

Fr. Perozich comments —

The Holy Spirit guides the church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. Some of us do not listen to the Holy Spirit, rather to our own inner voice, a constant danger for each Christian.

The Catholic Church is Jesus' means for salvation for all men, even when her members do not follow Jesus well, when leaders promote worldly agenda in place of the Lord's teachings.

There is no where else to go, so I'll stay here and endure the difficult times.

- ***the Church is always under attack from the forces of darkness. But there are certain times in which this crisis has reached alarming levels.***
- ***the Holy Spirit does guide the Church, He does it with a light touch. He allows sinful men to corrupt the Church's institutions, to proclaim heresy, and to degrade the witness of the Church to the point of near-silence.***
- ***The Holy Spirit's guidance is just that—guidance; the Church is not a puppet through which the Holy Spirit controls all the strings.***
- ***... how does the Holy Spirit guide the Church? Instead of controlling her, He influences each individual member, and particularly (but not exclusively) each member of the hierarchy. This influence can be either accepted or rejected by each individual.***
- ***The Holy Spirit will keep the Church as the means of holiness to the world. Apostolic succession will not break, and the Sacraments will be available, although not necessarily worldwide. ... she will still offer grace and salvation to many.***
- ***the Holy Spirit guides the Church: through individuals responding to His call.***
- ***It means that, no matter how sinful we may be, the Church still offers us the means of grace and salvation, if we choose to accept them.***

- *One can believe that Church leaders make significant mistakes and still recognize the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church. For often that guidance comes in the form of a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12)*

Does the Holy Spirit Still Guide the Church?

ERIC SAMMONS



In a recent podcast I argued that the Catholic Church's involvement in the ecumenical movement has been a failure and should be abandoned. A listener

concluded from this that I apparently don't believe the Holy Spirit guides the Church.

This accusation is leveled frequently against those willing to criticize the Church hierarchy (or even those who simply point out that the Church is currently in a significant crisis). After all, if God the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church, then surely major decisions made by the hierarchy, such as the Church's involvement in ecumenism, must be under the guidance of God Himself. Who are we to question Him?

On the opposite extreme, but with the same underlying premise, are those who conclude from the problems in the Church today that the Holy Spirit is *not* guiding the Church. This can spiral into a rejection of Catholicism and even a rejection of the existence of God. If God really exists, and He really guides the Church, then things wouldn't be such a mess, would they?

While it's true that the Church teaches the Holy Spirit guides the Church, there are a number of problems with the extrapolations I mentioned above. It misunderstands what that guidance entails, and what it allows or doesn't allow to happen within the Church.

As always, a study of history can help us understand our current situation. While we live in a time of crisis, we're not the first Catholics to do so. In fact, one could argue that the Church has *always* been in a state of crisis, as **the Church is always under attack from the forces of darkness. But there are certain times in which this crisis has reached alarming levels.**

In the fourth century, the majority of bishops were professing heretics. They accepted the Arian heresy, which taught that Jesus was not the eternal and divine Son of God. And when I say “majority,” I’m not exaggerating for effect: almost every single bishop was an Arian or at least silent or sympathetic to the heresy. There were persecutions against faithful Catholics such as St. Athanasius aided and abetted by the Arian bishops. Was the Holy Spirit’s guidance behind these persecutions?

In the 10th century, the papacy had fallen on hard times, in an era often called the “pornocracy.” Popes engaged in the worst forms of corruption and personal depravity, and the papacy was the pawn of powerful aristocratic families. Was the Holy Spirit guiding the corrupt families that ruled through the Chair of St. Peter?

In the late Middle Ages, multiple men claimed to be pope, leading to confusion and scandal throughout Christendom. Often the papacy was controlled by powerful political forces; the papacy itself was more of a political than spiritual office. The scandals emanating from Rome grew so substantial that millions of Europeans rejected the entire institution of the papacy during the Protestant Reformation. Did the Holy Spirit guide the Church to turn the papacy into a scandalously-run political office with at one point three separate claimants to the papal throne? Nor do we have to look that far back to make the point. In the early 21st century, the priestly sexual abuse scandal erupted into the public eye, revealing that thousands of priests had abused young people—mostly boys—and hundreds of bishops covered up their misdeeds, ignoring

victims' pleas for justice. Did the Holy Spirit guide those bishops to cover up sins in order to "protect" the Church?

Even this cursory look at the Church's past makes clear that if the Holy Spirit does guide the Church, He does it with a light touch. He allows sinful men to corrupt the Church's institutions, to proclaim heresy, and to degrade the witness of the Church to the point of near-silence. The Holy Spirit's guidance is just that—guidance; the Church is not a puppet through which the Holy Spirit controls all the strings. Such a setup would violate one of God's greatest gifts to mankind, free will.

So how *does* the Holy Spirit guide the Church? Instead of controlling her, He influences each individual member, and particularly (but not exclusively) each member of the hierarchy. This influence can be either accepted or rejected by each individual. If many individuals accept it, the Church will see good times, with growth and examples of holiness shining through. But if most individuals do *not* accept the Holy Spirit's guidance, then we have times such as the Arian crisis or today's crisis.

What about Our Lord's promise that the gates of Hell will not prevail against the Church (Mt. 16:18)? Many take that to mean that the Holy Spirit will protect the Church—and particularly the hierarchy united to the pope—from any major disasters, else the gates of Hell prevail. But again, as history has shown, our Church leaders can lead Catholics to at least knock at Hell's gates.

Our Lord's promise is a minimal guarantee, not a maximal prediction. **The Holy Spirit will keep the Church as the means of holiness to the world. Apostolic succession will not break, and the Sacraments will be available, although not necessarily worldwide.** Whole countries might be lost to the Church for a time, but the Church will not cease to exist, and **she will still offer grace and salvation to many.** Hell will not break through its gates and overwhelm the Church.

We see that, even in the Church's darkest days, the Holy Spirit was still guiding her, although it might be hard to see with human eyes. During the Arian crisis, St. Athanasius and countless lay Catholics maintained the orthodox Catholic faith. In the 10th century, the Church was still spreading the Gospel to areas like Hungary and Russia. During the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation (the *real* Reformation) produced saintly giants like St. Theresa of Avila, St. Philip Neri, and St. Ignatius of Loyola to lead the way.

And today we still perceive the Holy Spirit's guidance, even when we recognize the deep corruption, malfeasance, and incompetence that exists at all levels of the Church hierarchy. We see it in living saints like [Joan Andrews Bell](#), who has fought for the unborn for decades, inspiring so many others to do likewise. We see it in good shepherds like Bishop Athanasius Schneider and Bishop Joseph Strickland, who proclaim the Gospel without apology and in the face of strong resistance, even from their episcopal

colleagues. We see it in the anonymous Catholic college student who refuses to go along with the culture, saving herself for marriage and motherhood.

That's how **the Holy Spirit guides the Church: through individuals responding to His call.** His guidance doesn't mean that every Church program or institution is infallible or even a good idea. **It means that, no matter how sinful we may be, the Church still offers us the means of grace and salvation, if we choose to accept them.**

One can believe that Church leaders make significant mistakes and still recognize the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church. For often that guidance comes in the form of a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12) among individual Catholics who respond in faith. While the misdeeds and mistakes of the hierarchy make the headlines, the Holy Spirit continues to quietly guide the Church, making her the means of holiness and salvation for all.

[Photo Credit: Vatican Media]



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