

***Meditation on the Apostolic Letter of Encouragement written by Pope Benedict
in 2010 about Sacred Scripture and given the title The Word of God
[in Latin: VERBUM DEI]***

*“In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God...
and the Word became flesh”
(Jn 1:1, 14)*

The God Who Speaks

The word of God and the Holy Spirit

15. We need to mention the mission of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Word of God. There can be no understanding of Christian faith apart from the activity of the Paraclete. This is because God in making himself known to mankind always involves the relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are “the two hands of the Father.”

Sacred Scripture itself speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in salvation history and particularly in the life of Jesus: he was conceived of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit; at the beginning of his public mission, on the banks of the River Jordan, he sees the Holy Spirit descend on him in the form of a dove; according to the Gospel of Luke, it is always in this same Spirit that Jesus acts, speaks and rejoices; and in the Spirit he offers himself up as a sacrifice for our salvation. As his mission draws to an end, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus himself relates the giving of his life to the sending of the Spirit upon those who belong to him. The Risen Jesus, bearing in his flesh the signs of the passion, then pours out the Spirit, making his disciples sharers in his own mission. The Holy Spirit was to teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had said, since he, the Spirit of Truth will guide the disciples into all the truth. Finally, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, we read that the Spirit descended on the Twelve gathered in prayer with Mary on the day of Pentecost and thrust them forward to take up the mission of proclaiming to all peoples the Good News.

Jesus as the Word made flesh, is expressed in human words thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit. The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable. The same Spirit who acts in the incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary is the Spirit who guides Jesus throughout his mission and is promised to the disciples. The same Spirit who spoke through the prophets sustains and inspires the Church in her task of proclaiming the word of God and in the preaching of the Apostles; finally, it is this Spirit who inspires the authors of sacred Scripture.

16. The great writers of the Christian tradition speak unanimously of the place of the Holy Spirit in the relationship which believers are to have with the Scriptures. Saint John Chrysostom states that Scripture “needs the revelation of the Spirit, so that by discovering the true meaning of the things enclosed in the Scriptures, we can reap abundant benefits”. Saint Jerome is convinced that “we cannot come to an understanding of Scripture without the assistance of the Holy Spirit who inspired it”. Saint Gregory the Great emphasises the work of the Spirit in the formation and interpretation of the Bible: “He himself created the words of the Old and New Testaments, he himself revealed their meaning”. Richard of Saint Victor points out that we need “the eyes of doves”, enlightened and taught by the Spirit, in order to understand the sacred text.

Pope Benedict emphasises the very significant witness to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scripture which we find in the texts of the liturgy, where the word of God is proclaimed, heard and explained to the faithful people. We find a witness to this in the ancient prayers which invoke the Holy Spirit before the presider proclaims the readings: “Send your Paraclete Spirit into our hearts and make us understand the Scriptures which he has inspired; and grant that I may interpret them worthily, so that the faithful assembled here may profit thereby”. We also find prayers which are used at the end of the homily to ask God to send the gift of the Spirit upon the faithful: “God our Saviour... we implore you for this people: send upon them the Holy Spirit; may the Lord Jesus come to visit them, speak to the minds of all, dispose their hearts to faith and lead their souls to you, God of mercies”. This makes it clear that we cannot come to understand the meaning of the Word of God unless we are open to the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the hearts of believers.