



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 12 August 1998

1. In view of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, ever since the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* I have invited you to see “with the eyes of faith the 2,000 years of the action of the Spirit of truth, who down the centuries has drawn from the treasures of the Redemption achieved by Christ and given new life to human beings, bringing about in them adoption in the Only-begotten Son, sanctifying them, so that they can repeat with St Paul: ‘We have received ... the Spirit which is from God’ (cf. 1 *Cor* 2:12)” (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 53a). In our previous catecheses, we have described the manifestation of God’s Spirit in the life of Christ, at Pentecost, from which the Church came into being, and in the personal and community life of believers. Our gaze now extends to the horizons of the world and the whole of human history. Thus we are moving within the plan outlined by this same Encyclical on the Holy Spirit, in which it is stressed that it is impossible for us to limit ourselves to the 2,000 years which have passed since the birth of Jesus Christ. Indeed, we need “to go further back, to embrace the whole of the action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ — from the beginning, throughout the world, and especially in the economy of the Old Covenant” (*ibid.*, n. 53b). At the same time “we need to look further and go further afield, knowing that ‘the wind blows where it wills’ according to the image used by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus (cf. *Jn* 3:8)” (*ibid.*, 53c).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Second Vatican Council, focusing on the Church’s mystery and mission in the world, offered this breadth of vision. The Council holds that the Holy Spirit’s action cannot be limited to the institutional dimension of the Church, where the Spirit also works in a unique and full manner, but should be recognized outside the visible frontiers of Christ’s Body as well (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22; *Lumen gentium*, n. 16). For its part, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recalls with the whole of Tradition: “The Word of God and his Breath are at the origin of the being and life of every creature” (n. 703). And a meaningful text of the Byzantine liturgy says: “It belongs to the Holy Spirit to rule, sanctify and animate creation, for he is God consubstantial with the Father and the Son.... Power over life pertains to the Spirit, for being God, he preserves creation in the Father through the Son” (*ibid.*). Thus there is no corner of creation and no moment of history in which the Spirit is not at work. It is true that all things were created by God the Father through Christ and in Christ (cf. *Col* 1:16), so that the meaning and the ultimate purpose of creation is to “unite all things in him” (*Eph* 1:10). However, it is just as true that all this happens through the power of the Holy Spirit. Illustrating this Trinitarian “rhythm” of salvation history, St Irenaeus says that “the Spirit prepares man beforehand for the Son of God, the Son leads him to the Father and the Father gives him incorruptibility and eternal life” (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 20, 5).<sup>3</sup> The Spirit of God, present in creation and active in all the phases of salvation history, directs all

things towards the definitive event of the Incarnation of the Word. Obviously, this Spirit is no different from the one who was given “not by measure” (cf. *Jn* 3:34) by the crucified and risen Christ. The same identical Holy Spirit prepares the advent of the Messiah in the world and, through Jesus Christ, is communicated by God the Father to the Church and to all humanity. The Christological and pneumatological dimensions are inseparable and not only run through the history of salvation, but the entire history of the world. Therefore we can legitimately think that the way to salvation is open wherever there are elements of truth, goodness, genuine beauty and true wisdom, wherever generous efforts are made to build a more human society in conformity with God’s plan. Even more so, wherever there is a sincere expectation of God’s revelation and a hope open to the saving mystery, we can recognize the hidden and effective work of the Spirit of God who spurs man to the encounter with Christ “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (*Jn* 14:6). When we turn over certain wonderful pages of literature and philosophy, justly admire some masterpiece of art or listen to passages of sublime music, we spontaneously recognize in these expressions of human genius a radiant reflection of God’s Spirit. Of course, these reflections are on a different plane from those interventions which make the human being, raised to the supernatural order, a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells together with the other Persons of the Blessed Trinity (cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 109, a. 1, *ad* 1). Thus the Holy Spirit, directly or indirectly, orients man to his integral salvation.<sup>4</sup> For this reason we would like to pause in the next catecheses to contemplate the Spirit’s action in the vast arena of humanity’s history. This vision will also help us grasp the deep relationship that unites the Church and the world, the overall history of man and the particular history of salvation. The latter is not actually a “separate” history, but rather plays a role with regard to the former that we could describe as “sacramental”, that is, as a sign and instrument of the one great offer of salvation which reached humanity through the Incarnation of the Word and the outpouring of the Spirit. With this as the key, it is easy to understand several marvellous pages of the Second Vatican Council on the solidarity that exists between the Church and humanity. In this pneumatological perspective I am pleased to reread the preface of *Gaudium et spes*: “The joy and the hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men, of men who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men. That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history” (n. 1). It can be clearly seen here how the Church’s solidarity with the world and her mission to it must be understood as starting from Christ, in the light and power of the Holy Spirit. The Church thus experiences herself at the service of the Spirit who works mysteriously in hearts and in history. And we feel we are sent to transmit to all humanity the fullness of the Spirit received on the day of

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Pentecost.

*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:* I cordially welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from Taiwan, Japan and the United States of America. I gladly invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ upon you and your families.