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# **“If the Church is a boat, the Holy Spirit is the sail”**

In his 11 December general audience, Pope Francis concluded the catechetical cycle on how the Holy Spirit guides the People of God through salvation history, speaking about the Holy Spirit and Christian hope.

12/11/2024

*Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!*

We have arrived at the end of our catecheses on the Holy Spirit and the Church. We will devote this final reflection to the title we gave to the entire cycle, namely: “*The Holy Spirit and the Bride. The Holy Spirit guides the People of God towards Jesus our hope.*” This title refers to one of the last verses of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, which says: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’” (Rev 22:17). Who is this invocation addressed to? It is addressed to the risen Christ. Indeed, both Saint Paul (cf. 1 Cor 16:22) and the *Didaché*, a text from apostolic times, attest that in the liturgical meetings of the first Christians there resounded the cry in Aramaic, “*Maràna tha!*” which indeed means “Come, Lord!” A prayer to Christ, for Him to come.

At that earliest time, the invocation had a background we would describe today as eschatological. Indeed, it expressed the ardent expectation of

the glorious return of the Lord. And this cry, and the expectation it expresses, have never been extinguished in the Church. Still today, in the Mass, immediately after the consecration, she proclaims Christ's death and resurrection "*as we await the blessed hope and [His] coming.*" The Church awaits the coming of the Lord.

But this expectation of the *final* coming of Christ has not remained the one and only. It has also been joined by the expectation of his *continuous* coming in the present and pilgrim situation of the Church. And it is this coming that the Church thinks of above all, when, animated by the Holy Spirit, she cries out to Jesus: "Come!"

A change, or better, let's say, a development, full of meaning, has occurred with regard to the cry "Come," "Come, Lord!" It is not

habitually addressed only to Christ, but also to the Holy Spirit Himself! He who cries out is now Him to whom we cry out. “Come!” is the invocation with which we begin almost all the hymns and prayers of the Church addressed to the Holy Spirit: “Come, Holy Spirit,” we say in the *Veni Creator*, and “Come, Holy Spirit,” “*Veni Sancte Spiritus*,” in the sequence of Pentecost; and so on, in many other prayers. It is right that it should be so, because, after the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit is Christ’s true “*alter ego*,” He who takes His place, who makes Him present and operative in the Church. It is He who “declare[s] ... the things that are coming” (cf. *Jn* 16:13) and makes them desired and expected. This is why Christ and the Spirit are inseparable, also in the economy of salvation.

The Holy Spirit is the ever-gushing source of Christian hope. Saint Paul

left us these precious words, this is what Paul says: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (*Rm 15:13*). If the Church is a boat, the Holy Spirit is the sail that propels it and lets it advance on the sea of history, today as in the past!

Hope is not an empty word, or a vague desire of ours that things may turn out for the best; hope is a certainty, because it is founded on God’s fidelity to His promises. And this is why it is called a theological virtue: because it is infused by God and has God as its guarantor. It is not a passive virtue, which merely waits for things to happen. It is a supremely active virtue that helps make them happen. Someone who fought for the liberation of the poor wrote these words: “The Holy Spirit is at the origin of the cry of the poor. He is the strength given to those who

have no strength. He leads the struggle for the emancipation and full realization of the people of the oppressed.”

The Christian cannot be satisfied with *having* hope; he or she must also *radiate* hope, be a sower of hope. It is the most beautiful gift that the Church can give to all of humanity, especially at times in which everything seems to be dragging down the sails.

The apostle Peter exhorted the first Christians with these words: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” But he added a recommendation: “But do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pt 3:15-16). And this is because it is not so much the strength of the arguments that will convince people, but rather the love that we know

how to put in them. This is the first and most effective form of evangelization. And it is open to everyone!

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Spirit always, always help us to “abound in hope by virtue of the Holy Spirit!” Thank you.

## **APPEAL**

Every day I am following what is happening in Syria, in this moment that is so delicate in its history. I hope that a political solution may be reached that, without further conflicts or divisions, may responsibly promote the stability and unity of the country. I pray, by the intercession of the Virgin Mary, that the Syrian people may live in peace and security in their beloved land, and that the different religions may walk together in friendship and mutual respect for the good of the

nation, afflicted by so many years of war.

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(07/12/2025)