

RCIA 2020 Video Script Holy Spirit and Grace

[*Note: there are some questions at the end of the RCIA Holy Spirit video that I think are best to discuss in person. However, I do lay out some answers to those questions here in print form, at the end, if someone is interested.*]

Catholics believe that God is a Trinity – “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” They believe that God created the world as Trinity, that means, God was always Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; it’s not like the Father gained the Son and the Holy Spirit when Jesus was born. This is a mystery that is beyond our understanding: God is one God, but this one God exists in three persons. The reason we say this is because Jesus and the Holy Spirit are revealed to be fully God. Jesus speaks to God as Father, but Jesus himself is God: in the words of Gospel of John, at creation, Jesus is there “with God” but also “is God,” helping to create.

While Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is the central figure of our faith as Christians, we shouldn’t neglect the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit appears throughout the Bible, even in the parts written before the time of Jesus, the Old Testament. In the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the story of creation says that at the beginning of God’s work of creating the world, God’s “Spirit” hovered over the waters that were to be formed into the world.

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s Holy Spirit comes to rest on those who God chooses to be leaders: Prophets, Priests, and Kings.

The Holy Spirit appears at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. The Gospel of Luke states that “After all the people had been baptized and Jesus had also been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:21-22).

Maybe the most exciting image of the Holy Spirit comes from Pentecost. This story takes place a few weeks after Jesus’ death and resurrection, after he ascends into heaven and tells the disciples he will send them the Holy Spirit. In Acts we read “When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, [the disciples] were all in one place together, and suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different [languages], as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” (Acts 2:1-4). Notice how the Holy Spirit is *visible* in a new way: tongues of fire resting on the disciples.

The Holy Spirit plays an important role in the early Church: it shows Christians that Gentiles, that is, people who aren’t Jews, can be Christians. This might seem like an obvious idea to us, but remember that Jesus was Jewish, his 12 disciples were Jewish, and there’s even some parts of the Gospels where Jesus says he wasn’t sent to minister to non-Jews, but only to Jews. So there’s this question in the early Church over whether people who weren’t Jewish, who didn’t have the relationship with God described in the Old Testament, could be Christian at all. Yet in the book of Acts, a part of the New testament which tells the history of the early

Church after Jesus' ascension, we have this scene where the Holy Spirit descends on the Gentiles, showing the Apostles ("Apostles" are Jesus' former disciples, like Peter, James, and John), showing the Apostles that God wants the Gentiles to have salvation through Jesus Christ in the Church just like the others.

The Bible also states that the Holy Spirit plays a role in guiding the Church. In an important early meeting of the Church, the Apostles, Jesus' 12 disciples say "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" when they make a decision to officially include the Gentiles into the Church. The Holy Spirit helps the Church as a whole make decisions, by guiding the Church's leaders. The Holy Spirit also plays a role in continuing to teach the Church about Jesus, even though Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples that he will die, be raised, and ascend into heaven, but that he will send the Holy Spirit to them to continue to teach them, just as he had taught them while he was with them on the earth. Jesus predicts to his disciples that the Holy Spirit will "teach you everything and remind you of all I have taught you." (John 14).

We also read in the Bible that the Holy Spirit gives members of the Church special skills or "gifts." [1 Corinthians 12:7-11: "To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits, to another varieties of tongues, to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.]

So the Holy Spirit is a kind of character in the Bible who appears and assists and teaches, and is visible in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism and tongues of fire at Pentecost. You see this in artwork in Churches sometimes: a dove represents the Holy Spirit, usually placed together with an image representing the Father and another representing Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Well what the Holy Spirit, exactly, and how is it related to the Father and the Son, the other parts of the Holy Trinity? I like to turn to the Bible again here, because there's lots of passages that give us a pretty helpful guide into what the Church teaches about the Holy Spirit.

First, maybe the easiest statement of theology, is this: "God is Love" (1 John 4:8). Now, love implies a relationship between two things. Theologians have long thought that the relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a relationship of love that is the basis for God's loving relationship to us. God loves us because God *is* love, because God is one God constituted by a loving relationship of three persons.

We should also look at this passage—Romans 5:5—"God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." Here, Paul, the writer of the letter to the Romans in the New Testament, especially associates the Holy Spirit with God's love. If there's one person of the Trinity especially associated with the "God who *is* love," it seems to be the Holy Spirit, who, Paul says, pours out God's love into our hearts." Other Bible passages associate the love, or fellowship, of the members of Church for one another with the Holy Spirit [2 Corinthians 13:13: "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."]

We read in other Bible passages that the Holy Spirit plays a role in helping people believe in Jesus, but also to live faithful Christian lives. The Holy Spirit is given to people to help them live as Christians. In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul says that “No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.” Paul here seems to say that we need the help of the Holy Spirit to really have strong faith in Jesus, faith strong enough to make him the Lord of our lives. In Galatians 5:22, Paul speaks of the “fruits of the spirit,” things the Holy Spirit strengthens Christians with, particularly “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

In the letter to the Romans, Paul says that the Spirit helps us in our weakness, particularly by helping us pray. [Romans 8:26-7: “the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will.”] The Holy Spirit gives us a kind of connection to God, translating our concerns into “groanings” that have a special close connection to the relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So, back to our earlier question: what exactly is the Holy Spirit, and how is it part of the Trinity? From these Bible passages I’ve just discussed, we can see that the Holy Spirit seems to be love, and seems to help us love Jesus. We might say that the Holy Spirit is the love with which the Father loves Jesus and Jesus loves the Father, and that the Holy Spirit allows us to share in this Trinitarian relationship.

This is exactly what the 5th century theologian Augustine of Hippo pointed out when trying to explain the Trinity to himself and other Christians, while remembering that the Trinity is ultimately a mystery. Augustine said “the Holy spirit is something common to the Father and the Son, or it is their very commonness or communion...call this friendship, if it helps, but a better word for it is love.” Augustine here describes the Holy Spirit as the love between the Father and the Son. For Christians believing in Jesus and receiving the sacraments, they share in this love of God—remember 1 John 4:8, “God is love”—when they share in the Holy Spirit. Another recent theologian puts it this way “The Father and the Son love each other and us by one and the same love, the Holy Spirit who proceeds and who introduces the Church into friendship with the Trinity” (Gilles Emery, *The Trinity*).

Your next question might be: how do we come to share in this love of the Holy Spirit, this love of the Trinity? When is the love of God poured out into my heart? This leads us to our next topic, which is the word “grace.” The word “grace” has a special meaning in Christian theology that relates to salvation and our hope for eternal life.

Let’s back up a bit first: Christians believe that love of God in the Holy Spirit is poured out into our hearts when we believe and Jesus and receive the Sacraments. This is the pattern for what happens in the book of Acts. The Gentiles, that is non-Jews, hear about Jesus and believe in him and request to be baptized. When they are baptized, they immediately receive the Holy Spirit and begin to show spiritual gifts similar to those used by the Apostles.

The Holy Spirit binds us together with Christ and with one another in the Church in love. St. Cyril of Alexandria says that “all of us who have received one and

the same Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, are in a sense blended together with one another and with God.” The relationship between us as persons in the Church together with Christ is similar to the relationship of love between the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we receive the sacraments with faith and love, we are brought to a mysterious kind of sharing in the love between the Father and the Son, since the Holy spirit, the love between the Father and the Son, is sent to us in our hearts.

The term the Bible and later Catholic teaching uses for this transformation of our hearts by the Holy Spirit is sometimes the word “grace.” [Romans 5:21: “As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our lord.”] Grace is the word from the New Testament for how God makes us righteous, or good, through Jesus Christ. “Grace,” in other words, means you have received salvation and eternal life: if you die with grace, you would go to heaven. [John 17:3: “Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.”] This grace comes when the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The key point about the doctrine of grace is that when God pours this love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we love God back ourselves. We love God with our human mind and heart and will. Though God *gives* us grace with the Holy Spirit, this gift is something that helps and lets us use our own powers to love God back, to have “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” out of our own choice. A person who has grace uses their hearts and their free will to love God back and to love others as God loves them. The word “grace” names the human way that we share in the God who is Love, the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now there are some special questions that always arise when discussing grace. Questions about grace are also one of the major issues that divide Catholics and Protestants. In fact, questions about grace are really the most important dividing issues: it’s not the Pope, or the Mass, but really grace and questions about how the Holy Spirit works in us through grace that divide Catholics and other groups of Christians.

I think it is better to discuss these in person. Nevertheless, I thought I might write out some preliminary answers to read for those interested.

**Can I earn God’s grace by doing good works?*

Sometimes you’ll hear things presented like this: Catholics believe that you gain salvation by doing good works, while Protestants believe that you gain salvation only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This is not correct. The Catholic answer to this question is first and foremost “no,” you cannot earn the grace of salvation by doing good works. Remember that Paul says that the love of God has to be poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Catholics believe that we need to be joined to Christ’s body through the Holy Spirit acting in the Sacraments before we can have salvation. Being a good person is not enough to have salvation: you have to have faith in Jesus and receive the Sacraments to have eternal life, especially the sacrament of baptism.

However, Catholics do believe that once you have grace, this should show in your life by doing righteous and loving acts towards God and others. Catholics believe that grace makes us “righteous,” that means makes us good people. While Catholics believe that we are all sinners constantly in need of God’s mercy, nonetheless Catholics believe that grace should at least mean some kind of transformation of our lives into being more loving. Catholics believe that we can grow in the love of God, and grow in grace in a sense, *after* we have salvation through the Sacraments. We think of great saints like Saint Francis of Assisi or St. Therese of Lisieux as having a great level of grace (in fact, enough grace so as to give a little bit of their grace to others in the Church -- an interesting topic we can discuss later if you like). While you can grow in grace by doing good works in love, you cannot earn that initial grace of salvation just by doing good works.

**Can I lose grace by doing evil works?*

The Catholic answer to this is “yes.” While God calls all people to salvation, some people, in a mystery that we cannot fully understand, appear to reject his offer of love and turn their backs on God’s love. We all know or can imagine people who have received the sacraments or at one point in their lives had faith in Jesus but whose lives were not the type that reflected the love of God poured out into our hearts.

Catholics believe also that there are certain kinds of actions that sabotage divine love, that by being performed mean we lose that relationship of grace with the Trinity. Murder is the most obvious example: how could someone who loves God snuff out the life of another human being who is also loved by God and created in God’s image? Murder as an action would have to be a break with that love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Catholics sometimes call these actions “mortal sins,” they are “mortal” because they kill the relationship a person has to divine love, to the Trinity. But Catholics also believe the damage from these sins can be repaired if God calls people to conversion: this is also what the sacrament of reconciliation, or confession, is meant to repair.

**Can someone who does not believe in Jesus Christ have grace?*

Notice how I said above that Catholics don’t believe that a person can have grace simply by doing good works.

But you do have these questions that have arisen in the Church’s history: we know that humans have been around for a long time, what about people who lived before God’s covenant with Israel or people who lived in societies which never heard about Jesus? Think about the Aztecs, or ancient Chinese civilizations, and so on.

While Christians believe we can’t say anything definitive about the salvation of people who have never heard about Jesus, many Catholics, including St. Thomas Aquinas, have taught that people could have salvation through implicit faith. If people lived in such a time or place that they never could have heard of Jesus Christ, they might be saved by their faith anyway, even though they never had anyone

explicitly lay out that God is Trinity, that Jesus died and was raised for our sins, and so on. Their faith is implicit: they would believe in Christianity if it was presented to them explicitly, but they live in such a time or place that this wasn't possible. But they are still saved by faith in Jesus and given grace by the Holy Spirit, even though they never actually heard about the Catholic Church.

**Can someone who has not received the Sacraments have grace?*

You may have noticed that above I said that a person needs to receive the sacraments, especially baptism, to have grace. This is the Biblical pattern for salvation: in the book of Acts, the story of the early Church, the Gentiles believe the Apostles' teachings about Jesus, get baptized, and receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. Catholics believe that the life of grace begins with baptism and proceeds through the seven Sacraments: baptism, eucharist, confirmation, reconciliation, marriage, holy orders, and anointing of the sick.

However, Catholics do believe that grace can be given without the Sacraments. Remember that when Jesus dies on the cross, one of the thieves crucified with him says "remember me when you come into your kingdom," and Jesus says to him "today you will be with me in paradise." The thief on the cross was never baptized. It is simply his faith in Jesus that brings his salvation, that gives him grace and eternal life.

In the same way, Catholics believe that God can give grace to anyone He chooses to, at any time. While God has associated grace with the sacraments as a kind of channel that especially connects us to Jesus Christ, God gives grace outside of these sacraments. God can unite people to Jesus through the Holy Spirit in a hidden way as well as through obvious ways.

In a teaching that relates to you going through the RCIA process, the Church has taught that catechumens, those going through RCIA who have not received baptism, can have grace and eternal life if they die before they are baptized. When RCIA takes a year (or more), this is something that has happened at least a few times in the Church's 2,000 year history! The Church teaches that catechumens in RCIA are saved by a "baptism of desire," because you wanted, or desired, baptism, but weren't able to get it yet, you are saved just as if you did receive baptism if you die. Because if you hadn't died, you would have gone on and received baptism.

Those are the questions I think usually arise with grace. You probably have several of your own! Send us an email or talk to Deacon Paul, Fr. Tim, myself, or any other RCIA helpers if you want to discuss these questions further!