

# Life of the Spirit

Volume II

MAY 1948

Number 23

## VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS

BY

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REATOR SPIRIT ALL-DIVINE  
COME VISIT EVERY SOUL OF THINE  
AND FILL WITH THY CELESTIAL FLAME  
THE HEARTS WHICH THOU THYSELF DIDST  
FRAME.

This verse sums up the whole hymn. It may be looked upon as the Introduction.

The hymn is divided into four parts:

- I Introduction (verse I)
- II Invocation (verses II, III)
- III Petition (verses IV, V, VI)
- IV Doxology (verse VII)

The hymn is a petition to the Holy Ghost for grace and glory ('visit every soul—fill the hearts').

*Every soul.* Grace is in the *soul*, i.e., in the *essence* of the soul; or, as we might say, the very heart of our being. Blessed Juliana of Norwich calls it the 'mid-point' of the soul.

*Fill the hearts . . . which thou thyself didst frame.* The Holy Ghost was active in creation. Of course all the Three Persons were equally active; but certain aspects of creation are attributed to the Holy Ghost. God made the world through Love, i.e., the Holy Ghost. Moreover it is this same Love that governs and perfects the world and souls. 'The Spirit of God moved over the waters' (*Gen. 1, 1*). Hence no one is so fit to 'fill our hearts' as the Holy Spirit of God, who has framed them. Our souls were created by Love; Love alone can fill them.

II

O GIFT OF GOD, THINE IS THE SWEET  
CONSOLING NAME OF PARACLETE  
AND SPRING OF LIFE—AND FIRE—AND LOVE  
AND UNCTION FLOWING FROM ABOVE.

## III

THE MYSTIC SEVEN-FOLD GIFTS ARE THINE;  
 FINGER OF GOD'S RIGHT HAND DIVINE;  
 THE FATHER'S PROMISE SENT TO TEACH  
 THE TONGUE A RICH AND HEAVENLY SPEECH.

These two verses are an *Invocation*. We might almost identify them with what St Thomas calls '*obsecratio*', i.e., a reason for granting our petitions derived from God's goodness and mercy. Each of the invocations should be meditated on.

*Gift of God*. This is one of the three proper names of the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. The three names are: Holy Ghost, Love, Gift.

The Holy Spirit's first gift is love. As St Thomas says, all gifts between friends must rest upon love. Where love is not given, nothing is given, even were the whole world bestowed. Often the gift of love is enough, because by it we give, not our goods, but ourselves.

When St Peter, full of the Holy Ghost, preached his first sermon to the astonished listeners he could not forbear speaking of the gift he had just received. *Acts* 2, 38. 'Do penance and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the *gift of the Holy Ghost*'.

Again, when Simon the magician wished to obtain the Holy Ghost by an offering of money, St Peter said: 'Thou hast thought that the *gift of God* may be purchased with money' (*Acts* 9, 20).

*Paraclete*. i.e., Comforter. When our blessed Lord was about to leave his apostles, he knew how much they would miss him. To cheer their souls at that parting hour he promised to send them one who would comfort them, that is, one whose sympathy would bring not merely consolation but strength. It is evident that God's love and the thought of God's love are the chief consolation and strength in this vale of tears. To realise that whatever befalls us, falls from the love of God is to taste the springs of true solace. The soul that would understand what the word *Paraclete* means should meditate on our blessed Lord's last sermon to the Apostles, which is found in the Gospel of St John, the evangelist of God's love, chapters 14, 15, 16, 17. One text may be quoted. *John* 14, 16: 'I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another *Paraclete* that he may abide with you for ever'. 16, 6: 'Because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow hath filled your heart. 7: But I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go, for if I go not, the *Paraclete* will not come to you'.

*Spring of Life*. (*Fons vivus*, i.e., living well of water.) This recalls the dialogue between our blessed Lord and the Samaritan woman at

the well of Jacob. In reading this most touching scene (*John 4*) it will be noticed that our Lord presents himself to the sinner as if he were in need, i.e., as if the kingdom of Heaven were something we had the power to bestow on him. Then speaking of himself and of the grace of God which his spirit would bring forth in her sinful soul, he goes on to say (v. 14): 'But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up unto life everlasting'. *Isaias 56, 11*: 'And the Lord will give thee rest continually and will fill thy soul with brightness and deliver thy bones and thou shalt be a watered garden, and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail'.

*Fire*. No one comparison can ever exhaust a divine reality. Water is suggestive of cleansing and life-giving. There still remains the thought of refining and purifying, which is expressed by the image of fire.

*Matt. 3, 11*: 'I indeed baptise you in water unto penance, but he that shall come after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptise you in the *Holy Ghost and in fire*'.

*Luc. 12, 9*: 'I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled'.

*Love. (Amor. Caritas.)* This is one of the three proper names of the Holy Ghost. To understand what it means we should often read the Gospel and the Epistles of St John. It is more directly linked with the Holy Ghost in such texts as the following: *Rom. 5, 3*: '... we glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4: And patience trial; and trial, hope; 5: And hope confoundeth not because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the *Holy Ghost* who is given to us'. (Notice that the Holy Ghost is also looked upon as the Giver or Gift).

Again: 'Beseech them through our Lord Jesus Christ; and by the *charity of the Holy Ghost*'.

*Unction*: Three classes of men seem to have been anointed: (1) Kings, (2) Prophets, (3) Priests. Inasmuch as all Christians at baptism receive a sacred anointing with the Chrism (or Oil) they may be said to share in the quality of king, prophet and priest.

The Holy Spirit is especially linked with this sacred and mystic anointing of the soul. *Luc. 4, 18*: 'The *Spirit of the Lord* is upon me wherefore he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor'.

*Acts 10, 38*: 'Jesus of Nazareth: how God anointed him with the Holy Ghost'. Read 1 *John 2*, especially 20-29.

*Seven-fold gifts*: When a sinner turns to God, habitual grace comes into his soul together with seven virtues: Faith, hope, charity,

prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance,—and *seven* gifts. These gifts are the foundation of the mystical life of union with God. Isaias has enumerated them, chapter 11: 'And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him; the spirit of *wisdom*, and of *understanding*, the spirit of *counsel* and of *fortitude*, the spirit of *knowledge* and of *Godliness*. And he shall be filled with the Spirit of the *Fear of the Lord*.

*Finger of God's right hand*: We should meditate on the words of Jeremias (31, 33) quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 10, 15: 'And the Holy Ghost who doth testify this to us. For after that he said, And this is the testament which I will make unto them after those days, saith the Lord. I will give my laws in their hearts and on their minds *I will write them*'.

When our Lord wrote on the sand with his *finger* he had his Holy Spirit in view. *John* 8, 6: 'But Jesus bowing himself down wrote with his finger on the ground'.

Again: *Luke* 11, 20: 'But if I by the *finger of God* cast out devils, doubtless the Kingdom of God is come among you'.

The Holy Spirit is called the *finger of God*, because he *brings us in touch with God*.

*Promise*. The Holy Ghost is the promise of God. *Luke* 24, 49: 'And I send the *Promise of my Father* upon you'.

When our first parents sinned and had been driven out of Paradise nothing remained but a promise. So too when our Lord had blotted out that sin and had been welcomed to the heavenly Paradise nothing remained but his *Promise*.

*John* 2, 25: 'And this is the promise which he hath promised us, life everlasting'.

*Teach . . . a rich and heavenly speech*: The Holy Ghost *teaches interiorly* through conscience and inspirations and *exteriorly* through revelations and infallibility.

*Acts* 2, 1: 'And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished they were all in one place.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and *they began to speak with divers tongues* according as the Holy Ghost gave them *to speak*'.

## IV

KINDLE WITH FIRE BROUGHT FROM ABOVE  
EACH SENSE; AND FILL EACH HEART WITH LOVE.  
AND GRANT OUR FLESH SO WEAK AND FRAIL  
THE STRENGTH OF THINE WHICH NE'ER MAY FAIL.

This is the petition for *internal* grace; verse V is a petition for *external* grace.

*Sense.* Grace is asked for (1) sense, (2) heart, (3) flesh. This means all our faculties of *knowing*. The great virtue of prudence is granted for the purpose of guiding these faculties.

*Heart.* This means our faculties of loving. The two virtues of justice and temperance are granted us for the guidance of our affections and desires.

*Flesh.* Even our body with all its natural shrinking from pain and death is not cut off from grace. *Fortitude* is granted to us to subdue all undue shrinking from pain and death.

'The Word was made flesh'. Since the Incarnation even the bodies of men have been sanctified.

1 Cor. 3, 16: 'Know you not that your members are the *temple of the Holy Ghost*. Who is in you whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

For you are bought with a great price. *Glorify and bear God in your body*'.

## V

DRIVE FAR AWAY OUR DEADLY FOE  
AND GRANT US THY TRUE PEACE TO KNOW.  
SO WE, LED BY THY GUIDANCE STILL,  
SAFELY MAY PASS THRO' EVERY ILL.

This is a petition for external grace of two kinds, viz.:

1. *Defence.* Drive far away.

2. *Guidance.*

*Peace.* This is one of the effects of Charity. When our Lord came on earth the Angels sang '*Glory* be to God on high; and on earth *peace* to men of good will'. This was the correct division. It would be wrong if man received the *glory*; for glory is due to him who gave the good-deed and the good-will. Man's share is not glory but peace.

In his last words to the Apostles our Lord remembering the song of the Angels said (*John 14, 27*): 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid'.

'Peace' is a characteristic word of the Church. In holy Mass the priest prays that it may abide with us for ever. Over the graves of the dead we write the words: 'May they rest in peace'. For these

same dead the Church prays for us for those 'who sleep the sleep of peace'.

Peace is not pleasure. The world has pleasure in its gift; but not peace. And the peace of Christ our Lord is something which the world cannot give or take away. Yet if peace be a higher kind of pleasure, it is pleasure following on pain, joy growing out of sorrow, day springing from night, victory after a struggle, love after estrangement, home after a foreign land, God after this vale of tears!

## VI

*TO US, THROUGH THEE, THE GRACE BE SHOWN  
TO KNOW THE FATHER AND THE SON.  
AND, SPIRIT OF THEM BOTH, MAY WE  
FOR EVER REST OUR FAITH ON THEE.*

A petition for the full sight of the face of God and the mystery of the Undivided Three!

Here below until day breaks and the shadows flee, the Spirit must lead us through the night of faith and hope.

## VII

*TO SIRE AND SON BE PRAISES MEET  
AND TO THE HOLY PARACLETE.  
AND MAY CHRIST SEND US FROM ABOVE  
THAT HOLY SPIRIT'S GIFT OF LOVE.*

A sublime doxology. A model prayer of praise closing with a swift renewal of the one main petition of the hymn: 'Send us from above that Holy Spirit's gift of love'.

*Scribebam in Conventu St. P. N. Dominici apud  
Carisbrooke.*

*Feria 3<sup>a</sup> P. Pent. 1904.*

*Fr V. J. McNabb, O. P.*

*qui sese orationibus vestris humillime commendat.*