

How to Talk  
to Children  
about

THE HOLY  
SPIRIT

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TWENTY-THIRD  
PUBLICATIONS

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# Introduction

“How do I talk to my child about...?” This is not an uncommon question among parents as well as teachers and catechists. Abstract concepts, hard-to-broach subjects, and sensitive issues all require a particular kind of language that gives a child enough information without being overly complex or confusing. The same is true for many aspects of our faith.

This series of books provides parents as well as teachers and catechists with a range of questions about these topics. Each one offers terminology relatable to a young child’s experience as well as family activities to stimulate further conversation and comprehension. In sharing these responses, you are likely to find yourself more than capable of talking to your child about these and other topics of faith and practice.

# Who is the Holy Spirit?

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*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 where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ACTS 2:1-4*

## **For your information**

It is safe to say that the Holy Spirit is the most challenging person of the Holy Trinity to explain to children. “God the Father is the Creator, God the Son is Jesus, and God the Spirit is...?”

It is easy to fall short in our explanation. Too often we gloss over this important aspect of our faith because it might be too difficult to address, or we might not fully understand it ourselves.

Although all images of the Trinity are inadequate, as the concept is beyond our understanding, the most helpful image of the Trinity for me is St. Augustine’s image of the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love that flows between. Each Person of the Trinity has a different task, and the Holy Spirit’s task involves communication and movement. In Greek, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the “Paraclyte,” which means “the advocate” or “helper.” The Spirit guides us through joyful and difficult times and reveals Christ’s face to humanity.

## **Talking to your child**

There was a delightful nun at the school I used to work at who said that the Holy Spirit was like the wind. You can’t see it, but you can see the effect it has on things. Through the gifts and fruits of the

The Holy Spirit is a movement, not a physical object, which can be hard for children, especially small children, to understand. Using an image like the wind, take your child outside to experience the wind and ask them to notice this movement. Ask your child what they see, and how they know that the wind is there. Help the child draw a connection between the movement or energy behind a force, and its observable presence in the world.

Spirit, we can see God working in the world, and we can see the movement of God in our lives and in the life of our community. The gift of the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost (by way of a violent wind from heaven, which tracks with Sister's image!), and their lives were never the same. The Holy Spirit continues to move in us and in our world, revealing God and inspiring us at every turn. When opening up conversations with your child about the Holy Spirit, it can be helpful to use literal images like these (wind, fire, love) to help the child conceptualize this topic.

### **Pray together**

*Come, Holy Spirit, move in us like the wind. Allow us to see you through our love, actions, and words. May your flame shed light on your presence in our lives always. Amen.*

# Role of the Spirit

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*The Holy Spirit, the artisan of God's works, is the master of prayer.*

**CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 741**

## **For your information**

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. In the Nicene Creed we say that the Holy Spirit is “Lord, the giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son” and “who has spoken through the prophets.” This implies a movement out from the Father and the Son and shows the Spirit’s role in communicating God’s message through humanity. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit strengthened the disciples and allowed them to speak bravely the good news in many languages so that all could understand. Although the Holy Spirit is always active around us, we receive the Holy Spirit through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. During the latter, we are “sealed” with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts help us to become more like Jesus. They help us to grow the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are behaviors that show that the Holy Spirit is active within us. The twelve fruits are charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.

## **Talking to your child**


When introducing your child to the subject of the Holy Spirit, it is very helpful to begin with Scripture. Tell your child the story of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–31), and how the Holy Spirit gave the disciples the courage to proclaim the gospel in all languages and allowed

them to remember and believe in all that Jesus said. Let them know that the Holy Spirit is still at work in the world, continuing to give us gifts that help us to love God and show that love in the way we live our lives.

Show them the list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and help them identify where they might see these gifts in their own lives. Remind them that we receive these gifts in baptism, but it is up to us to stay open to seeing the action of the Spirit so that we can benefit from the Spirit's guidance. Depending on the age of the child, spiritual gifts might manifest differently; for the very young, it might be allowing yourself to empathize with someone's sadness and to comfort them when they need it. For an older child, it might look like standing up to a bully on behalf of a friend. Using guiding questions, help the children realize real-life examples of these gifts in their lives.

### **Pray together**

*Come, Holy Spirit. You are the helper, the friend, the consoler, the teacher, the guide. As you move through the world, lead me to truth and guide my choices. Amen.*



There are many images for the Spirit, including a dove, flame, breath, wind, or dancer. Invite your child to make an illustration of one of these images, and discuss together what it might say about the Holy Spirit.

# The Holy Spirit as wisdom

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*However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” the things God has prepared for those who love him. These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.* **1 CORINTHIANS 2:9-10**

## **For your information**

Saint Thomas Aquinas thought the spiritual gift of wisdom to be the most perfect of all the gifts, because it weaves them all together. When we think of wisdom, we might think of general knowledge, something that comes from study or with experience. While these can be forms of wisdom, the gift of wisdom the Holy Spirit gives us goes deeper. It is a true understanding of God in and around us and placing that understanding at the heart of our perception and judgment of all things. Through the gift of wisdom, the Holy Spirit allows us to understand God as mystery as we look at the Spirit’s role in our lives. Through all our experiences—love, death, birth, beauty, pain—as life unfolds around us, wisdom heightens our awareness and perception of God. This helps us to follow God’s will in our lives and allows us to recognize the importance of keeping God first in our hearts and minds. Through the Holy Spirit, wisdom helps us to discern what is from God and to keep God central.

## **Talking to your child**

When talking to children about the holy gift of wisdom, first ask where they might feel God working in their lives. Bring up some examples of their own experiences: “Remember when we saw that

When you talk to your child about the spiritual gift of wisdom, take the time to explain that this is much bigger than just having general knowledge. This is a wisdom that is based on experience and an understanding of the centrality of God in our lives. Ask the child about examples of wisdom figures (like a grandparent, teacher, etc.) in their lives. Help your child write a thank-you note to this wisdom figure, letting them know that they see them as an example of this gift.

beautiful sunset?” “Remember when you were feeling so worried when you were fighting with your sister?” “Remember when you felt so happy at your birthday party when we all were singing to you?” Have a conversation about how these experiences show us the Holy Spirit’s movement in the world, from God’s creation around us to the way we love each other. Children might enjoy this game of “Where is God” in these retellings, and it is important that these conversations always serve as a reminder to keep the wisdom of God’s presence in our lives central. “When you saw that beautiful sunset, and knew that God was there, what does that motivate you to do?” Answers might be to take better care of God’s creation, or to remember to be grateful to God in those moments. Whatever the answers, these conversations can help children learn to appropriately respond to the spiritual gift of wisdom in their lives.

### **Pray together**

*Come, Spirit of wisdom. Show me where God is acting in my life. In times of joy and times of sadness, and all the moments in between, help me to hold God at the center of my “big picture,” and guide my steps as I remember your presence. Amen.*