



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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The role of the Spirit in the baptism and public life of Jesus

1. After the Incarnation, another significant intervention by the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus takes place during his baptism in the Jordan River.

Mark's Gospel gives the following account of the event: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'" (*Mk* 1:9-11 and par.). In the fourth Gospel there is a reference to the witness given by John: "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him" (*Jn* 1:32).

2. In the concordant testimony of the Gospels, the Jordan event marks the beginning of Jesus' public mission and of his revelation as the Messiah, the Son of God.

John preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (*Lk* 3:3). We find Jesus among the crowd of sinners coming to be baptized by John. He recognizes him and proclaims him the innocent lamb who takes away the sin of the world (cf. *Jn* 1:29), to lead humanity back to communion with God. The Father expresses his pleasure with his beloved Son, who becomes an obedient servant unto death, and gives him the Spirit's power so that he can carry out his mission as the Messiah-Saviour.

Jesus has certainly possessed the Spirit since his conception (cf. *Mt* 1:20; *Lk* 1:35), but in baptism he receives a new outpouring of the Spirit, an anointing of the Holy Spirit, as St Peter attests in his speech at Cornelius' house: "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power*"

(Acts 10:38). This anointing is an *elevation* of Jesus “in the eyes of Israel as Messiah, that is to say, the ‘One Anointed’ with the Spirit”; it is a true *exaltation* of Jesus as Christ and Saviour (cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 19).

While Jesus lived in Nazareth, Mary and Joseph were able to observe his growth in years, wisdom and grace (cf. *Lk* 2:40; 2:51) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who was working in him. Now, instead, the messianic age is being inaugurated: a new phase in the historical existence of Jesus is beginning. His baptism in the Jordan is like a “prelude” to what will happen later. Jesus begins to stand by sinners, to reveal the Father’s merciful face to them. His immersion in the Jordan River prefigures and anticipates his “baptism” in the waters of death, while the voice of the Father, proclaiming him his beloved Son, foretells the glory of the Resurrection.

3. After his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus begins to exercise his threefold mission: a *royal* mission, which involves him in fighting the spirit of evil; a *prophetic* mission, which makes him the tireless preacher of the Good News; and a *priestly* mission, which spurs him to praise the Father and to offer himself to him for our salvation.

All three synoptic Gospels stress that, immediately after his baptism, Jesus is “led” by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness “to be tempted by the devil” (*Mt* 4:1; cf. *Lk* 4:1; *Mk* 1:12). Satan suggests a triumphal messianism to him, consisting in such spectacular wonders as turning stones into bread, throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the temple without suffering injury, achieving instantaneous political control over all the kingdoms of the world. But Jesus’ choice, in total obedience to the Father’s will, is clear and unequivocal: he accepts being the suffering, crucified Messiah who will give his life for the world’s salvation.

Jesus’ struggle with Satan, which began in the wilderness, continues throughout his life. One of his typical activities is precisely that of exorcist, which is why the crowds cry out in amazement: “With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him” (*Mk* 1:27). Anyone who dares to say that Jesus’ power derives from Satan is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (*Mk* 3:22-30): it is in fact “by the Spirit of God” that Jesus casts out demons (*Mt* 12:28). As St Basil of Caesarea states, with Jesus “the devil lost his power in the presence of the Holy Spirit” (*De Spir. S.*, 19).

4. According to the Evangelist Luke, after his temptation in the desert, “Jesus returned to Galilee with the power of the Holy Spirit ... and taught in their synagogues” (*Lk* 4:14-15). The Holy Spirit’s powerful presence is also found in Jesus’ evangelizing activity. He himself stresses it in his inaugural address at the synagogue of Nazareth (*Lk* 4:16-30), applying the passage of Isaiah to himself: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (*Is* 61:1). In a certain sense we can say that Jesus is the “missionary of the Spirit”, sent by the Father to proclaim the Gospel of mercy with the power of the Spirit.

Enlivened by the power of the Spirit, what Jesus says truly expresses his mystery as the Word made flesh (*Jn 1:14*). It is therefore the word of someone with “authority”, unlike the scribes (*Mk 1:22*). It is “a new teaching”, as those who hear his first address in Capernaum are amazed to recognize (*Mk 1:27*). These are words that fulfil and surpass the Mosaic law, as becomes apparent in the Sermon on the Mount. (*Mt 5:7*). They are words that extend divine forgiveness to sinners, offer healing and salvation to the sick and even bring the dead back to life. They are the words of the One who was “sent by God”, in whom the Spirit dwells in such a way that he can give that Spirit “without measure” (*Jn 3:34*).

5. The presence of the Holy Spirit is particularly prominent in Jesus’ prayer.

The Evangelist Luke says that at the moment of his baptism in the Jordan, “when Jesus ... was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him” (*Lk 3:21-22*). This connection between Jesus’ prayer and the presence of the Spirit returns explicitly in the hymn of exultation: “Jesus rejoiced *in the Holy Spirit* and said: ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth’” (*Lk 10:21*).

Thus the Spirit is present in Jesus’ most intimate experience, that of his divine sonship, which prompts him to call God “Abba” (*Mk 14:36*) with a unique trust that is not evidenced in the way any other Jew addressed the Most High. Precisely through the gift of the Spirit, Jesus will enable believers to share in his filial communion and intimacy with the Father. As St Paul assures us, it is the Holy Spirit who makes us cry out to God: “Abba, Father!” (*Rom 8:15*; cf. *Gal 4:6*).

This filial life is the great gift we receive in Baptism. We must rediscover and constantly nurture it, making ourselves docile to the work that the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly welcome the participants in the Sixth World Congress of Endoscopic Surgery, and I encourage you always to place your scientific skills at the service of the well-being and dignity of the human person. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Uganda, Japan, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.