

Unity in the Spirit

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Remember the story from the book of **Genesis** about the Tower of Babel? You can read all about it in Genesis, chapter 11. If you have not read it, or cannot remember it, now would be a good time to review the story.

According to the story, a long time ago, the people who lived in ancient times were all united, even to the point where they spoke only one language throughout the world. In their unity, they were also somewhat arrogant. They decided to build a tower that would take them up to the place where God dwells. When they were building the great tower, the Lord struck them down, scrambled their language, and made it impossible for them to understand each other. The Lord scattered the people and sent them out to the farthest reaches of the earth.

Remembering the story of the Tower of Babel, recall now the story of the first Pentecost. You can read all about Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2. If you have not yet read the story, or if you need to refresh your memory, now would be a good time to do so.

The story of Pentecost is similar to the story of the Tower of Babel, but with the opposite results. The story of Pentecost gathers people of

many languages and cultures, people from all over the known world, and unites them. Their unity—a unity so profound that they all understand each other—is a unity that is found only in the person of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the story of Pentecost teaches us that the old days are over, the old ways are over, and the disunity and the alienation that had dominated the people of the earth since ancient times have been wiped away. The way that is now open before the people of God, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, is the way of unity, cooperation, and the fullness of the promised kingdom of God.

Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit of God, however that event occurred the first time in the lives of the apostles and the disciples, is intended to be a gift from God. As a gift, it is freely and powerfully offered to the Christian community, not only on the original day of Pentecost but also again and again. However, because the coming of the Spirit of God is a gift, it is only *offered* to us, it is not forced upon us. As such, there is no guarantee that the offered gift will be accepted. There is no guarantee that, if accepted, the gift might not be



THE CONFUSION OF TONGUES BY DORÉ, WIKIMEDIA

abused. There is no guarantee that the gift will be used to make sense out of the babble and the alienation. There is always a real possibility that the gift of the Spirit may be misunderstood and contribute to the noise and the distraction, and instead of helping us focus on what the people of God need for unity, it will instead scatter us and pull us into opposite directions.

The Spirit of God does not intend to scatter or to confuse, but it is nevertheless a risk. It is a risk because with the manifestation of the Spirit, there is yet another gift that is needed, and that is the gift of discernment: the ability to determine what is from God and what is not. Discernment is very difficult because it often brings us face to face with our own fears, judgments, perceptions, opinions, and all those other human attributes. It takes a very patient, a very prayerful, and a very wise person to discern the movement of the Spirit of the Lord. It takes a very patient, a very prayerful, and a very wise person to speak to the people of God with confidence and with the assurance that what they are teaching does in fact come from God and is in fact reflective of the will of God.

Realizing that the Spirit of God comes to the people of God as a gift, and accepting the fact that the manifestation of the Spirit of God needs to be prayerfully discerned, are there any signs we can look for to help us know that what we are being taught and the direction in which we are being led do in fact come from God? This is not an idle question; rather, it is a very important question. People of faith need some assurance that what is being asked of them is something that comes from God and is a clear reflection of the will of God at work in the lives of the people of God. This reassurance and direction are crucial for a scrupulous person, yet it is often difficult for the person to accept because of the disorder and the deception that it presents.

We know that one of the questions asked by Martin Luther and others who we today identify as the Protestant reformers was exactly this question: *How can we be sure that something comes from God?* This is no great surprise, really,

because Martin Luther suffered from scrupulosity and struggled with many of his own uncertainties. Despite the persistence of this question, though, there has not been a clear answer that all Christians have found acceptable.

The tradition that grew out of the Protestant reformers' question insisted that real discernment could be guaranteed only by sacred Scripture. The tradition that grew out of the Protestant reformers' question with a Catholic twist was that real discernment could be guaranteed only by sacred Scripture *and* the teaching of the Magisterium—the pope and his bishops. And that is exactly where we are today, with both perspectives fueling the current controversies about the moral issues of our time.

Some 2,000 years after the first manifestation of the Spirit of God, where do we find ourselves? Has the gift of the Spirit united us as one people, clearly focused on the kingdom of God, or are there still scattered and alienated remnants of the people of God around us? If you experience the unity and the fullness of the Spirit, then do so with a grateful heart. If, on the other hand, you believe we are not experiencing the promised oneness and unity, and that we are instead living in disorienting disunity, then what do you do? What is the expected response? What is the prayer of the people of God today, in this place, in our time and circumstance? ☼



***Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful,
and make the fire of your love
burn within them. Amen.***

Sickness and Suffering from a Loving God?



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When faced with sickness, suffering, and death, we sometimes wonder how a loving God can allow these things to happen to us. We may find ourselves asking, ***“How can God do this to us?”*** In situations where innocent children face sickness or death, we find ourselves particularly challenged to understand why. We may ask ourselves, ***“Where is this loving God now?”***

The answer to these questions can be found at the foundation of our faith. God’s love for us is total and all-encompassing. God does not want sickness, suffering, or death. We see Jesus weeping as he witnesses the sisters of Lazarus mourn his death. Throughout Scripture, we witness Jesus performing miracles to help the blind see, the lepers heal, and the crippled walk.

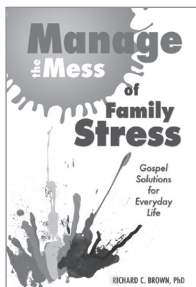
Causes of Evil: Nature of Material Things and Human Freedom to Choose Evil

Despite these miraculous healings, however, sickness, suffering, and death remain natural, normal consequences of living in this physical world. [And while] innate goodness is present because each individual is made in God’s own loving image and likeness, each individual also possesses the freedom of the human will, and with that freedom also comes the power to choose good or evil.

Solutions: Servanthood and Forgiveness

In practicing servanthood toward others who face difficult circumstances, we can listen and respond to their needs. Caring for others who need our help is the greatest opportunity we have to practice servanthood. When we respond to hurtful behavior by reaching out in a

positive way, we rebuild the relationship and bring it back to the way God wants all human relationships to be, now and for all eternity. From a psychological standpoint, responding in this way allows us to waste less energy thinking and worrying about the hurtful behavior. The foundation of Jesus’ entire message rests on the principle of loving God and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. ⚙



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Mailbox

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Q. Today, I was praying a thanksgiving rosary, and near the end of my prayer, I felt like I had blasphemous thoughts. They just popped into my head. I am experiencing guilt and anxiety about this. Do I need to repeat my rosary and confess all of this?

A. Absolutely not. This is the way that scrupulosity works. It takes even the good that we are trying to do and makes a mess out of it. Remember two things: first, thoughts are not blasphemous; they are upsetting, but that is an entirely different matter. Second, you are not responsible for something that you did not generate; you are only the witness.

Q. I went to confession yesterday, and father rushed through the words of absolution. I could hear that it was the proper form, but it sounded like words were skipped. Today, I am bothered by the thought that my confession is not valid.

A. Your confession is totally valid. The matter and the form necessary for the sacrament to be celebrated were both present. It cannot be invalid for this reason; it can, however, be a source of exaggerated concern for you because scrupulosity can take anything and twist it into anxiety.



Additional Resources Online for Those Seeking Help

Liguori Publications offers resources online that people with scrupulosity have found very helpful:

For helpful videos, please visit [YouTube/Catholic OCD](#).

For pastoral care and spiritual direction opportunities, please visit [managingscrupulosity.com](#).

For direct support and to access new helpful videos, please visit [Patreon.com/CatholicOCD](#).

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