

Parish Novena to the Holy Spirit
Day Three: Monday 25th May 2020



The Gift of Understanding

'We teach what scripture calls: the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him. These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God.'

(1Cor 2:9-10)

On today's Novena journey we will be reflecting on the Holy Spirit's Gift of Understanding. Yesterday's gift of Wisdom allowed us to respond to situations from God's viewpoint, today's gift of understanding helps us to comprehend the things that are of God. Saint Paul, in the above quote, is writing to the early Christian community at Corinth. He is reminding them that there are some things beyond the intellectual grasp of man's mind. It is only through the gift of the Spirit that we can truly understand them.

A wonderful example of this is found in Luke's Gospel. A few weeks ago, we had the account of the two disciples travelling along the road to Emmaus where they met the Risen Jesus, though they failed to recognise immediately.

Their minds had been darkened with the dramatic and turbulent days of Holy Week. Jesus their master and teacher had been arrested, crucified and buried. The one they hoped in appears to have let them down; and now there are the reports that his body is missing. Their heads are bewildered and their minds fuzzy. However, the stranger on the road sets them straight:

'You foolish, men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?' Then starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself...Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him...'

(Lk 24:25 -28; 30)

What a wonderful line from St. Luke, '*And their eyes were opened...*'. This is the effect of the Holy Spirit's gift of understanding. Our minds begin to open fully to understanding the things that pertain to God.

A personal example that comes to mind when I saw the Spirit's gift of understanding bearing fruit was at Lourdes over twenty years ago. During a summer term at university I went on pilgrimage to the shrine as a helper. I was appointed to accompany an elderly lady from her hotel to the Stations of the Cross where the bishop was to lead the pilgrims in prayer.



As a theology student at the time I knew the concept, symbolism and religious meaning behind the prayer of the Stations. I'd gone through the motions of this devotion numerous times growing up, however, on this particular day God spoke to me through the witness of the old lady I was accompanying.

She would have modestly said that she went to the 'University of Fish & Chips' because everything she knew and learnt in life, she read from the newspapers that her Friday night chippy tea was wrapped in. She knew a lot more than what she claimed. It was during the Stations of the Cross that I noticed her crying quietly to herself and I asked was she okay or should I take her back to the hotel. Her response was immediate: '*Why are they hurting him? What has he ever done to us? Oh, we are bad and yet he still loves us!*' I can still picture her now, the theologian from Rochdale, who understood a lot more than me. I was observing the Stations she was living and praying the Stations. I noticed the statue of Jesus from a distance carrying his cross, she was walking next to him and noticed every scratch, bruise and drop of blood that came off his broken body.

My undergraduate theology course involved three years of formal study which resulted in being awarded a B.Theol (Hons). My elderly companion had been studying, praying and serving the Lord for over 75 years of her life. The result was something better than a certificate or some initials after your name. The award she received was the peace and understanding of who Jesus Christ the Son of God truly is. I still receive prayer cards and affectionate letters from my theologian in Rochdale every year and I know that she is still studying with her prayers, Bible, religious books and rosary daily.

The Holy Spirit's Gift of Understanding allows us the wonderful grace to see beyond the superficial and delve into the depths of comprehending the truths of God and His mysterious ways.

Veni Creator Spiritus

***Come, Holy Spirit, Creator come,
From your bright heavenly throne!
Come, take possession of our souls,
And make them all your own.***

***You who are called the Paraclete,
Best gift of God above,
The living spring, the living fire,
Sweet unction, and true love!***

***You who are sevenfold in your grace,
Finger of God's right hand,
His promise, teaching little ones
To speak and understand!***

***O guide our minds with your blessed light,
With love our hearts inflame,
And with your strength which never decays
Confirm our mortal frame.***

***Far from us drive our hellish foe
True peace unto us bring,
And through all perils guide us safe
Beneath your sacred wing.***

***Through you may we the Father know,
Through you the eternal Son
And you the Spirit of them both
Thrice-blessed three in one.***

***All glory to the Father be,
And to the risen Son;
The same to you, O Paraclete,
While endless ages run.***

Amen.

In the silence of our Novena prayer today, let us ask the Spirit for the grace to nurture the gift of Understanding. The Catholic writer and speaker Mark Shea wrote:

'The gift of Understanding comes to our brains the same way the gift of strength comes to our muscles — by exercise. Today, ask for understanding and then roll up your sleeves and crack the books.'

Mark is not saying that through our own effort we can achieve the gift of Understanding but that we need to appreciate and foster it so that it can bear fruit in our life. When a child is given a puppy or kitten at Christmas, they do not neglect it because the poor creature will die. Instead they love it and care for it and watch it grow and it brings great pleasure and comfort. The same with the Spirit's gift of Understanding. We cannot not be a passive participant in the relationship but must co-operate with the Spirit so that, like my companion in Lourdes, we too will see beyond the surface and grasp the truth of God.

How do we take care of the Holy Spirit's gift of Understanding? What are we reading? When are we praying? What are we watching? Who are we listening to?

Come, Holy Spirit

Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love.

V. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray:

O God, who taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the gift of the same Spirit we may be always truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

God Bless and keep praying.

We continue on day four of our Novena pilgrimage tomorrow.

Fr. O'Brien