

Introduction

A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion.

—Mark 4:37–38

Jesus was fast asleep. Even though he was in a boat battered by crashing waves and heavy winds, his companions convinced that they were all about to die, Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern. This was obviously one heck of a storm, but Jesus rested comfortably while seasoned fishermen panicked.

Wouldn't it be great if we could learn to react like Jesus when we are battered by the storms of life? For close to ten years, I have traveled around the country, leading parish missions and giving talks designed to help people find a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. In my presentations, I always make the point that the Lord wants to be involved in our lives and assist us with our daily struggles. With his help, it is possible to remain peaceful in the storm.

As I interact with fellow Catholics at my speaking engagements, I keep hearing the same comments:

“How can I not stress out when the world is so crazy?”

“I pray and go to Mass, but I'm still afraid.”

“I try not to get mad, but those people make me so angry!”

“Worrying is part of life. I’ve just learned to accept it.”

“God is not answering my prayers and I’m tired of waiting!”

Many churchgoing Christians seem to believe that most problems we face each day are outside of God’s jurisdiction. As a result, they live like practical atheists, as if God doesn’t exist. They accept worry, hopelessness, misery, and hatred as a normal part of life. They fly off the handle and lose composure on a regular basis. For many people, “church life” and “real life” are totally separate.

Why does this happen? For the most part, it occurs when we lose sight of four important pieces of information:

- *The invisible world exists.* There is more to the world than what we perceive with our senses. Just because we can’t see God doesn’t mean that he doesn’t exist. The same applies to the angels, and even to Satan. To experience peace and confidence in God (and share them with others), we first need to acknowledge that he is real. To combat the temptations of Satan, we must understand that he exists and that he’s out to get us.
- *God is in control.* No matter what happens, God is always in control. The Bible tells us that it is God “whose hand holds the depths of the earth; who owns the tops of the mountains. The sea and dry land belong to God, who

made them, formed them by hand” (Ps 95:4–5). We can’t always see the solution to our problems from our limited perspective, but “nothing will be impossible for God” (Lk 1:37). God is much bigger than our problems and has given us everything we need to remain calm and to trust, if we open ourselves to those graces.

- *God loves us.* In the midst of turmoil, we often assume that God does not care about our struggles. Jesus experienced this firsthand with Martha (Lk 10:40) and the storm-battered apostles (Mk 4:38). Lashing out at God may be a natural human response in our difficulties, but it’s not based on reality. According to the Bible, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). He really does care!
- *God wants us to be at peace.* I often open my talks with the words “I want you to be free from anxieties.” After the members of the audience smile and nod their heads, I let them know that I borrowed those words from St. Paul. In 1 Corinthians 7:32, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write that exact message. Guess what? If God wants you to be at peace, and free from all the effects of anger and stress, it must be possible. He would never ask you to do something that isn’t possible. Unless you grasp that concept, you will never find the peace you seek.

SECRET WEAPONS OF FAITH

In this book, we will look at a variety of stress-producing situations and discover how the fruits of the Spirit—the cultivated harvest of the seeds of virtue planted inside us at Baptism, the “first fruits of eternal glory” (CCC 1832)—enable us to respond in a Christlike manner.

We will examine each of the fruits and explore ways to activate them in our lives. This approach doesn’t involve ignoring the problems that surround us. Rather, it requires shifting focus, recognizing that God is always in charge and has given us these “secret weapons” of the faith, which the Spirit wants to help us use every day.

What are they, you ask? We can find both the “fruits of the flesh” and the “fruits of the Spirit” in St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians:

Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you . . . those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. (Gal 5:19–23, RSVCE)

Take a moment and read this passage again slowly. Do any of these fleshly fruits give you trouble? Are there fruits of the Spirit that you find attractive, that you need to cultivate in your life? Then you’ve picked the right book—keep reading!

Each time we remove the fleshly fruits from our lives and ask the Holy Spirit to replace them with the fruit of the Spirit, good things happen. Not only will behaving in this way bring us peace, but it will also bring peace to those around us. It might not happen overnight, but we will gradually become more like Jesus, who slept during a raging storm. Aside from giving us the peace we seek, this new way of life also enables us to change our crazy world for the better!

A WORD OF CAUTION

Most of us know instinctively what we should and shouldn't do. We have the Bible and two thousand years of Church teaching to assist us in living holy, peaceful lives. (Even those who aren't very familiar with the Bible or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are often aware of the basic teachings of Jesus: pray, avoid worry, and repay hatred with love.) But how many times do even these basics trip us up? Why is it so difficult to follow his instructions?

Even though we know what we *should* do, our response to stressful situations is often the exact opposite of what Jesus commanded. We grow impatient and forget about praying as we run around trying to fix our problems on our own. We act as though everything depends on us. We think that we have to get things under control—and it has to be done *now*!

Before long, we become aware of our limitations and give in to worry and anger. Trying to relieve our stress, we turn to the internet, TV, or self-medication. Instead of helping, these activities often make us feel worse. Anxious and overwhelmed, we take out our frustration on those around us.

As Christians, shouldn't we be able to live peaceful lives and not fall apart when problems arise? Yes, but it's not quite that simple.

Even if we are aware of what Jesus said and what the Church teaches, we can't simply will ourselves to overcome these challenges. On our own, we will fail every time—especially when faced with a crisis or volatile situation. It's too easy to spin out of control. We need more than the Bible or the *Catechism* to help us deal with the challenges of daily life. These resources are important, but they are not enough.

Jesus knew that we would need additional help, and that's why he gave us the Holy Spirit, who plants within us tiny weapons of goodness—fruits, we call them—that we cultivate over the course of our lifetime. And that's what this book is all about.

LISTEN TO THE SPIRIT

Learning to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit is the secret to finding the peace you seek and living the life that God planned for you. Listening to the Spirit lets you know what to do and when to do it. His gentle voice will instruct you when to take action and when to rest in the Lord and wait. Instead of gritting your teeth and trying to remain calm in the face of adversity, follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and he will fill your heart with joy and peace.

Jesus never expected you to handle the struggles of life on your own. That's why the very Spirit (who guided him as he dealt with hostility and persecution) comes to live in you at

Baptism and wants to assist you every day. When Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life” (Mt 6:25), he knew that he would be sending someone to guide you. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, it is possible to remain calm and in control in the middle of the storm.

By the time you reach the end of this book, you will learn how simple it is to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. It all starts with a powerful three-word prayer that should flow from your lips frequently. It’s a prayer that will put you on the road to peace by letting the Holy Spirit work freely in your life. Do you long for the peace of Christ to dwell in your heart and spill over into all areas of your life? If so, let’s begin our journey by praying this brief prayer. Don’t be fooled by its simplicity. There is power in these three words. Repeat after me . . .

Come, Holy Spirit!

You may not realize it, but something just happened when you prayed those words. Even if you felt nothing, that simple prayer is always effective. When you invite the Holy Spirit to go to work in your life, fasten your seat belt and get ready. You’re in for a wonderful and exciting journey. He will always respond.

Before too long, you’ll find yourself able to rest comfortably even during the storm. Be patient and let the Holy Spirit gradually transform you into the image of Jesus. That’s *his*

job, and he does it well. Your job is to be docile and let him work in your life. If you can do that, you will be *transformed!*

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

—2 Corinthians 3:18, RSVCE

Part I

Laying the Foundation

1

Bring On the Power!

But you will receive power when the holy Spirit
comes upon you.

—Acts 1:8

Jesus spoke these words of consolation and promise to the apostles and by extension to us, yet they are ignored by millions of Christians every day.

In all fairness, it's easy to see why. Jesus promising the Holy Spirit to the early Church seems like old news, something that happened long ago. The only time this message typically resonates with us is on Pentecost Sunday. One day each year, we recall that the Holy Spirit descended on the Church and something special happened. In a few hours, however, we forget all about it. (But we shouldn't.)

Unfortunately, the significance of the word translated into English as “power” is often lost on us—it is simply overused. A baseball player who hits lots of home runs is referred to as a “power hitter,” a short rest is called a “power nap,” and a midday meeting between politicians or businesspeople is sometimes known as a “power lunch.” We speak of “powerful”

movies, songs, or plays. The word is used so casually that it doesn't seem like a big deal. Is it any surprise that Jesus' promise of power (courtesy of the Holy Spirit) is overlooked?

To better understand what Jesus was promising, we need to dig deeper.

FEEL THE POWER!

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and certain words and phrases aren't easily translated into English. What exactly did St. Luke mean when he used the word "power" (*dunamis*) in Acts 1:8? This Greek word is the root of the English words "dynamite" and "dynamic." The kind of power Jesus promised was explosive!

When the Holy Spirit descended on the men and women of the early Church, they received explosive energy that changed their lives dramatically. The members of the early Church experienced radical conversion (we can read about it in the Acts of the Apostles), turning from their old ways and living together in peace, hope, and joy—often despite tremendous persecution and turmoil. They spoke in tongues, performed miraculous healings, and willingly put their lives in jeopardy to proclaim the Gospel so forcefully that thousands were drawn to the faith (despite the threat of persecution).

All of this was possible because of the Holy Spirit. Wouldn't it be great if we had access to that same kind of power? It would come in handy as we attempt to deal with the craziness going on in the world and in our lives. Here's some good news. Not only do we have access to that same power, but it is available to us *right now!*

COME, HOLY SPIRIT!

We first receive the Holy Spirit at Baptism, according to the *Catechism*: “Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte ‘a new creature,’ an adopted son of God, who has become a ‘partaker of the divine nature,’ member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1265).

The power of the Holy Spirit in us is then strengthened through the sacrament of Confirmation: “For by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed” (CCC 1285).

If you have been baptized and confirmed, you possess the same Holy Spirit given to the members of the early Church at the first Pentecost. You have all of the gifts (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord), and you have the “power”! Do you feel it? If not, you’re not alone.

When faced with the struggles of life, even loyal followers of Christ often feel powerless and out of control. Furthermore, it’s often hard to see this power in others. Unlike the members of the early Church, many modern-day Catholics completely adapt to secular culture. There seems to be nothing different about them. They may pray occasionally and attend Mass on Sunday, but they often act as if they were atheists. How is this possible, given the internal presence of the Holy Spirit?