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"What life does the Holy Spirit give?"

In his 16 October general audience, Pope Francis continued catechetical cycle on how the Holy Spirit guides the People of God through salvation history, speaking about the Holy Spirit in the faith of the Church.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

With today's catechesis, we will move on from what the Holy Spirit

revealed to us in the Holy Scripture to how He is present and active in the life of the Church, in our Christian life.

In the first three centuries, the Church did not feel the need to give an explicit formulation of her faith in the Holy Spirit. For example, in the Church's most ancient Creed, the so-called Symbol of the Apostles, after proclaiming: "I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born, died, descended into hell, rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven," adds: "I believe in the Holy Spirit" and nothing more, without any specification.

But it was heresy that drove the Church to define this faith. When this process began – with Saint Athanasius in the fourth century – it was precisely the experience she had

of the sanctifying and divinizing action of the Holy Spirit that led the Church to the certainty of the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. This occurred during the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, which defined the divinity of the Holy Spirit with the well-known words we still repeat today in the Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”

To say that the Holy Spirit “is the Lord” was like saying that He shares the “Lordship” of God, that He belongs to the world of the Creator, not to that of creatures. The strongest affirmation is that He is due the same glory and adoration as the Father and the Son. It is the argument of equality in honour, dear to Saint Basil the Great, who was the main

architect of that formula: the Holy Spirit is the Lord, He is God.

The Council definition was not a point of arrival, but of departure. And indeed, once the historical reasons that had obstructed a more explicit affirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit had been overcome, this was confidently proclaimed in the worship of the Church and in her theology. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, in the aftermath of the Council, went on to state without hesitation: “Is the Holy Spirit then God? Certainly! Is He consubstantial? Yes, if He is true God” (*Oratio* 31, 5.10).

What does the article of faith we proclaim every Sunday at Mass say to us, believers of today: “I believe in the Holy Spirit”? In the past, it was mainly concerned with the statement that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father.” The Latin Church soon supplemented this statement by

adding, in the Creed of the Mass, that the Holy Spirit proceeds “also from the Son.” Since in Latin the expression “and from the Son” is called ‘*Filioque*,’ this gave rise to the dispute known by this name, which has been the reason (or pretext) for so many disputes and divisions between the Church of the East and the Church of the West. It is certainly not the case to address the issue here, which, moreover, in the climate of dialogue established between the two Churches, has lost the acrimony of the past and today allows us to hope for full mutual acceptance, as one of the main “reconciled differences.” I like to say this: “reconciled differences.” Among Christians there are many differences: he belongs to this school, that other one; this person is a Protestant, that person... The important thing is that these differences are reconciled, in the love of walking together.

Having overcome this obstacle, today we can value the most important prerogative for us that is proclaimed in the article of the Creed, namely that the Holy Spirit is “life-giving,” the “giver of life.” Let us ask ourselves: what life does the Holy Spirit give? At the beginning, in creation, the breath of God gives Adam natural life; the statue of mud is made “a living being” (cf. *Gen 2:7*). Now, in the new creation, the Holy Spirit is He who gives believers new life, the life of Christ, supernatural life, as children of God. Paul can exclaim: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death” (*Rom 8:2*).

In all of this, where is the great and consoling news for us? It is that the life given to us by the Holy Spirit is eternal life! Faith frees us from the horror of having to admit that everything ends here, that there is no redemption for the suffering and

injustice that reign sovereign on earth. Another of the Apostle's words assures us of this: "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit who dwells in you" (*Rom 8:11*). The Spirit dwells in us, He is within us.

Let us cultivate this faith also for those who, often through no fault of their own, are deprived of it and are unable to give meaning to life. And let us not forget to thank Him, who with His death, obtained this inestimable gift for us!

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