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THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

MAKING FAITH COME ALIVE



“Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:22)

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Fr. Frank DeSiano, born in New York City, was ordained as a Paulist priest in 1972. He has served as pastor in downtown New York and in Chicago. In 1990, he earned a D. Min. from Boston University, completing his dissertation on "Parish Based Evangelization." He served as consultor for the US Bishops' Committee on Evangelization for over a dozen years. He has written numerous books on spirituality, discipleship and evangelization, and is frequently published in periodicals like *The Priest*, *Catechetical Leader*, and *Deacon Digest*. In 1994 he was elected President of the Paulist Fathers. He presently lives in Washington where he is president of Paulist Evangelization Ministries. He travels widely, conducting parish renewals (missions), presenting to Catholic clergy at convocations and retreats, and discussing the relationship of evangelization and catechesis. He designed and wrote "Awakening Faith," as a process to help Catholics re-connect with their faith. Among his latest books are: "Mission America: Challenges and Opportunities for Catholics Today," "Faith and Culture in Catholic Education," and (e-book) "New Perspectives: A Report on the Synod on the New Evangelization."

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Contents

**INTRODUCTION:
GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT**

**SESSION 1:
GOING DEEPER:
THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM**

**SESSION 2:
BREAKTHROUGHS:
THE SPIRIT OF UNDERSTANDING**

**SESSION 3:
CONNECTING WITH OTHERS:
THE SPIRIT OF COUNSEL**

**SESSION 4:
LET GOD BE GOD:
THE SPIRIT OF FORTITUDE**

**SESSION 5:
OUR SOLID FOUNDATION:
THE SPIRIT OF KNOWLEDGE**

**SESSION 6:
THROUGH THICK AND THIN:
THE SPIRIT OF FIDELITY**

**SESSION 7:
TAKING GOD SERIOUSLY:
THE SPIRIT OF REVERENCE**



SESSION 5:

Our Solid Foundation:

THE SPIRIT OF KNOWLEDGE



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The group gathers, perhaps with refreshments, and welcomes each other. The facilitator orients the group for this session. Each participant briefly shares something that happened during the past week. Then there is a moment of silence while the facilitator asks the question:

Think of a time in your life when the truth of things—especially the truth of our hearts—helped you make a difficult decision or extraordinary sacrifice. How did it feel to see things so clearly?

SCRIPTURE

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (John 14:12-18)

ESSAY

Among the many contrasts between cities like Chicago and New York are the ways they put up big buildings. New York City sits, to a large extent, on schist rock. People can see this rock extruding throughout Central Park. Putting up a building involves blasting away the rock to a depth that will allow the construction of a foundation. Astounding as

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it may seem, often the building erected—despite its height—weighs less than the rock that was excavated.

Chicago, on the other hand, has buildings that soar to the skies at the point where a prairie meets Lake Michigan. Putting up a large building in Chicago entails getting through the soft layer of land that sits next to the lake. Large trucks bring in steel beams of fifty feet or more. Pile drivers pound these steel beams through the layers of soil until the beam sits on bedrock. When enough beams have been pounded into the bedrock, workers can then begin setting the foundation upon them.

Bedrock. Foundation. Fundamentals. The essentials.

Just as buildings need solid footings—all the more the higher they are—so humans need bedrock in their souls. We need things upon which we build our image of the world and life; we need truths that support us in the unsteady moments of our lives. Anyone who has experienced the death of a parent knows this: all of a sudden one of the foundations of our emotional lives is gone. It seems like the essential support of our lives has been taken away. Nations that suffer through civil war experience this on a collective level: that people would take up arms and kill their neighbors forces a society to discover its bedrock, the truth of itself.

In the passage from John, Jesus faces the bedrock of his life. He speaks on the night before he will be betrayed, beaten, shamed, and executed as a criminal—all of which will lead to the victory of resurrection. Just before Jesus' condemnation, Pilot cynically sneers at him, asking "What is truth?" (John 18:38). In this farewell discourse, however, Jesus promises his disciples that he will send "another Advocate" who will support the disciples by leading them to truth. Jesus will send "the Spirit of truth" to them. This truth will be so solid in their lives that they will understand that Jesus abides with them, in and through his Spirit, even in his absence. This truth will be such a bedrock that the disciples will have the confidence to pray and proclaim, even in the face of persecution.

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The truth of the Holy Spirit is no different than the truth that Jesus reveals in his life, death, and resurrection. It is the truth of the Paschal Mystery—that true life comes only through death. Just as Jesus uncovers the saving power of God for all of humankind by his martyrdom in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 13:33), so the Spirit continues to uncover that saving power in our own lives. Going through death in faith, we come to fuller life. This is the bedrock on which all believers stand.

Every time we say the prayer attributed to St. Francis, we acknowledge this bedrock truth. “It is by giving that we receive, it is by pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is by dying that we are born to eternal life.” We say this prayer almost by instinct, but do we see the essential foundation that it points to in our spiritual lives? The Spirit would liberate us to give generously—but we hoard and hedge. The Spirit would liberate us to forgive and reconcile—but we hold onto our grudges and resentments. The Spirit would take away any fear of dying in our self-giving—but we cower spiritually, enclosed in ourselves.

Many commentators today speak of the relativism that dominates modern society; people feel they can make up their own truths in accord with their desires. Believers know there is one truth that upholds all of human meaning and purpose, the bedrock truth that the Spirit teaches us: if we live and die in Christ, we will come to know true life, and we will live forever.

DISCUSSION

Ask participants to share their reactions to the reading.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

- 1. Where do you turn when your life has been shaken?
What are the images, memories, and supports you look for?*
- 2. Can you see patterns of death and resurrection in your own life?
What shape have these taken?*
- 3. What do you make of the relativism of today's world?
How do you sort your way through it?*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Even as people today like many options and think that finding truth is almost impossible, our experience of God in Jesus Christ provides us with a deep sense of truth. We know what God has done, and continues to do, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We experience that death and resurrection as a resource, a bedrock, in our own lives. The Spirit of Knowledge empowers us to give witness to the truth of Jesus, mostly in the way in which we live, but also in the way we stand up for Christ in daily life. The Church honors those who have given witness through their deaths to the truth; we call these people martyrs. But all of us are called to be witnesses in our everyday lives.

Reflect on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, numbers 2471–74, on bearing witness to the truth.

PRAYER

Invite participants, if they can, to kneel down and fold their hands in the traditional form of prayer. Request that they feel the solidity of the ground on which they kneel and the deep sense of asking in the movement of their bodies as they kneel. Ask them to acknowledge in humility the truth of God's limitless love. Invite them to speak words of praise as they recognize God's power and life.

Then lead them in the following prayer:

Spirit of God, enlighten us. Help us to know the core of our own being, and help us to sense the power of your presence. Lead us away from illusions and distortions that bring us to sin, selfishness, deceit, and falsehood. Give us the bravery to know ourselves by looking into our own hearts, fearless to see what your Spirit must change, joyful to see your Spirit at work in our lives. Help us be faithful in the pattern of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND HOSPITALITY

APPENDIX

PRAYER FOR THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

Holy Spirit, very love of God,
fill us with the gifts that bring our faith alive.

Make our minds stir with Wisdom;
break down through the gift of Understanding
all the barriers we erect.

Give us the gift of Courage when we grow timid;
let your gift of Counsel bring us to support
each other on our journeys.

When we grow weak and wobbly, fill us with Fortitude;
help us know the Truth you are by your gift of Knowledge,
that we may always affirm your love
as the foundation of our lives.

Make us constant in following you through the gift of Fidelity;
and, growing in reverent awe, make our lives centered on
nothing else than the Life and Love which is God,
and which you bring into our lives through faith.

Come Holy Spirit.

Fill the hearts of your faithful.

About Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Paulist Evangelization Ministries is an apostolic arm of the Paulist Fathers. Our goal is to help reach those who are not involved in a family of faith—whether seekers who are looking for faith, or Catholics who have halted the regular practice of their faith. Through the development of programs and various publications, we want to reach people to invite them to re-experience Jesus Christ in the richness of our Catholic tradition, and equip parishes to reach out more fully in invitation and welcome. Please visit us at www.pemdc.org, and support our efforts by inviting others to come to know Jesus Christ.