

Session 4: Receiving God's Gift



Session 4: Receiving God's Gift

Opening Prayer:

Come, 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 by the light of the Holy Spirit, didst instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise and ever to rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

Tonight we have reached the fourth seminar and tonight's topic is a very relevant and interesting one: *Receiving God's Gift* – of course, that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Firstly, it is good to summarise where we have come from:

- In *Seminar 1*, you heard about the way in which the **gift of God's love frees us from sin** and the malign influence of the evil one.
- In *Seminar 2*, you heard how **God wants to give you new life in the Holy Spirit**.
- In *Seminar 3*, you heard how **the Lord wants to move you** from knowing about the person of Jesus **to knowing Jesus in person** by being filled with the Spirit. This happens as a result of **claiming by faith** the mighty graces you have already received in your baptism and confirmation. We saw last week how these graces are released with full power within us.
- **In this Seminar**, we look at what you will need to do over the coming week in order to be properly disposed to **receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit** next Friday.

In Revelation 3:19-20 we read,

Session 4: Receiving God's Gift

"Be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

There is a wonderful painting of this scene by Holman Hunt, in St Paul's Cathedral, London. Jesus, the light of the world, is knocking on a door. But if you examine the door, you will notice a curious fact about it. It has not handle and what Hunt was suggesting by that was the fact that the door can only be opened from within. As there is no handle on the door, Jesus can't open it. He waits for the response of the householder. Another aspect to notice is the weeds and briars growing in front of the door – you could argue that they are a symbol of obstacles to the way of entry and also they indicate that the door has not been opened for a long time. It's time for it to open because the Lord is there. It is also a symbol of our own hearts.



Let's imagine it's an Irish door, which for those of you who don't know Gaelic is a **DORAS**. We can derive a mnemonic from this:

- ◆ **D** for desire
- ◆ **O** for obedience
- ◆ **R** is for repentance
- ◆ **A** is for asking
- ◆ **S** is for submitting.

1. Wholehearted Desire for the Spirit

Firstly, it is true to say that there is **no blessing or growth in the Christian life without preceding desire**. The deep and stronger that desire the greater the openness to grace. As Jesus said in John 7:37-39a,

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit."

When I was baptised in the Holy Spirit, I remember telling my mother about it. She was a bit sceptical and I was a bit disappointed actually by her response. She said, *"Pat, you are always getting enthusiasms for subjects, but the enthusiasms never last and then you move on to something else. I suspect that it will be the same with all this Holy Spirit thing you are talking about."* Then about 1½ years later, she said to me, *"You know, I was mistaken about your enthusiasm for the Spirit; it hasn't lessened, if anything it seems to have gotten stronger."* I remember she said, *"I think this is the love of your life"* and I replied, *"It is, mother. The Holy Spirit is the love of my life."* Obviously, she was impressed – I must have changed for the better – and she said to me, *"how could I receive the Holy Spirit that you've received?"* She continued, *"By the way, I don't want a long talk from you. I only want a simple one-point answer."* So, I remember saying, *"Now, mother, you can't explain the atom in*

Session 4: Receiving God's Gift

one short point and I don't think you can explain the Holy Spirit in one point either." So she said, "No, no, no, no, no! Don't give me one of your sermons, just give me one point that I can follow." I remember turning to the Lord and saying, "Give me a brainwave; I need one here!" Then I remembered a story about St. Kevin and a young man who came to see him in Glendalough and I told that to my mother. It goes as follows:

One day when St Kevin of Glendalough was walking up and down next to one of the lakes praying, he was approached by a young man. "Are you the famous Abbot of this monastery?" he asked. Kevin replied, "I am the abbot, but where have you come from?" "Dublin" replied the young man. "And how did you get here?" asked Kevin. "I walked all the way," replied the youth. "It was a long walk," Kevin replied, "why did you come here?" "I came to meet you" replied the Dubliner. "And what do you seek?" Kevin enquired. The young man responded, "I desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit." "You want to be filled with the Spirit?" "Yes, I desire it more than anything else in the world." "More than popularity, power, pleasure or possessions?" Kevin asked. "Yes," replied the young man. "Well, in that case would you do me a favour," said the Abbot, "by stepping with me into the lake." With that, Kevin invited the youth to step into the lake nearby. He plunged his head under the water until the last bubbles of air came from his lips. Then yanking him up by the hair, Kevin asked, "What is it you desire more than anything else in the world?" "Oh, for a breath of fresh air!" gasped the young man. "When you want baptism in the Spirit with the same intensity," replied Kevin, "you will surely experience his anointing coming into your heart."

That was my answer to my mother, but I'm not sure that it did the trick though! I have often repeated that story because I do think that it captures something that is vital – **you need to have a strong desire for the Holy Spirit**, not a half-hearted one and when your whole heart is given to that desire, things will happen. There is a verse in Deuteronomy 4:29,

"From there you will seek me (I always think 'there' is wherever you are) and if you seek me with all your mind and all your heart and all your strength, you shall surely find me."

That is where scripture is guaranteeing. If we seek with all our heart, then we will find – maybe a better way of putting it is that 'we will be found by the Lord' and God's grace will break through.

2. Obedience to God's word

The second quality we need during the coming week is **obedience to God's word**. St Paul said in Ephesians 5:18,

"Be filled with the Spirit."

Instead of being advice, this is a **command of the Lord**. In order to obey that command, it is important to rely on the infallible promises of God to send the Spirit to

Session 4: Receiving God's Gift

those whose desire prompts them to ask for it. Here is just one of many possible New Testament examples. In Luke 11:13, Jesus said to parents,

"If you then, though you are evil, (in other words, though you are sinners) know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

As Catholics, we pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus, to be worthy of the mighty promises of Christ. **The promise to send the Spirit surely is the greatest of all those promises.** So, when we ask for the Holy Spirit, we are asking for something that is in accordance with the will of God – that's what God wants for us.

3. Repentance

Thirdly, in order to prepare for the coming of the Spirit, **it is important to be willing to remove obstacles to the Spirit's coming.** One of the phrases used in scripture is, *"Avoid grieving the Spirit"* (Ephesians 4:30). The truth is, however, that many things in our lives tend to grieve the Holy Spirit. The principal one would be **our lack of love that often informs our attitudes, our words and our deeds.** Needless to say, all un-repentant sin is a barrier to the Holy Spirit. One must be willing to turn away from such things as spiritualism, occult and new age beliefs and practices, reiki, sex outside marriage, robbery, lying, slander, drunkenness, pornography, drug-taking, etc. – the list could be a long one, indeed. Now, I stress the fact that one must be willing to turn away from them. We won't be able to turn away without God's help and often it is only when we are baptised in the Holy Spirit that we have the power to turn away from sin, but we can confess sin in our hearts – we won't have the opportunity this week to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation – and say to the Lord, 'I am willing to turn away from all the obstacles to your Holy Spirit.'

I have found over the years, however, that possibly the greatest single block to the infilling by the Spirit is **unforgiveness and resentment.** So, it is important to ask for God's help to remember who it is, either living or dead, who still needs your forgiveness. As Colossians 3:13 says,

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Then with God's help forgive that person/s. Over the years, I have found sometimes when you look into your heart and say, 'is there anybody I resent?', someone will come to mind. You become aware that you are consciously resentful and unforgiving towards someone who may have done you a great injustice or hurt you deeply. I think what is even more common is that we look into our heart and say, 'oh, thank goodness, there is no one I need to forgive.' But I wonder is that the whole truth because sometimes when we were hurt in the past, we did not forgive the person who hurt us at the time. What happened was we forgot the hurt, or in psychological terms, we repressed it in our unconscious, together with the associated negative feelings, but that memory and the associated negative feelings do not go away. From our unconscious, they can

Session 4: Receiving God's Gift

influence our conscious attitudes and behaviour. So, I think we have to ask God for help in remembering – is there still someone who needs my forgiveness?

I remember on one occasion praying that the Lord would reveal anything of that nature to me – this is something I have recounted many times – and the image of a priest came into my mind, one who was the Dean of Discipline in my secondary school. One day, when I was about 17 or 18 years old, I was looking at a notice board in the corridor in the school with a group of other students, when this priest came along and he told all of us boys to move away. Apparently, he thought I did not move away quickly enough and he said, "Right, Collins, up to the office". So, I went up to the office – I was often up in the office, I can tell you about one thing or another! – however, on this occasion when I went in, it was a bit sinister because he closed the door and there was nobody there except himself and myself. Then he said, "now you disobeyed what I told you, so I want you to bend over that desk" and he took out a leather strap and whacked me on the behind. The whacking on the behind was not the real problem, it was the humiliation involved. Here I was, a young man at this stage - my father had never treated me in this way – and here was this priest doing so. It hurt me so much at an emotional level that I never told a living soul what happened behind that closed door and I repressed that memory.

I joined the same order to which he belonged and I often met him before he died and I would often feel very cold towards him and if anyone praised him, I might half agree and then say something critical about him. It was just in that moment of grace that this repressed memory came back to me and I knew the Lord was saying, "*Please forgive this man for the hurt he caused you.*" I remember talking to a psychotherapist on one occasion and I recounted this memory and I said, "you know I was never sexually abused, but I felt as if I was". She said that my instinct was absolutely correct and there was something quite sexual about his beating me on the behind and that he may have been getting some kind of perverse satisfaction from doing that. Once it was pointed out to me by the Lord, with God's help I made the act of will and I said, "Lord, I do want to forgive that man and be at peace with him. May his soul rest in peace because I am now, with your help, forgiving him". When you do something like that, you clear a big obstacle away – maybe that's the briars and the weeds that are growing in front of Holman Hunt's door; we have to get rid of them, so that the Lord may enter by the power of his Holy Spirit into the room of our hearts. So, I would encourage you to think about this point during the week. Is there any obstacle in my life that I need to deal with before next Friday? Here is a very apt quotation:

"WHEN YOU FORGIVE, YOU DO NOT CHANGE THE PAST, BUT YOU DO CHANGE THE
FUTURE!"

4. Asking with expectancy

The next way we prepare for the coming of the Spirit, is by **asking for the Spirit with expectant faith**. We can expect the Spirit to come upon us because, as I have already said, when you ask for the Spirit you are asking for something that is clearly in line with God's will. There are many gifts we could ask of God, without being certain

Session 4: Receiving God's Gift

that they were in accord with the divine will. For example, if you bought a lottery ticket, you could ask God that you might win the lottery, but I don't think you could have any conviction that this was God's will for you – it might actually be far from God's will for you. But **to ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit is always in accord with the centrality of God's will.** Remember Ephesians 5:18 which we have already quoted, "*Be filled with the Spirit*" – that is a declaration of God's will. That being so, scripture assures us: "*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him*" (1 Jn 5:14-15). It's not that we 'will have'; the above is an accurate translation of the Greek, "we have what we asked of him".

That further reminds me of a promise of Jesus in Mark 11:24,

*"Whatever you ask for in prayer, **believing you have it already**, it will be yours."*

So, I am convinced – and you can be convinced – that next Friday as soon as you begin to ask for the sending of the Spirit, you will definitely receive the first instalment of that grace, because what you are asking for is **what God wants for you.**

5. Submit to the gift of God

The fifth plank in our door is to **submit to the gift of God.** Up to this point during the week you are active desiring, obeying, repenting and asking. Now it is over to God, as you **submit to his action within you by the power of the Spirit.** Now I don't think it will come as a surprise to you when I say that at this point the devil can attack by prompting thoughts such as:

- ◆ I wonder if all this is real?
- ◆ I know others receive the Spirit but I'm unworthy to do so – by the way, of course you are unworthy to receive the Holy Spirit; it is the Holy Spirit that makes us worthy; that's why we need the Holy Spirit!
- ◆ Will I lose control of my life if I receive the Spirit? – what will be the outcome?
- ◆ Will God ask me to suffer or to do something very difficult?

They are all typical temptations by the evil one. However, remember what James 4:7 says,

*"**Humble** yourselves before God. **Resist** the devil, and he will flee from you."*

So, once we identify that these negative thoughts are coming from the dark side, we can resist them. If you resist them, relying on God's power, the devil will flee from you and will have no hold over you. When people pray for you online next week, you may not be aware of any change at the outset. But then either suddenly or gradually, you will find yourself moving from knowing about the person of Jesus to **knowing him in person**, as someone who loves you unconditionally and lives within you by his Spirit of love.

Session 4: Receiving God's Gift

Openness to the gift of praying in tongues

When people experience baptism in the Spirit, they often receive **gifts of the Spirit that would help them to evangelise others effectively**. I would urge each and every one of you quite strongly to be open to whatever gift the Lord might want to give you. I know that when I was baptised in the Holy Spirit in 1974 – by the way, I did not have the advantage of attending a Life in the Spirit Seminar - like many others I received the ability to pray in tongues straight away. And it is good to recall that it is a gift that Mary and the apostles received at Pentecost. There is no mention of Our Blessed Lady praying in tongues before Pentecost but she certainly prayed in tongues from then onwards. St Paul:

- ◆ said that he prayed in tongues more than anyone (*"I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you."* - 1 Cor 14:18),
- ◆ wished that everyone could pray in tongues (*"I would like every one of you to speak in tongues"* -1 Cor 14:5).

So be open to the possibility of receiving this lovely gift of non-rational prayer:

"For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding." (1 Cor 14:14-15).

When we pray for you next Friday, we will suggest one or two ways of opening up and submitting to the gift of praying in tongues. If I had more time, I could speak more about the gift of tongues and show what a great help it is in one's prayer life. If you want the gifts of prophecy and words of knowledge, I have always found that it is a great preparation for receiving those gifts. In fact, tongues is a great preparation to hearing God just speak to your heart, like Samuel of old. So, although the gift of tongues is arguably the least of the gifts, in many ways it is actually **the doorway to the greater gifts**. So that is why we encourage people to be open to the gift of tongues. I found it tremendously reassuring, when after being prayed with, straight away I was able to pray in tongues and I have continued to do so for the last 46 years.

So, I would urge you during the week to continue to pray using the meditation for each day in your *Finding New Life in the Spirit* booklet or the *Reflections* booklet that Jane supplied you with at the beginning of this seminar. The former booklet urges us to read Chapter 14 of John's Gospel during the week and also Chapter 8 of the Acts of the Apostles. I think that prayer is going to be very important during the week. Also, in relation to the sharing which we are about to do, in opening up to one another, we are unbeknown to ourselves opening up to the Spirit of God.

Discussion Starters

Session 4: Receiving God's Gift

1. As you reflected and prayed during the week did anything real touch or inspire you?
2. Which of the planks in the door to blessing struck you as the most important for you - desire, obedience to God's word of promise, repentance, asking, or submitting?
3. What is your understanding of and attitude to the gift of praying in tongues?