

Trust the Spirit Within

by Thomas H. Groome

The Spirit within is always our primary Teacher.

The first Bible story of creation climaxes on the sixth day with God making humankind in God's own image and likeness. (See Genesis 1:26–27.) The

second creation story embellishes the first with delightful details of God crafting Adam from the dust of the earth. It culminates with God breathing God's own life into the earth-person.

(See Genesis 2:7.) These mythical stories teach the great foundational truths of our faith, affirming that we are like our God and we possess God's own Spirit within us.

God's Spirit within us makes us capable of all that is uniquely human, such as the ability to relate, to love, and to create. The Hebrew Bible highlights that God's Spirit makes us capable of knowledge and wisdom. We can have the wisdom to live as a person of faith because of God's Spirit within us. As Moses taught the people, God's word is already "in your heart" (Deuteronomy 30:14).

In Christian faith, God's Spirit is revealed as the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity. Jesus

promised that he would send God's Holy Spirit on the disciples to continue as their Teacher. "[T]he Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit came with the first Christian Pentecost and has remained with the Christian community ever since. Every Christian receives the Spirit at Baptism and the fullness of the Spirit's presence through Confirmation. As Paul wrote, "in the one Spirit we were all baptized . . . all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Catholic Christians believe that the Holy Spirit guides the entire Church, especially through its teaching office. We also believe that each individual Christian has the gift of God's Holy Spirit within them. The Spirit within is always our primary Teacher, especially in matters of faith. Surely this has great implications for the work of catechists.

We can take comfort that, important as our work may be, the outcome of our work of catechizing others does not depend solely on our efforts.

We have a Partner who works in people's hearts far more effectively than we can. Taking too much responsibility for the outcome of catechesis amounts to replacing the Holy Spirit, rather than being an instrument through whom the Spirit works.

Beyond taking a great weight off catechists' shoulders, knowing and trusting that each person has the gift of the Holy Spirit should shape how we teach. We need to teach in ways that allow the Spirit to work, that prompt learners to draw upon the Spirit within them. For example:

- Find ways to engage the learners' very souls—to get into their hearts through what matters most to them and to have them listen to themselves and to their own depths.
- Ask questions and use activities that invite learners to reflect, recall, and question. This encourages

learners to recognize that the Spirit works through their own minds and hearts.

- Share faith stories and use images, examples, and creative lessons to stimulate their imaginations. This is where the Spirit moves most readily.
- Encourage learners “to look and see for themselves,” confident that the Spirit will inspire them.
- Invite learners to make decisions about living their faith, allowing the Spirit within them to guide them.

Faith in the Holy Spirit, of course, should never be confused with magic. Our best efforts as catechists are still necessary! And yet, these efforts are only an instrument through which the Spirit works. Trust the Spirit within people to cause the growth. (See 1 Corinthians 3:6.)

For Reflection

- In what ways have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in your personal life and in your ministry?
- What effect could your conscious awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit have on your catechesis?

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