

New Testament 2 - Life in the Early Church: Recapturing the Spirit

Part 1 Ten Insights from Acts that will speak to us today about Our Parishes

1. Embrace the Power of the Resurrection
2. The Holy Spirit is directing the Divine Plan of Salvation
3. Collaboration in Discerning God's Plan
4. Change Can Happen When We Listen to the Holy Spirit
5. Help in Discerning the Way is Available
6. Discipleship is a Journey
7. Reconnect with the Paschal Mystery
8. Discipleship involves the Cross
9. True Church
10. Evangelization is Essential

Questions to Consider from Part 1

1. How do you experience **the power of the Resurrection** at Your Parish? (Both personally and as a community of faith)
2. Where do you witness the **Holy Spirit active in the discernment of God's Plan** for Your Parish?
3. What **resources** can aid Your Parish in its self-reflection?
4. What **challenges** to fulfilling God's plan do you foresee? How should you best deal with them?
5. If True Church is built on **Word, Worship, Community and Service**; articulate how these are actively present at Your Parish today. How can they have a stronger presence?
6. How can Your Parish have a more powerful **outreach** in sharing the Good News of Jesus with others?

Part 2 St. Paul: God's "Chosen Instrument" Acts 9:15

1. Paul was a Diaspora Jew
2. Paul's World of Meaning
3. Paul experienced the Risen Christ
4. What Christ did for us
5. Paul felt compelled to preach the gospel
6. Paul founded + cared for Churches
7. Paul Communicated with Letters
8. The Church is the Body of Christ
9. A Life of Holiness
10. Paul and Women

Questions to Consider from Part 2

1. What would be 2 or 3 **adjectives** that you might offer to capture your impression of Paul?
2. St. Paul was one of the very first and most influential leaders in the Church. What can Paul's life and ministry teach you about **Pastoral Leadership in the Church today?**

New Testament 2 Assignment Question:

Write a Pauline-type letter to a faith community that you are familiar with (e.g., your parish, prayer group, fellow-ministers, pastoral council, parish staff, perhaps another Christian denomination or sect, K. of C., etc.). Please try to emulate the format that Paul used in his letters. In this letter include the following features as Paul did:

- problems or concerns that you hear of/see in the community.
- effective spiritual advice and theological rationale for each of your directives.

N.B. This exercise in emulating Paul's style and method of theologizing is not intended to be critical of individual Christians or churches. Every community has various issues and problems and could use some prophetic guidance. Also, Paul's approach was always very practical and problem-centered. If you find this assignment overly critical or judgmental, please feel free to create a fictional situation.

On Grace in Everyday Life – Fr. Karl Rahner SJ

Excerpted from his book of reflections on the Spiritual Life called *Belief Today*

Has any of us ever really felt that God's grace was working within us? By grace we do not mean pious sentiments of one kind or another, or that sort of religious uplift occasionally experienced on Sundays and holy days, or that faint feeling of consolation that steals over us now and then in time of trouble. We mean the real, genuine experience of a visitation of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity, who was manifested to us through Christ's incarnation and sacrifice on the cross. Can one experience grace at all in this life? If not, surely there would be an end to our faith, an end to that holy twilight which envelops us all through our earthly pilgrimage? Now the mystics tell us – and attest it by the example of their lives – that they have had experience of God and, therefore, of grace. The experiential knowledge of God through mysticism is, however, a dim mysterious thing that one cannot discuss if one has not had it and one does not discuss it if one has not experienced it ...

But where or how is real experience of the spirit to be had? ... Let us see whether the spirit has been at work in our own lives ...

Can we recall any occasion when we kept silent although we longed to defend ourselves and although we were in danger of being unjustly dealt with? Did we ever freely forgive someone from whom nothing was expected in return and who would take our silent forgiveness simply as a matter of course? Did we ever obey, not because to do otherwise would have got us into trouble, but solely for the sake of those silent, incomprehensible mysteries which we call God and God's will? Did we ever make a sacrifice that was thankless and unnoticed and did not even give us a sense of inner satisfaction? Were we ever a prey to utter loneliness? Did we ever decide

on something purely at the dictates of our own conscience, something that could not be discussed with or explained to anybody else? ...

Have we ever tried to persevere in the love of God when all emotion and enthusiasm has deserted us, ... when our prayer seemed to be uttered into the empty, unanswering void and when the bottomless depths of a dreadful abyss seemed to be opening before us; when everything seemed to be incomprehensible and devoid of all meaning? Have we ever performed a duty that could only be carried out under circumstances which forced us to deny and forget ourselves? Did we ever do a kindness to a person from whom we could not expect as much as a shadow of gratitude or appreciation?

Let us look into our lives, then, and see if we can discover whether any such experience ever came our way. If we can find it did, we may be sure that the spirit was at work within us then, and eternity and ourselves had a brief encounter; ...

From all this we can form an idea of the secret longing for the spirit that is felt by truly spiritual persons, the saints in particular... They have tasted the sweetness of the spirit... They know well that God's grace can also bless the dull round of daily tasks well done, and bring the doers a step nearer to God...

When we Christians, living by faith, experience the action of the spirit, it means that we are having contact with the supernatural, although the contact may be scarcely perceptible... But when on such occasions, our inner being seems for perhaps one brief moment to escape from our control; when everything tangible and describable and perceptible seems to recede into the background of our awareness; or when everything seems to vanish into an ineffable, pervasive, impalpable bliss – then we may be sure it is not only the human spirit but the Holy Spirit himself that is working within us. That is our moment of grace, the moment when, from his boundless infinity which for us is so close to nothingness, God, tremendous and unfathomable, enters into communion with us.

When, therefore, we no longer cling to self or even pay attention to it; when we deny ourselves in serving others; when we view our own selves and everything else as objects far away in the infinite distance – then we are at last beginning to live in the world of God, the God of grace and of life everlasting...

Let us then search our own lives for instances of God's grace, but not in order to boast when we have found any. God's grace cannot be found in the sense that lost property is found; it cannot be reclaimed triumphantly into our own possession. It can only be found in seeking God and surrendering ourselves to him in self-abandoning love, unconditionally and forever. We should continue to ask ourselves as we go through life whether we feel that we are being granted this favor of living by dying to ourselves. Such self-examination is a good measure of how far we have to go before we can hope to encounter the Holy Spirit in our own so-called spiritual life. A long road may still lie ahead of us but let us accept the Holy Spirit's invitation given through the inspired psalmist: "O taste and see that the Lord is good!"

Questions to Consider on the Holy Spirit

1. Can you recall some instances where ***you felt the Holy Spirit unexpectedly nudging you*** in some way? How did you respond? When did you come to realize that it was the Holy Spirit acting in your life?
2. How can you be ***more open and accepting*** to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in your daily life?

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