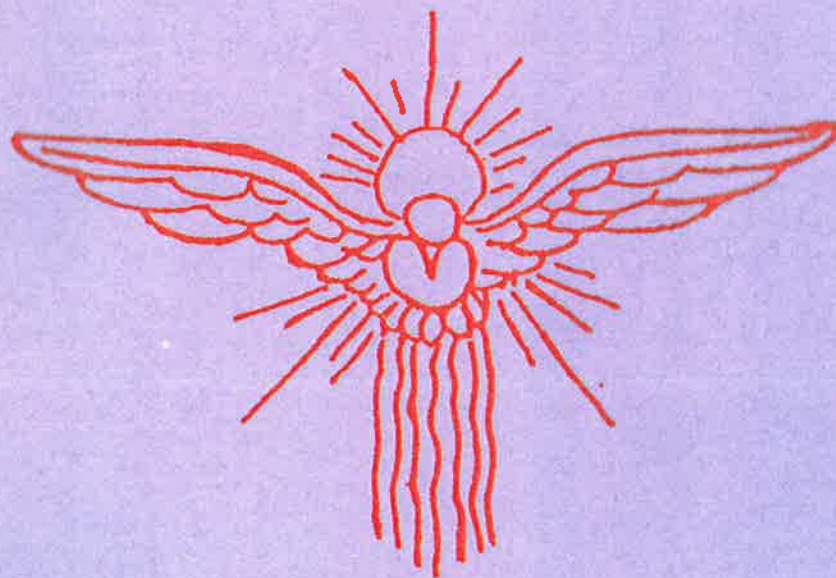




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INTRODUCING THE HOLY SPIRIT



RENEWAL IN CHRIST BOOKLET #5

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THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Since the creation of the world He (the Holy Spirit) has been present. We are informed in the beginning verse of God's Word that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." (Genesis 1:1,2) However, before the full revelation of God through His Son Jesus, the Holy Spirit worked among people in limited ways and was not available to humanity at large. For example, the Holy Spirit gave Sampson supernatural physical strength to protect his people. Moses was filled with the great power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in order to lead his people out of slavery and into the Promised Land. In addition, Moses was inspired by the Holy Spirit when he wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. The great prophets of old, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel (to name several) were inspired by the Holy Spirit as they delivered God's message to their people, and also in their prophecies concerning the coming Savior of the world, Jesus.

In relation to this writing, one of the most interesting and exciting God inspired prophecies before the time of Christ, was uttered by the prophet Joel. He proclaimed, "I will pour out my spirit on all people..." (Joel 2:28). That astounding prophecy came true ten days after the Ascension of Christ to heaven. Just before His crucifixion and wonderful resurrection from death, Jesus comforted His disciples by informing them that although He must return to heaven, He would not leave them alone as "orphans", but would ask the Father to send to them the Holy Spirit, Who would be to them what Jesus was: "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another *Counselor* to be with you forever -- the *Spirit of Truth*" (John 14:16,17).

PENTECOST -- THE HOLY SPIRIT IS AVAILABLE TO ALL HUMANITY

Ten days after our Lord ascended back to heaven, as He promised, the Holy Spirit came down in a most unique and dramatic way. Before I discuss this any more, I must stress a very important point: That although His last instructions to His followers, before His ascension, were to preach the Good News of the Gospel to all people and make disciples of them, to baptize all who came to God and to teach everything He taught them (see Matthew 28: 16-20), Jesus warned His followers "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised..." "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... and to the end

of the earth" (Acts 1:4 & 8).

To loosely paraphrase Jesus, perhaps we could say, "**And do not try to accomplish ministry until you receive the Holy Spirit's power. Do not become priests, do not become deacons or parish council members, do not become Sunday School teachers, don't form committees or organize churches -- don't do a single thing -- until you receive the power of the Holy Spirit. You have been assigned a supernatural task, and you will need God's supernatural strength to accomplish it!**" In other words, trying to function as a Christian or as a church without the power of the Holy Spirit, is as silly trying to get electrical power from a dead circuit - but plug the line into a live circuit (power of the Holy Spirit), and you'll get tremendous power to accomplish whatever you want to.

Finally, fifty days after our Lord rose to life from the dead, the promised Holy Spirit came. That is the Day of **PENTECOST**, it is the birth of the Church. (This event is celebrated by the Armenian Church every year as a great feast in the spring). On that day, as the Disciples were praying together in the upper room where they had shared the Last Supper with the Lord, the unimaginable happened -- heaven's gate opened and absolutely tremendous power fell from heaven, God's Holy Spirit, came upon the believers. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house..." The visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit is described as "tongues of fire" in Acts 2:2,3. From that day to the present, unlike previously, God's Holy Spirit was made available to all believers throughout the entire earth -- to whosoever believes in and accepts by faith, the Son of God.

The late Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan explains this miraculous event in this way: "After the Ascension and the Pentecost, when the Church received the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room, Christ continued to do His work and acted through His Mystical Body, the Church, and He will so act henceforth. Thus the Church has the same function in the world that the human body of Christ had when He lived on this earth." In this regard, a most fascinating passage is found in the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter four. In the first verse we read that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" as He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted for forty days by the Devil. And in the 14th verse, we read that after the forty days of temptation, Jesus returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" to begin His public ministry.

SOME IMPORTANT LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Isn't it fascinating that Jesus, although He is God and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, was directed by the Holy Spirit and also in the "power of the Spirit"? Why did He, Who is God, rely on the Holy Spirit? The answer is that, as a perfect human, our Lord wanted to be our perfect example. St. Paul writes that Jesus "humbled Himself" by taking on our human nature (Phil. 2:6-8). He temporarily set aside all the privileges of Deity, and He lived, He preached, and He performed all His miracles with the power of the Holy Spirit, just as we are supposed to do. As a matter of fact, during the last hours before His crucifixion, our Lord revealed some deep spiritual truth of God to His disciples, one of the most wonderful being the promise that we -- the Church -- will do all the works He did, and even greater works! "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). If we can even begin to comprehend the significance of this, we will not be able to contain the joy and excitement of our potential in God and His limitless power! Today, many people have turned away from God and are concentrating and relying on "human potential", but human potential compared to our potential in God (through the Holy Spirit) is like comparing a plastic toy gun to the hydrogen bomb. There's no comparison!

Ever since the birth of the Church, Christians have performed great works and miracles in the name of God through the power of His Holy Spirit. For many centuries our Armenian Church Fathers have prayed with faith and have displayed great spiritual power, with many miracles attributed to them. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Armenians were among the first missionaries to pagan populations, preaching boldly the Word of God and helped to establish Christian churches in foreign lands. Our Spirit-filled Armenian Forefathers were the first in world history to defend, at the cost of their lives and fortunes, the Christian Faith; and for that, they were referred to as the "Torch Bearer of Christianity" in the East.

Sadly, today, in this so-called "Free and Christian" nation, we are losing many of our people, especially the youth, to secularism, non-Armenian Churches, and even to the cults. Unfortunately, many Christians today do not enjoy their Christian life as they should, and nor do they feel God's presence in their individual lives, and also,

not experience inner peace, simply because they do not know about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and their potential through Him. Neither do they know how to pray with the help of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, let us become acquainted with the Holy Spirit, and find out His relationship to the believer.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON AND HE IS GOD

In the popular movie series, *Star Wars*, there are many references to "The Force". Quite simply, The Force is supposed to be a great power in the universe which can be used for good or evil purposes. (This by the way, is a central belief among the Hindus and all occult-based religions). Some people, and especially some cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, see the Holy Spirit somewhat like The Force of the *Star Wars* movie, or as God's force (or power). However, the Holy Spirit is not simply God's powerful force, but He is God. We do not refer to the Holy Spirit as "it", but in a personal manner, as "He". The Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity -- God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This is clearly indicated by Christ Himself in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 28, which is the last chapter of that Gospel, and it contains the last words of Christ who said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son *and of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 28:19). In addition, this is affirmed by the celebrant during the Badarak of the Armenian Church, after the Havadamk (The Nicean Creed) is recited. He declares, "As for us, we shall glorify Him who was before the ages, worshiping the Holy Trinity and the one God-head, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..."

Further, from the testimony of Holy Scriptures, we have many examples of the personality of the Holy Spirit. For example, we know that He has a will and can make decisions (I Cor. 12:11); He speaks (Acts 8:29); the Holy Spirit's feelings can be hurt (Ephesians 4:30); He has a mind (Rom. 8:27); and the Holy Spirit loves (Rom. 15:30).

NAMES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There are a number of names for the Holy Spirit in the Bible. Each one reveals a different character or function of the Holy spirit. The following are some examples: He is called the Spirit of God (I Cor. 3:16), the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14),

the Spirit of truth (John (16:13), the Spirit of Life (Rom. 2:8) and the Comforter. Let us look at the passage in which the Holy Spirit is described by Christ as the Comforter. Turn your Bibles to the Gospel of St. John chapter 14, verses 25 and 26. What is the important message of Christ to us in these verses? Christ spoke these comforting words to His disciples not too long before He was to be taken away from them to be crucified on the cross. Jesus wanted to assure them that God would not abandon them, but that He would be present with them through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will comfort all those who belong to God and teach them the meaning of God's Word. In other words, the Holy Spirit acts as our Counselor and Teacher, just as Jesus did when He was here.

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We read in the Book of Acts, chapter two, the account of the birth of the Church. As we have already mentioned, on that memorable day, the Holy Spirit came as Christ promised and filled the believers with His mighty power. Miracles took place and St. Peter gave an inspiring sermon in Jerusalem which resulted in the conversion of three thousand people. They accepted Jesus Christ, they were baptized and formed the first Church. An important spiritual principal (which Satan does not want Christians to realize) is that *whenever Christians display faith and allow the Holy Spirit to operate in their lives, miracles happen!* Please excuse the repetition, but I can't help repeating that the Church was born by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, and was also given supernatural gifts in order to operate. That dynamite power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to all Christians who ask God for them by faith. A description of these gifts is given in I Corinthians chapter 12, verses 4 through 11. *Let us read that passage.*

What is the role of the Holy Trinity in relation to the gifts as described in verses 4, 5 and 6? Although there are different kinds of gifts, they all are given by the Holy Spirit. In the Church there are different kinds of service such as preaching, teaching, caring for the poor, giving donations, etc., but that service is for one Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the Leader of the Church. And concerning the different abilities mentioned in verses 7 through 11, such as the ability to speak with special wisdom and to pray for the healing of the sick, these abilities are given by God (the Father) to His children so that they may successfully carry on His work in the world through the Church.

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

Our Armenian Church Fathers have been filled with the mighty power of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For example, just prior to the conversion of Armenia to Christianity, St. Krikor the Illuminator was put in a deep dungeon by the Armenian King Drtad. And although St. Krikor should have died within days in that horrible situation, he was miraculously kept alive by the power of the Holy Spirit and an angel of God for more than 12 years. In time, the king who had imprisoned him suffered from a rare disease and developed an insanity for a long time. When it was realized that St. Krikor was still alive in the dungeon, he was released in order to pray for King Drtad. The king was miraculously healed and accepted Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior and was baptized. At that time (in the year 301), Armenia was declared as a Christian nation. During that extremely happy time, St. Krikor, assisted by King Drtad, built the very first cathedral in Armenia which is known as Holy Etchmiadzin.

And concerning another great Armenian Church saint, it is recorded that St. Nerses Shenorhali "...used to gather around him those Bible loving people and lived with them. He used to read the Word of the Holy Spirit (Bible) and always talk with the Holy Spirit." It is very interesting as well as important to note that the Armenian Church believes that the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are to be used and enjoyed by the Church even now, and that those abilities were not just for the early Church. This is clearly shown, for example, by the fact that when an Armenian celibate priest is ordained to the highest rank, known as Dzyrakoun Vartabed, the ordaining bishop, among other things, asks that that person be filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the ability "...to teach, to reveal the Divine Scriptures, to speak in tongues, and to translate..."

In addition, our Church Fathers have provided the Armenian Church with special prayers for the healing of the sick, as well as the prayer for the expelling of evil spirits from demonized people. A very interesting informative statement in this regard was made by Bishop Paren Melkonian in his writing entitled, "The Comparative Analysis of the Armenian Liturgies" (Brotherhood of Mekhitarists, 1950). He states that in the Armenian Church Father Antsevantsi's interpretation of the Armenian Divine Liturgy, after the recitation of the Creed, the deacons "would bring into the church all that were behind the doors (those who were not prepared to receive Holy Communion) -- the catechumens, lepers, the demon possessed and the penitents --

and the priest would then read a prayer upon them and the whole congregation would join in with supplication with healing.”

Also in relation to the above, I want to mention that when I was at a meeting of Armenian clergy at the St. Vartan Cathedral in New York about seven years ago, Bishop Barkev Mardirosian, Primate of Karabagh was present, and he shared his experiences with us. He said that amidst all the bad news we hear about the politics and fighting between the Karabagh Armenians and Azerbaijan, we don't hear about the good work God is doing among His people. Bishop Barkev then proceeded to give examples of how certain paralyzed young people accepted Jesus Christ, were baptized, received Holy Communion, and several days later, were miraculously healed of their paralysis. One was a young man who had suffered paralysis for ten years and was confined to a stretcher, and the other, was a young woman who was born paralyzed. He commented that these two were just a few of the many cases of miraculous healings which took place! **Quite plainly, we believe in the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit through the Church, even in this day.**

THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Many Christians do not enjoy their relationship with God as they ought to, and live with constant anxiety, fear and worry due to the pressures and problems of life. This is so because they are not aware of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and they do not know how to benefit from them. In the 5th chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, verses 22 and 23, we are told of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. They are: JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS and SELF-CONTROL.

It is so vital for us to realize that if we pray regularly, and in our prayers if we also ask God to produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit in us, we will benefit greatly. God will begin to, for example, help us to love ourselves and accept ourselves in the proper way, and then, the Holy Spirit will enable us to love others. When we get into the habit of prayer, little by little, the Holy Spirit will also relieve our anxieties and depression, and help us to control ourselves in regarding unhealthy habits and ungodly lifestyles. I'll never forget one teenager who was having terrible nightmares constantly, and she got to the point that she was terribly frightened to sleep at nights. But then she got into the habit of praying every night for God's peace, and to also

read a Psalm before going to bed. The nightmares stopped and she enjoys the inner peace of the Holy Spirit.

For the Christian who is empowered with the Holy Spirit through **prayer, worship and reading of Scripture**, the troubles and challenges of life will still come, but will never conquer that person. God has promised that if we put our faith in Him and are firmly grounded in Him, then **“in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 8:37-39). Incidentally, these are great verses to memorize.

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The ministry of the Holy Spirit has never stopped. The term “ministry” has to do with service. He began ministering since the beginning of creation. As we noted, the Holy Spirit came upon men such as Sampson, Moses, King David and the great prophets, enabling them to perform great feats and accomplishments. Let's now turn our attention to what the Holy Spirit can do for us. Let us see how the Holy Spirit is ready minister in our individual lives so that we can live as Christians and serve God.

There are many ways in which the Holy Spirit is active in the lives of people. Some of the more important functions are the following:

1. **The Holy Spirit is God's seal of ownership upon the believer and Satan cannot take the believer away from God (II Cor. 1:21-22).** This is one of the greatest comforts we have from God, especially when Satan wants us to lose our confidence in our salvation. Incidentally, after the Baptism rite of the Armenian Church, the baptized believer is Chrismated, that is, sealed by holy oil (muron). The holy oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, and is also the symbolic seal of God upon the believer -- in other words, God is putting His seal of ownership upon the believer, and Satan cannot claim that person.

2. **The Holy Spirit makes peoples' conscience aware of sin --** He is constantly making humanity aware of their sinful condition and directing them to the Savior for help. “When he comes, he will

convict the world of guilt in regard to sin..." (John 16:8).

3. He miraculously transforms the believer into a child of God (John 3:1-8). We cannot save ourselves by any means, but the salvation of a sinner is a miracle of God through His Holy Spirit.

4. The Holy Spirit helps the Christian conform to the image of Christ (II Cor. 3:17-18). Despite our frustrations and failings in the Christian life to which we are called, the Holy Spirit will not give up on us. He will constantly work to improve us, and conform us more and more into the image and likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is called "sanctification". God is constantly cleansing His children by various means and methods, even though some of these may seem harsh at the time. God disciplines those He loves!

5. He reveals the meaning of God's Word to the Christian (I Cor. 1:11-16). This passage clearly indicates that spiritual knowledge is foolishness to the non-believer. It doesn't make sense, and is not discerned by the non-believer. However, the believer has access to the mind of God, and through the Holy Spirit, the Bible becomes alive and meaningful. Even if you don't understand a passage immediately, the Holy Spirit will enable you to comprehend God's Word in time and by various means.

6. He gives power and courage to Christians so they may witness for God (Acts 1:8).

7. The Holy Spirit will resurrect, that is, bring back to life, all the believers in Christ, just as He raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 8:11).

8. He continuously prays for the believer (Rom. 8:26-27). Have you ever had trouble praying to God? Have you ever found it impossible to express your innermost needs and desires to God? Of course -- we all have had this experience. **But the great news is that the Holy Spirit will help us pray!** "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ...the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

Well then, I hope the reading of this booklet has opened your mind to some of the most wonderful truths of God ever given to mankind. As St. Paul has said, no mind can conceive of the wonderful things God has in store for those who love Him. Certainly, the Holy Spirit of God and the potential we have through Him is incomprehensible. Even the sky is not the limit for those Christians and Churches who cultivate a good and healthy relationship with the Holy Spirit.

*It is so upsetting to realize that many church goers haven't the foggiest idea about the Holy Spirit and how God has intended to work with the Spirit in the lives of those who are His children. Among church groups, too often we see the spiritually weak, the spiritually lame and dying, when the truth is that things can be the opposite. **WE NEED A SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IN OUR ARMENIAN CHURCHES.** We need the build up of faith, and the power which comes with the Holy Spirit among our people.*

Let us take the banner of the Christian Faith and let the Armenian Christian once again be regarded as the "Torch Bearer of Christianity" as in our glorious past. Let us get away from the paranoia and silliness of the notion that the study of God's Word, for the building up of our faith, is for non-Armenian Christians. We need the truth of God to survive as Christians. Our Catholicos, Karekin I has stated that a people may become Christian, but without the Bible and Christian education, they cannot remain Christian ("Challenge to Renewal", 1996). Our Lord said, "...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). We must be exposed to God's truth through the Bible in order to attain faith through that knowledge. Truth is power, it is freedom. Satan has cleverly worked to keep many of our people in spiritual ignorance and bondage. Let us liberate ourselves with the Truth by the Holy Spirit Who is the Revealer of God's Truth. And then, we will see miracles in our churches, and reclaim our lost youth.

May the Guardian and the Hope of all the faithful, Jesus Christ, keep and preserve the Armenian Church Faithful under His Precious Cross in peace, and preserve them from all the enemies, both visible and invisible. May they be made worthy to enter into God's Kingdom, to praise and worship God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit now and forever, amen.



A Prayer to the Holy Spirit by
St. Nersess the Graceful

*Spirit of God, true God, who
did descend into the Jordan and
into the upper chamber, and who
did enlighten me by the baptism
of the Holy Font, I have sinned
against Heaven and before You;
cleanse me anew with Your divine
fire as You did purify the holy
Apostles with fiery tongues. Have
mercy upon Your creatures and
upon me, a manifold sinner.*

