**THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MARY**

**1.- Introduction**

In this last meditation, I would like to invite you to contemplate the One who enables us to live fully the **mystique** of our life in all its dimensions, for it is He who makes possible our *divinization* as a participation of the Trinitarian Life through our personal configuration with Jesus Christ: **the Holy Spirit**.

It is a fundamental reality in our human, Christian and religious life; unfortunately, particularly in the Western Church, it still remains as "the great Unknown." In this regard, the Eastern Churches have much to teach us, so that we can breathe, as Pope St. John Paul II said, "with the two lungs" of Christian life and theology. Precisely because the presence and action of the Holy Spirit is emphasized much more in them, they have also developed much more than in the West the paradigm **of the divinization of the human being**, as the culmination of the wonderful project of the Triune God.

Since this is a very broad topic, I should limit myself only to the presence of the Holy Spirit *in the Salesian Charism*; even more concretely: to the *mention of the Holy Spirit in the Constitutions*.

**2.- The Holy Spirit in the Constitutions**

First of all, it is worth remembering that these are not only *juridical* texts (with the importance that this means), but also **charismatic** ones. *As Vita Consecrata* magnificently states*,* "When the Church recognizes a form of consecrated life or an Institute, she *guarantees* that in its spiritual and apostolic Charism are found all the objective requirements for achieving personal and communal evangelical perfection" (VC 93).

It is clear that this recognition is identified, habitually, by the approval of the Constitutions of the Congregation. We have, therefore, the guarantee of the Church that assures us that our Charism is a path of evangelical perfection in love, called to be assumed by each Salesian Brother in a personal way.

Undoubtedly, it would be much more enriching to present not only the Holy Spirit in the Constitutions, but it would be much more desirable to have a complete view of the "**Trinitarian theology**" they contain: the way the Father, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are presented. For now, according to our theme, we present only the mission and action of the Spirit; even in front of the complete wealth of articles, we will only show this specific aspect.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales is very strong and significant.

The action of the Holy Spirit is manifested, above all, in the life of our holy Father Don Bosco: "The Holy Spirit **aroused**, through the maternal intervention of Mary, St. John Bosco, **formed** in him a heart of father and teacher." (C. 1); He filled him with the gifts of nature and grace (C. 21). *Gift of the Holy Spirit* is the Preventive System (C. 20). Don Bosco, in response, always lived in an attitude of **docility** to the Holy Spirit (which is accentuated with regard to prayer: C. 86).

In the likeness of our Father, we too "draw from this active presence of the Holy Spirit the energy for our fidelity and the support of our hope" (C. 1); Therefore we are invited to be attentive to his presence in us (C. 12).

+ The consecration the Father makes of us is accomplished "by the gift of his Spirit," to send us "to be apostles of the young" (C. 3).

+ He makes us partakers of Christ's life in the Spirit" (C. 60), and continues His work of formation in us, as with the disciples (C. 96).

+ As with Don Bosco, he grants *personal gifts*  to us (C. 22), guiding us by being **light and strength**: so we proclaim and ask for it in the *prayer of* Religious Profession (C. 24): light for our intelligence, to know what God wants from us, and strength for our will, to be able to realize what we have discovered through discernment as God's plan for us: in this way he leads us "toward the fullness of truth" (C. 96).

+ The Holy Spirit **sanctifies**  us because he is "a permanent source of grace and support in our daily effort to grow in the perfect love of God and man," so that we can bring to our recipients the best possible gift: our own **holiness** (C. 25).

Our attitude before the Holy Spirit is characterized by some specific traits, which we can summarize in three closely related words: **listening - attentiveness - docility**.

\* **Listening - attention**: The Holy Spirit makes us hear his **voice** (C. 2), in order to carry out Don Bosco's apostolic project. This listening constitutes the foundation of formation as a *permanent personal attitude*: for, in pastoral work, the Salesian "strives to discern in events the voice of the Spirit, thus acquiring the ability to learn from life" (C. 119). Article 64 speaks of this attention in a very interesting context, that of **obedience**: "Docile to the Spirit and attentive to the signs He gives us through events..."

The importance of this attitude is accentuated in particular situations, the most relevant of which is the General Chapter, through which "the whole Society, allowing itself to be guided by the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to know at a given moment in history, the Will of God, for a better service to the Church" (C. 146).

\* Intimately united to these attitudes is **docility**: we are "a community of baptized persons who, *docile to the voice of the Spirit*..." (Const. 2) realize our Mission. Article 64 links it to attentiveness, and Article 99 presents it as a fundamental attitude of formation: "Docile to the Holy Spirit, (the Salesian) develops his aptitudes and gifts of grace in a constant effort of conversion and renewal."

Finally, as a totalizing attitude, which is a determining factor of the "Grace of Unity" for the Salesian and his community, we are invited to **make life, prayer, learning to encounter God *through those to whom we are sent*. "By discovering the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of men, especially the young"** (C. 95), we fully live out our relationship with God.

This reflection leads us to conclude, with *Vita Consecrata*, that in our Salesian charism "the reference of the Evangelical Counsels (and not only of these, but of our whole life) to the holy and sanctifying Trinity **reveals its deepest meaning**" (VC 21); and to confirm what it states further on: "When the Church recognizes a form of consecrated life or an Institute, it guarantees that in its spiritual and apostolic Charism **all the objective requirements** for achieving personal and communal evangelical perfection are met" (VC 93).

And it is not unimportant that the Rector Major in justifying the theme of GC 29 says that it refers "to the **centrality of God (as Trinity)**,**"** which means that there is a need to rediscover the Triune God as the foundation of being passionate about Jesus Christ.

**4. - Mary, "Bride of the Holy Spirit"**

At the top of this reflection, indeed of all the reflections offered on this topic, I would like to point out some aspects in which Our Lady is an *example and model* of our relationship with the Holy Spirit; consequently, we can say that she is the fullest example of the **mysticism** of the Christian life.

First, we find in the New Testament a very interesting "*pneumatological inclusion"*: the first time Mary is mentioned, and the last time, she is always in full relationship with the Holy Spirit: *the Annunciation and Pentecost*. "The Holy Spirit will descend upon you, and the Power of the Most High will spread its shadow over you" (Luke 1:35). "All these were assiduous and with one accord in prayer, together with some women and with Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14), waiting for the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, we find in Mary the most beautiful example of a **"Trinitarian relationship,"** which, in light of what was said earlier, does not distance her from us, but invites us to imitate her. In prayers to Our Lady we sense a *diversified relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*; in such a way, that the three deepest "relationships" of the human being are attributed to Her: **Daughter - Bride - Mother**. Without ignoring that they have a special meaning and density in Her, in a *similar way* we too are invited to live our relationship not so much with "God" in the abstract and in the singular, but with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: a relationship of love and friendship, enabling us to experience His presence in every moment of our lives.

At this point, I would like to return again to the three attitudes that are essential in our relationship with the Holy Spirit and of which Mary was an example: **listening - attentiveness - docility**.

In particular, I would like to emphasize her attitude of *listening*, manifested in her ability to *experience* events *in depth*, in order to be able to *discern* what the Spirit wants to communicate to her, and thus to *cooperate* fully with Him. "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19, *et passim*). The two verbs that indicate Mary's attitude are: **συνετερει - διετηρει**. Both of them have the same root: **τηρειν** which is translated as to *keep, preserve, guard, reflect*. But most important are *the prefixes:* **συν - δια.** The former always speaks of *union, together*; while the latter means: *through of...*

In this way, if we want to summarize Mary's attitude, we can say that it is twofold: *in living these facts/words*, she tries to see them as *a whole* (not in isolation, or separating them), *deepening them in themselves*, in order to understand their meaning. This is, undoubtedly, **discernment** in its shortest and fullest expression. And it is very significant that in the two cases it is stated that this discernment has its center *in his heart*! (**εν τη καρδια αυτης**).

We end by asking Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, that we, too, may be docile to the Holy Spirit, listening to His Voice and cooperating with Him in His work, which consists in bringing to the fullness of truth and love all those who "are Christ's"; more so, all of humanity, especially the girls and boys whom the Lord wants to entrust to us.

At the end of our Exercises, let us ask our Father, through the maternal intercession of Mary, that we may allow ourselves to be configured every day to Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; and in this way every moment and every action of our daily lives, lived in the mysticism of our Charism, will become an occasion for growth in faith, hope and love, thus realizing in our existences the wonderful plan of the Triune God: **to make us participants, in fullness, in His Divine Life.**

Here is a text from St. John Chrysostom on the Holy Spirit :[[1]](#footnote-2)

If there were no Holy Spirit, we could not exclaim 'Lord Jesus.' "For no one can say 'Lord Jesus' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). If there were not the Holy Spirit, we believers could not call upon God (cf. Rom 8:15, 26); we say, "Our Father, who art in heaven." Just as we cannot say 'Lord,' neither can we call God 'Father.' Whence do we know this? From the Apostle, who asserts, "Since you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, who cries, 'Abba, Father'" (Gal 4:6). If you call [God] 'Father,' think that you were deemed worthy of that invocation by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. If there were no Spirit, the word of wisdom and science would not be in the Church; for to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of science (1 Cor. 12:8). If there were not the Holy Spirit, there would be no pastors and doctors in the Church; they too are [instituted] by the Holy Spirit, as Paul points out, "In it the Holy Spirit has set you as pastors and bishops" (Acts 20:28).

**Appendix**

**The Strength of the HOLY SPIRIT**

"How is the Easter event made 'ours' today, fulfilled once and for all? Through the same One who is its originator from the beginning and in the fullness of time: *the Holy Spirit*. He is personally the Newness in action, in the world. He is the Presence of God-with-us, "joined to our spirit" (Rom. 8:16). Without Him, God is far away; Christ is in the past; the Gospel is a dead letter; the Church, a mere organization; authority, despotism; mission, propaganda; worship, an evocation; and the Christian life, a slave morality. But, in the Holy Spirit and in permanent communion with Him (in an inseparable synergy), the cosmos is elevated and groaning in the birthing of the Kingdom; man remains in struggle against the flesh; the risen Christ is present; the Gospel is life-force; the Church signifies Trinitarian communion; authority is a liberating service; mission is a new Pentecost; liturgy is memorial and anticipation; and all Christian life is divinized."[[2]](#footnote-3) .

Without the Holy Spirit, *God* is not only distant, but is infinite remoteness. He is the Absolute, eternal and inaccessible, Creator and Lord who can and dominates everything, who inspires respect and even awe, who astonishes and trembles with his infinity and who oppresses and crushes with his greatness. Is this not the image of God that has been offered to us so many times? But, with the Holy Spirit and because of Him, God is infinite nearness, infinite tenderness, Love-Friendliness, living Presence, tender Mercy, Trinity-Family, mysterious Hearth, the great Friend of man, who wants his full human fulfillment, as his active co-worker, and who tremblingly respects his freedom. Therefore, our fundamental attitude before Him is trembling adoration, unwavering faith in His Love, unlimited trust, active docility, unconditional adherence, responsible cooperation and grateful praise. *Adoration* is not bondage but "ecstasy of love."

With the Holy Spirit, *God*, for us, is *Abba*. And we are, for him, little children, tenderly loved. "*We are no longer strangers or foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and family members of God*" (Eph. 2:19). We truly belong to the Family of God, which is the Trinity. We are truly children of the Father; children in the Son; children of the Father in the Son through the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, St. Paul writes: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you have not received a spirit of slaves to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adopted sons that makes us exclaim, *Abba*, Father! The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to testify that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:14-16). "The proof that you are children is that God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son who cries out*, Abba*, Father! Then you are no longer slaves, but sons; and if sons, heirs also, by the will of God" (Gal 4:6-7).

The Holy Spirit, by truly configuring us with Christ, who is the Only Begotten of the Father and the Only Begotten of the Virgin-Mother, truly makes us children in the Son, through a real participation in his Sonship; and, at the same time, unites with our own spirit to give us a living awareness of our divine and Marian filiation.

Without the Spirit, *Jesus* is simply a historical personage, who lived in the past-even if recent-and who belongs irrevocably to that past; who certainly left us a magnificent example of life and a splendid doctrinal message; but nothing more. By the Spirit, on the other hand, Jesus Christ is infinitely alive and present and is the most actual person in the universe, contemporary with all people: more intimate to us than ourselves.

Without the Holy Spirit, *the Gospel* is a book and ultimately a dead letter. With the Spirit, the Gospel is a living and life-giving Person, whose word is a force and power of life, who enlightens everything, who gives meaning to everything, and who is capable of transforming man and the whole of society from within. By the Spirit the Gospel is eternally relevant.

Without the Spirit, *the Church* is nothing more than a mere organization, similar to many other human organizations and institutions existing in the world of men. An institution with cultural, humanitarian and, above all, religious purposes. But nothing else. However, with the Holy Spirit, the Church is, with all the rigor of the word, *mystery*: the historical and social realization of God's saving plan for humanity, the *sacrament of Christ*, the visible presence of the invisible Christ, the new *corporeity* of the Incarnate Word, the instrument of the same Spirit in the salvation of men. With the Spirit, the Church is a *Communion* of life with God in Jesus Christ, which becomes a communion of life with men. With the Spirit*, the Church means and is Trinitarian communion*: family participation in the family life of God-Trinity. And, in a vigorous analogy, something very similar should be said of a religious congregation. In any case, we can ask: *what predominates* in it, the *charismatic dimension* or the *institutional dimension*? For, in truth, it is not a matter of 'opposing' but rather 'integrating' dimensions that are essential but do not have the same value and importance.

Without the Spirit of Jesus, *authority* is *power* and dominion. Has it not been understood, so many times, this way in the Church, in open contrast to the Gospel itself? Did not the jurists call it precisely *dominating power*? Power and dominion are an attack on the human person, because they oppress and enslave, creating dependence and servility. Without the Spirit, authority becomes authoritarianism or permissiveness. At the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, authority is *diakonia*, humble service of love to the brethren and, therefore, an authentic service of liberation, which guarantees and promotes the true freedom of God's children.

Without the Spirit, *mission* remains mere propaganda, advertising, even if it is the proclamation of transcendental truths for man. Without the Spirit, the '*apostolate*' is a human, charitable or welfare activity-and, sometimes, mere activism; but it ceases to be a true apostolate and, consequently, a truly saving action. With the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, mission is mystical, because it is an action of the same Spirit through us, and it becomes a new Pentecost.

Without the Holy Spirit, *worship* is a series of rites and ceremonies and liturgy is a representation empty of content and life, a mere evocation or memory of events that belong to the past. With the Spirit, worship is life and liturgy is living memory and real actualization of the entire mystery of Christ: Incarnation-life-passion-death-resurrection. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, the liturgy is the personal action of Christ, who revives and actualizes, with us and for us, his entire mystery.

Without the Spirit, the "Christian" life ceases to be truly *Christian*, because it is no longer a life in Christ and from Christ; and it also ceases to be truly *spiritual*, because it is not a life in the Spirit and from the Spirit. And morality becomes a "slave morality." With the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, life is truly *Christian and spiritual*, taking these adjectives in their most rigorous and profound sense: For Christ and the Spirit are truly the authentic protagonists of this life, and man - the human person, male or female - *allows himself to be guided, 'lived' and vivified by Them*, thus reaching the highest summit of humanization and divinization.

This brief *analysis* can serve somewhat as a *test*, to know how far we are truly *Christian and spiritual*, in the strong sense of these words. And, above all, as a perspective, that is, as a look ahead: toward what we are to be and toward what we are to live, regardless of whether, up to this point, we have lived it or not (cf. Phil. 3:14).

1. St. John Chrysostom*, De Sancta Pentecost I,* PG 50, 458.

   In: Karl Christian Felmy, *The Orthodox Theology Contemporanes,* Quiriniana Ed. 1999, 169 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *The Power of the Spirit* - from the Address to the Third World Assembly of Churches, Uppsala, 1968

   Ignatius IV Hazim [Habib Hazim] (1921 - 2012), Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Latakia and Primate of the Church of Antioch [↑](#footnote-ref-3)