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## Chapter 4

# Being Open to the Holy Spirit

John 15:26-16:15

### UNDERSTANDING

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### DISCUSSION

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

*Read John 15:26–16:15*

## The Big Picture

Christians receive the Holy Spirit at baptism but many fail to take advantage of this great gift.

In West Texas, there is a famous oil field known as the Yates Pool. During the Depression, this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Yates. Because Mr. Yates was not able to make enough money on his ranching operation to pay the principal and interest on the mortgage, he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes or food, his family, like many others, had to live on government subsidy.

Day after day, as he grazed his sheep, he wondered how he would be able to pay his bills. Then a seismograph crew from an oil company came into the area and told Mr. Yates that there might be oil on his land. They asked for permission to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a lease contract.

At 1,115 feet they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many of the later wells were more than twice as large. Thirty years after the first well was drilled, all the wells still had the potential of pumping 125,000 barrels of oil a day. And Mr. Yates owned it all! The day he had purchased the property, he received the oil and mineral rights, yet he was living on government assistance. A multi-millionaire living in poverty! What was the problem? He did not know the oil was there. He owned it, but he did not know it! <sup>1</sup>

One of the most famous oil fields in West Texas is known as Yates Field. Originally a ranch, the owner of the land, Ira Yates, was in danger of losing it all during the Depression. Struggling to pay his bills and his mortgage out of the meager profit from his ranching business, he acted on a desperate hunch and invited an oil company to drill an exploratory well on his land to look for oil.

Little did Yates know that he was sitting on one of the largest oil reserves in the state: That test well became a gusher, and soon wells drilled all over Yates's property were producing tens of thousands of barrels of oil a day. Yates—a man who had been living in poverty on government handouts—became a multi-millionaire almost overnight. All that time, he owned the oil under his land; he simply did not know it.

When Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He gave us the Holy Spirit as our guide, and yet many Christians fail to take advantage of their easy access to this wonderful Counselor. In a passage from John's Gospel, Jesus explains why He gave us the Holy Spirit and how the Holy Spirit can work in our lives today.

### **Application to Jesus**

Jesus announces that it is better for the Holy Spirit to be with us than Jesus Himself.

### **Who Is the Holy Spirit? (John 15:26)**

Along with Jesus Christ and God the Father, the Holy Spirit is one of the three persons that make up the Trinity (Mt 28:19). Here, in John's Gospel, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Counselor and the Spirit of Truth. Jesus will elaborate on these titles later in the passage.

### **Why Does the Holy Spirit Come? (John 15:27–16:7)**

The Spirit comes precisely because Jesus is leaving His disciples. While Jesus is gone, the Holy Spirit will bear witness to Jesus (Jn 15:26). Jesus also foretells the persecution that the disciples will endure; the Holy Spirit is there to help them not fall away (16:1). Surprisingly, Jesus tells His disciples that it is actually a good thing that He is leaving. Most of us would choose to have Jesus Himself with us rather than the Holy Spirit, and yet Jesus tells us the direct opposite (16:7)! The Holy Spirit must be a powerful weapon.

### **What Does the Holy Spirit Do? (John 16:8–15)**

Jesus then details what the Holy Spirit will do when He comes. First, He will convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (Jn 16:8). Jesus is departing because of the lack of faith of the people who

will eventually crucify Him. Afterward, the Holy Spirit will convict these unbelievers of their lack of faith.

Jesus also knows that His disciples will be much more open to His message after His death and resurrection. After Jesus is gone, the Holy Spirit will guide the disciples to all truth with the same authority as Jesus (16:12–13). He will tell them of things to come and glorify Jesus (16:14–15).

### **What Else Does the Holy Spirit Do?**

Scripture mentions numerous details about the Holy Spirit that help us to understand His role more clearly. The Holy Spirit:

- acts as a teacher (Jn 14:26);
- encourages us (Acts 9:31);
- intercedes for us (Rom 8:26);
- sanctifies us (Rom 15:16);
- leads us (Rom 8:14);
- gives us different gifts (1 Cor 12:4–11);
- lives inside of us (Rom 8:11);
- helps us avoid sin (Gal 5:16);
- can be resisted (Acts 7:51);
- aids us in prayer (Rom 8:26–27); and
- can be invited further into our lives (Acts 2:38).

### **The Holy Spirit in Our Lives**

While the Holy Spirit comes to us most powerfully in the sacraments

of baptism and confirmation, we still need to continually open our lives up to this powerful Person of the Trinity. In his Second Letter to Timothy, Paul says this about the Holy Spirit: “Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.” How can we “rekindle”—or, as other translations say, “fan into flame”—the Holy Spirit in our lives?

During his last homily of World Youth Day 2010, Pope Benedict XVI told the participants how to receive the Holy Spirit in their lives:

Yet this power, the grace of the Spirit, is not something we can merit or achieve, but only receive as pure gift. God’s love can only unleash its power when it is allowed to change us from within. We have to let it break through the hard crust of our indifference, our spiritual weariness, our blind conformity to the spirit of this age. Only then can we let it ignite our imagination and shape our deepest desires. That is why prayer is so important: daily prayer, private prayer in the quiet of our hearts and before the Blessed Sacrament, and liturgical prayer in the heart of the Church. Prayer is pure receptivity to God’s grace, love in action, communion with the Spirit who dwells within us, leading us, through Jesus, in the Church, to our heavenly Father.

May we put these words into practice and increase the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### **Application to Our Lives**

Through prayer and the liturgy of the Church, we can rekindle the gift of the Holy Spirit in a profound way.

## NOTES

DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*John 15:26–16:15*

## STEP 1: OPENER

Read the story and commentary about the Yates oil field in West Texas.

## STEP 2: BACKDROP

The words found in our passage today come from the time just before Jesus is crucified. Having spent three years with His disciples, Jesus knows that His absence will be quite a change for his followers. In response, Jesus tells them about the Holy Spirit who will come after He is gone.

## STEP 3: PASSAGE

Read John 15:26–16:15.

## STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.



**1. After reading this passage, what stands out to you about the Holy Spirit?**

*Answer: Allow the group to discuss. This should give you a feel for the thoughts of your group.*

**2. Verse 26 mentions “bearing witness to Jesus.” What do you think this means?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**3. What does Jesus say will happen to His disciples when they bear witness to Him after He is gone?**

*Answer: Persecution is the result. In this case, Jesus says death is a possibility.*

**4. How do you deal with persecution of your faith?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**5. How can the Holy Spirit help you?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**6. Think about the situation of the disciples. Why would it be hard for Jesus to leave them?**

*Answer: The disciples have been following Jesus for three years and have given up everything for Him. They have sought to conform their whole lives to Him.*

**7. How does Jesus' departure help His disciples?**

*Answer: After seeing the power of Jesus' resurrection, the disciples will be much more open to learning Jesus' message and spreading it to others.*

**8. Is it hard for you to trust that it is better for Jesus to go than to be present with us now? Why is this the case?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**9. What will the Holy Spirit do when He comes?**

*Answer: Jesus is departing because of the lack of faith of the people who will eventually crucify Him. When He comes, the Holy Spirit will first convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (Jn 16:8). Afterward, the Holy Spirit will convict these unbelievers of their lack of faith.*

**10. Read the account of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples (Acts 2:1–12, 36–42). How does the Holy Spirit come to Jesus' disciples? How does He come to those who convert?**

*Answer: The Holy Spirit comes to the disciples with tongues of fire. He comes to those who convert through baptism.*

**11. Pick out three to five passages from the list of Scripture passages on the Holy Spirit provided in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" Have individuals read these passages to the group to learn more about the Holy Spirit. Afterward, feel free to share the whole list with your group.**

**12. Think about the story of the Yates oil field in West Texas. When Yates was a poor man, what kept him from the wealth he already possessed?**

*Answer: Yates didn't know the riches he already possessed.*

**13. How does this relate to the Holy Spirit?**

*Answer: We possess the Holy Spirit, but if we don't know about this gift, we can't take advantage of it.*

**14. Read 2 Timothy 1:6. In his letter to Timothy, Paul reminds us to "rekindle" or, in other translations, to "fan into flame" the Holy Spirit in our lives. In a homily at World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI gives us some tips on how to rekindle the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Read the quote from "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"**

**15. Take some time as a group to pray for the Holy Spirit to come. You can do this in a number of ways: You can pray individually in silence, as a group, or over one another as you ask for specific intentions and ways that the Holy Spirit can increase in the lives of your group.**

## NOTES