



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Wednesday 2 September 1998*

1. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “the human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection 'in seeking and loving what is true and good' (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 15)” (n. 1704). The Holy Spirit, who “searches the depths of God”, is at the same time the light that illumines man’s conscience and the source of his true freedom (cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 36). In the sanctuary of his conscience, man’s most secret core, God makes his voice heard and his law known, that law which reaches its perfection in the love of God and neighbour as Jesus taught (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 16). By following this law in the light and power of the Holy Spirit, man achieves his full freedom.

2. Jesus Christ is the fully realized truth of God’s plan for man, who has received the highest gift of freedom. God wished “that man should 'be left in the hand of his own counsel' (*Sir 15:14*) so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him” (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 17; cf. *CCC*, n. 1730). Adhering to God’s plan for man revealed in Christ Jesus and fulfilling it in one’s own life means discovering the authentic vocation of human freedom, as Jesus promised his disciples: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and truth will make you free” (*Jn 8:31-32*). It is not only a question of listening to a message and obediently accepting a commandment. “More radically, it involves holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father” (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 19). The Gospel of John emphasizes that it is not Christ’s enemies who take his life with the brutal necessity of violence, but he who gives it freely (cf. *Jn 10:17-18*). By fully complying with the Father’s will, “the crucified Christ reveals the authentic meaning of freedom; he lives it fully in the total gift of himself and calls his disciples to share in his freedom” (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 85). Indeed, with the absolute freedom of his love he forever redeems man who, by abusing his freedom, had turned away from God; he frees man from the slavery of sin and, by granting him a share in his Spirit, gives him the gift of authentic freedom (cf. *Rom 8:2*; *Gal 5:1, 13*).

3. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”, the Apostle Paul tells us (*2 Cor 3:17*). By the outpouring of his Spirit, the risen Jesus creates the vital space where human freedom can be fully realized. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ gift of himself to the Father in his Death and Resurrection becomes the source and model of every authentic human relationship with God and with one’s brethren. “God’s love”, St Paul writes, “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (*Rom 5:5*). By living in Christ through faith and the sacraments, the

Christian also “freely commits his entire self” to God the Father (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 5). The act of faith by which he makes a responsible decision for God, believes in his love revealed in the crucified and risen Christ, and abandons himself responsibly to the influence of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 4:6-10) is the highest expression of freedom. By joyfully fulfilling the Father’s will in every circumstance of life, after Christ’s example and in the power of Spirit, the Christian advances on the path of authentic freedom and looks with hope to the time when he will enter into the “full life” of the heavenly homeland. “By the working of grace”, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “the Holy Spirit educates us in spiritual freedom in order to make us free collaborators in his work in the Church and in the world” (CCC, n. 1742).<sup>4</sup> This new horizon of freedom created by the Spirit also guides our relationship with the brothers and sisters we meet on our way. Precisely because Christ has freed me by his love and given me his Spirit, I can and must give myself freely in love to my neighbour. This profound truth is stated in the First Letter of the Apostle John: “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn 3:16). Jesus’ “new” commandment sums up the law of grace; the person who accepts it realizes his freedom to the full: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:12-13). No one can reach this height of love achieved by Christ crucified without the help of the Paraclete. Indeed, St Thomas Aquinas could write that the “new law” is the grace itself of the Holy Spirit, given to us through faith in Christ (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 105, a. 1, conclus. and ad 2).<sup>5</sup> This “new law” of freedom and love is personified in Jesus Christ, but at the same time, in total dependence on him and his Redemption, it is expressed in the Mother of God. The fullness of freedom, which is the Spirit’s gift, “was manifested in a sublime way precisely through the faith of Mary, through the ‘obedience of faith’ (cf. Rom 1:5): truly, ‘Blessed is she who believed!’” (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 51). May Mary, the Mother of Christ and our Mother, be the one to guide us then to an ever deeper and more joyful discovery of the Holy Spirit as the source of true freedom in our

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life!

*To the English speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:* I welcome to this audience the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Australia, Japan and the United States of America. I invite you to pray constantly and to open your hearts ever more widely to the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. Upon you and your families, I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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