**Come and Fill Me Up!**

We all like the feeling of being “filled up.” Whether it means being filled with food from a wonderful meal or being filled with love for our children, we know how pleasant it is when we feel we have all that we need.

We all like being filled up spiritually as well. So here is my recipe for being filled up by the Holy Spirit. Whether I am at Mass or in personal prayer, I follow pretty much the same strategy.

The first thing I do is “set my position.” This means I take a moment to examine my conscience to see if any minor sins are keeping me from hearing the Lord or feeling his presence. If I find any, I ask him to forgive me, and I trust that God’s mercy is greater than any of my failings. Then I imagine myself in Peter’s shoes as he told Jesus, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). I tell Jesus that I want to stay close to him.

My next step in seeking to be filled by the Spirit is to ponder the Scriptures. I always try to picture myself present in whatever passage I am reading, just as St. Ignatius of Loyola taught. Then, I ask some questions: “What is Moses feeling as he stands before the burning bush? And what do I feel when I pray before the Blessed Sacrament? What is Abraham thinking as God asks him to strike out for the Promised Land?” And I ask myself if God is pressing me to move forward in some area. What was it like for the disciples to help in the feeding of the five thousand? And I wonder if God is showing me a way that he wants to use me in his mission.

I also find that music helps me to be filled with the Spirit. Whether at Mass or in my personal prayer, I fell closer to the Lord when I sing songs of worship to him. Singing engages my emotions as well as my thoughts. As I sing, I try to be like the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with perfume. I honor Jesus, I tell him that he is Lord of my life, and I give him the first affections of my heart.

As I am singing and worshipping Jesus-especially after I receive Communion-I ask him to fill me with the Holy Spirit and give me some insights. Then I try to reflect on whatever comes into my mind. Then I write down what I think the Spirit is saying and try to carry it into my day.

A Simple Plan. So that’s my simple plan. I don’t always get it right, but I trust that even on the days when I am not so focused, God is still filling me with his Spirit

I am convinced that the Holy Spirit wants to fill us so that we can become more and more like Jesus. So as you read this summer double issue, open your heart and say, “Holy Spirit, come and fill me with your presence. Come and change my heart.” May the Lord bless you and fill you with his love.

Joe Difato

Publisher

**Filled to overflowing Peace Joy**

Imagine that you have just finished a very good meal. Perhaps it was at a fine restaurant, or maybe you had extra time to make something special for you family over the weekend. You push back your chair, maybe sip a cup of tea, and relax-how satisfying!

This might be one way to help us think about what it’s like to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit fills us, we are satisfied. We feel filled with his love, and we find ourselves at peace as we “relax” in his presence. It’s a wonderful feeling that we never want to lose. Along with Peter on the mount of Transfiguration, we say, “Lord, it is good that we are here” (Matthew 17:4).

But this is just the beginning. While eating a good meal satisfies us, being filled with the Holy Spirit changes us as well. His love makes us feel happy, but it also sends us out into the world to serve him. Just as food provides fuel to energize our bodies, the Spirit energizes our hearts. We want to sit and enjoy his love, but we are also filled with so much joy that we can’t just stay where we are. We feel compelled to share the Spirit’s blessings with everyone around us.

Clearly, there is much that the Spirit can do in us. So let’s take a look at the Scriptures to get a sense of all that he has in store for us.

**Love, Joy, Peace.** We know how happy we feel when we receive an unexpected gift from a loved one. When you see your closest friends exchange marriage vows, you can’t help but clap for joy. Or think of the peaceful, comforting feeling that comes over you when two of your children, who have been fighting for years, finally reconcile and embrace. In each of these situations, our emotions are stirred; the feeling of love warms our hearts.

It’s no different when the Holy Spirit fills us. We feel a love inside of us that we know isn’t coming from us. We feel a warmth in our hearts that tells us we are in God’s hands and that he will never let us go. We feel a newfound joy that lifts us up and banishes fear, anxiety, sadness, and anger.

These descriptions can sound awfully sentimental and emotional, can’t they? In a sense they are, but being filled with the Holy Spirit is more than an emotional shot in the arm. Something much deeper is happening, and St. Paul captures it well. Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, he cautioned, “Don not get drunk on wine,” he says, “but be filled with the Spirit…giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:18, 20).

For Paul, there was a distinct difference between the emotional extremes of being drunk and the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit. When you are drunk, you can often feel overly happy or relaxed or even giddy. You might also end up acting rowdy and disruptive and violent. That’s because you have less control over your feelings, your words, and your actions.

But for Paul, the Holy Spirit produced a different set of reactions: love and joy, yes, but also peace and patience and gentleness and even self-control. He called this joyful but calm disposition the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22). He felt that the contrast between those drunk on wine and those filled with the Spirit-filled believers as they were repulsed by everyday drunkards.

**“Sober Intoxication.”** This is what it feels like when the Holy Spirit fills us. This is the kind of fruit we can experience when the Spirit whispers in our hearts the truth that we belong to Christ. Taking Paul’s words to heart, the Fathers of the Church have described it as a kind of “sober intoxication.”

For the Fathers, “sober intoxication” is the feeling that comes when the Spirit convinces us that nothing can separate us from the love of God (romans 8:39). What’s more, they were convinced that this kind of love and joy, this intoxication, wasn’t reserved just for the great saints. In fact, many of them expected everyday believers to experience a powerful filling by the Spirit-just as St. Paul did.

If Paul were here today, he would not hesitate to tell us that we all have the potential to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He would not hesitate to tell us both to avoid getting drunk with wine and to seek the Spirit’s filling-and on a regular basis. He knew that the Spirit wants to fill us with grace and love over and over again so that we never forget how much God loves us. He would also urge us to sing songs and give thanks to God, even when we don’t feel particularly joyful. That’s because he knew that the more we lift our hearts and our voices in praise, the more we open ourselves to the Spirit’s power to fill us.

**Open Our Eyes, Lord.** The Spirit does more than lift up our hearts, as wonderful as that is. He also opens our eyes. Have you ever had a flash of insight into a problem or challenge facing you? Maybe you have spent hours trying to figure it out, but then all of a sudden, the answer appears out of nowhere. You have an “aha” moment when you see or understand something in a whole new way, and that new understanding excites you. On an everyday level, these aha moments have helped you solve a problem at work or come to a deeper understanding of what is inside of your teenager’s mind or finally gain control over your finances.

But Scripture tells us that the Spirit takes us even further. The Bible is filled, in fact, with stories of people who have spiritual aha moments. Blind Bartimaeus, Lydia of Philippi, Elizabeth and Zechariah, and so many others had a specific spiritual moment that changed them forever. Then there are the people who had numerous moments like these: the Virgin Mary, Peter, James, John, Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, and Barnabas, to name just a few.

All these stories are in the Scriptures to help convince us that the Spirit wants to give aha moments to us as well. He wants to give us moments when we suddenly realize that we are special to God. He wants to give us moments when we understand one of the mysteries of our faith in a new way or moments when we receive new insights about how to help a loved one or how to overcome a certain struggle with our own sinfulness.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples, “When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you... …He will…declare to you the things that are coming…He will take from what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13-14). Guidance and insights like these come as we gradually mature in our faith, but they can also come in new and dramatic ways, just as they did for the people we mentioned above.

**What about Us?** The Holy Spirit wants to guide us and keep opening our eyes to the kingdom of God. He wants to help us come to see Jesus in new and exciting ways as we continue to grow in our faith. All day long he is sending messages to us, offering us this grace. When you receive a sense that you should be more kind to someone or let go of a deep hurt, guess who is behind it? The Holy Spirit. When you have driven past a poor neighborhood every day for five years, but then one day, you feel a powerful sense of sadness for the people trapped in poverty there, that’s the Spirit at work in you. When you begin to feel the desire to start going to daily Mass, you can be sure that the Spirit is behind the message.

Of course, these messages from the Spirit aren’t always going to be the most dramatic words we have ever heard. There may be times when he changes the course of our lives by opening up a whole new calling for us, but for the most part, his aim is to open our eyes and show us how deeply Jesus loves us. For the most part, he will encourage us to be more like Jesus to our families. For the most part, he will ask us to care for the people in our parishes and neighborhoods.

There is so much the Spirit wants to do in us! In the next article, we will look at one way we can open ourselves so that he can fill us more and more.

**Lift up your heart Love Goodness**

The Book of Revelation is filled with prayers of worship, adoration, and praise. Even in the parts that describe the violent upheavals at the end of the world, the angels and saints in heaven are still singing joyful songs of victory and love to Jesus. Somehow, in the midst of a cosmic battle, the citizens of heaven never waver in their confidence. They never fear the final outcome, and they never seem to worry about their fate. They know that they belong to the Lord, and that knowledge fills them with joy.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have that same disposition? What a blessing never to be intimidated by difficult circumstances, but to remain light hearted in every situation! Of course, this won’t happen fully until we join the angels and saints in heaven. But we can still taste this heavenly joy and happiness here and now as we ask the Holy Spirit to fill us.

In this article, we want to offer some practical suggestions for how you can experience the Holy Spirit filling you and giving you his joy.

**Be Filled at Mass.** Grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ. (Eucharistic Prayer III, emphasis added)

Nowhere is the Spirit more active among us than when we gather for Mass. From the formality of the opening procession to the personal intimacy of Communion, God is there, longing to fill us with his truth, his love, and his power. So how can we experience these blessings?

The first thing we can do is check our mind-set. Why are we coming to Mass? To fulfill our obligation? Or to meet Jesus and receive his love? Of course, it’s always good to be at Mass, even if we are not deeply engaged, but imagine how much more we can receive when we go with an open heart and an attentive mind. “I am here because I want the Holy Spirit to fill me with every grace and blessing. I am here because I believe that the Spirit has a message for me. I am here because I want to feel God’s love in the presence of my brothers and sisters in Christ.” These kinds of statements can help us go with the right mind-set. They can put us in the right disposition so that we can experience the Spirit filling us up.

So mind-set is important. But how do we take it and apply it in a practical way? Here are a few suggestions.

**Step by Step.**

\*You can begin the moment you enter church: when you bless yourself with holy water, make it a point to recall your baptism. Let it remind you that Jesus has washed away original sin. Tell yourself that he can also wash away-right there and then-any distractions, doubts, or fears that might keep you from hearing his voice and worshipping him.

1. During the penitential rite, offer up to the Lord any venial sins that might be clouding your spiritual vision. Tell him you are sorry for ways you may have hurt him or the people around you.
2. As you hear the readings and homily, imagine that Jesus himself or Isaiah or Moses or Mary is the one proclaiming the word of God. Place yourself in the scene that you are hearing, and expect that the Holy Spirit will help these words come alive in your heart. Imagine what it will be like in heaven, when you finally see your heavenly Gather face-to-face. Every question you have ever had will be answered, and every answer you receive will fill you with wonder at the love your Father has for you.
3. During the Eucharistic prayer, picture yourself right there in the upper room, watching Jesus take the traditional Passover prayers and fill them with new meaning. Join Peter and John and James and all the other disciples in marveling at the miracle unfolding before you; bread and wine are being transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Imagine him inviting you personally to come to the altar and receive him-both in your body and in your heart.
4. After Communion, kneel quietly in adoration and worship. You are one with Jesus. He is pouring his Spirit into you. His Spirit has a special message for you. He wants to nourish you and heal you and fill you with his grace. For these few brief minutes, you can have a taste of what heaven must be like!

**Signs of the Spirit.** Try this experiment over the next few weeks. Every Sunday at Mass, try to walk through each part of the liturgy with the mindset we described previously. Take the steps we outlined, and see what the Holy Spirit does. Welcome the Spirit, and ask him to raise up your human efforts and fill them with heavenly insight, joy, and strength. Here are just a few things that might happen as you do:

1. During the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass, you may feel Jesus’ mercy washing your heart clean. You may be filled with a new sense of joy knowing that Jesus is always ready to forgive you.
2. A word or phrase from one of the readings may strike you as God’s own personal message to you. Perhaps when Jesus tells someone, “Your faith has saved you,” you will feel a sense of assurance and confidence that Jesus sees how much you believe in him. Or perhaps the words of the psalmist will warm your heart and make you pray in the same way.
3. During the homily, you may feel the Holy Spirit urging you to take a certain action like reaching out to a friend who is hurting or committing yourself more deeply to daily prayer.
4. During the prayer of the faithful, you may feel moved to pray for a friend (or even an enemy!) with greater urgency.
5. Singing “Holy, holy, holy” may give you the feeling that you are in heaven with the saints and angels. You may find yourself filled with a new joy and wonder in the presence of the Lord.
6. As you are kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer, you may have a new sense of how great God is and how much he deserves your adoration and worship.
7. After receiving Communion, you may feel a new sense of joy and peace because you know that Christ is in you. Words of gratitude and praise may well up inside of you, and you may find yourself telling Jesus that you love him.

Each of these effects is a sign of the Holy Spirit filling you up. They all point to his desire to “declare” to us the blessings and grace that flow from Jesus’ cross (John 16:15). They point to the Spirit’s desire to convince us that “we are children of God” (Romans 8:16).

**A Changed Disposition.** As you experiment with taking up this hope-filled, expectant mind-set during Mass, look out for ways that your disposition might gradually change in the rest of your day and in the week ahead. Consider writing down in a prayer journal some of the senses you receive at Mass, and glance over them during the week. If you feel the Holy Spirit is asking you to make a small change in your life-like to be more consistent in prayer or to try to share a kind word with someone who is hurting-write that down as a way to remind you.

Whatever you decide to do, pay attention to your actions and your disposition. Perhaps you will begin to feel more lighthearted or you may find it easier to remain at peace in stressful situations. You may find yourself more will9ing to forgive or to reach out to someone who seems to need a hand. You may also find yourself stopping a few times during the day to turn your heart back to God. All of these are signs of what St. Paul called the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22). They are all signs that the Holy Spirit is filling your heart.

Isn’t it wonderful to know that the Holy Spirit wants to give you a heavenly disposition? Isn’t it encouraging and comforting to know that he wants to fill you up so that you can have the same courage, joy, and freedom that the angels and saints in heaven have? And the best part is that he wants to do this for us over and over again-every time we come to Mass with open hearts.

**Faithfulness Patience**

One night, Peter asked Jesus for permission to come to him. Jesus looked at Peter and agreed. While this seems to be an ordinary request, it was quite extraordinary: Jesus was standing on the waters of the Sea of Galilee during a violent storm. So if Peter wanted to be with Jesus, he had to walk on the water as well. And he did! As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, Peter remained on top of the sea. But at some point, Peter shifted his focus to the storm around him. You know the rest of the story.

The call to follow Jesus every day can feel just as intimidating as an invitation to walk on water. Scripture calls us to be holy as God is holy (Leviticus 20:7). More than once, Jesus told people to go and sin no more (John 5:14, 8:11). He told us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us (Luke 6:27). He told us to forgive those who have wronged us if we want God to forgive us (Matthew 6:14-15). Following Jesus means being humble, poor in spirit, and ready to repent on a daily-no, make that an hourly-basis. The exhortations go on and on, to the point at which we feel like throwing up our hands in exasperation.

The truth is, none of us have the strength or maturity to fulfill all the teachings of Jesus perfectly. And yet Jesus promises us that nothing is impossible with God (Mark 10:27). It’s his Spirit that makes the difference. It was the Spirit’s grace that gave Peter the ability to walk on water, and it’s the same Spirit who will give us the ability to live out the words of Jesus. The Spirit can make the impossible become possible-if we ask him to keep filling us up.

So let’s take a look at how we can deal with the distractions that keep us from turning to the Spirit and experiencing his grace in our lives.

**God Is for Us. Satan Is against Us.** If there were someone in your life who repeatedly helped you, encouraged you, and sought nothing but the best for you, how would you treat that person? You’d want to honor him; you’d want to spend time with him: you’d want to tell other people about him. It would be very hard to turn you against him because you know deep in your heart that he loves you and has you best interests at heart.

Well, this is how it is with the Holy Spirit. He is on our side. He wants to know God’s love, to seek his grace, and to walk in his light. When sin had separated us from God, he sent his Son, Jesus, to rescue us. By dying for our sins, Jesus restored our fellowship with God so that we could become vessels of his Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, God has made it possible for us to stay close to him and to be changed into his image and likeness.

But where God is for us, Satan is against us. He is the father of lies and a thief who steals, kills, and destroys (John 8:44; 10:10). Just as he did with our first parents and just as he tried to do with Jesus, Satan will try to twist the truth and weaken our faith so that we will wander into sin. Then, after having done his damage, he will try to weasel out of any blame by urging us to accuse God or each other instead.

Think about how often people say, “How can God allow so many terrible things to happen, like war and abortion and poverty?” But the truth is that God doesn’t cause any of these things. We live in a sinful world, and human choice that has been influenced by the devil in his attempts to destroy our faith.

Never doubt that God is for you. Never doubt that the Holy Spirit is in you. Satan is the real enemy. He has no love for us and no concern for our well-being. The clearer we are about God’s goodness and about Satan’s evil intentions, the more we will be able to resist the distractions that block us from God.

**Battling the Strongholds of Distraction.** In our first article, we talked about how the Holy Spirit is pouring millions of good and holy thoughts into our minds every day-thoughts of love, kindness, mercy, courage, and blessing. They are similar to the thoughts that prompted Peter to get out of the boat and walk toward Jesus. By contrast, the devil sends us a barrage of negative, divisive, and self-centered thoughts every day. HE tempts us to become angry, disillusioned, cynical, downtrodden, and resentful. There may even be times when it feels as if our minds are held captive by negative thoughts, and the positive ones don’t stand a chance.

So if God is all-powerful, why does the devil seem to get the upper hand so often?

Because he is very good at distracting us from God and moving us to take our eyes off Jesus. HE is very good at building up strongholds of deception in our minds (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

This is why it’s vital that we learn how to discern the thoughts that come to us in the course of each day. It’s vital that we “test everything” and keep the good while rejecting what ever is evil-whatever pushes us away from the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:21). If we could learn how to judge our thoughts and discern their influence, we would be far less distracted and far more focused on Jesus.

**The GISO Principle.** In the corporate world, businesses manage their inventory according to a principle called FIFO: first in, first out. This means that the products that come into the warehouse first are the first ones to be shipped out. A similar principle exists in the spiritual life; only we call it GISO: God in, Satan out. Let the Holy Spirit fill you, and reject everything that comes from the devil. Here is three-step process that can help us put this principle into action:

1. Every morning when you wake up, turn your heart to the Holy Spirit Invite him and his positive, loving thoughts into your mind. Proclaim your belief that every good and perfect gift comes from him and that every negative thought has its roots in the schemes of the devil. Yield yourself to God, and he will fill you with his good and holy intentions.
2. Listen in prayer. Whether it is the Rosary, Eucharistic adoration, daily Mass, or personal prayer and Scripture reading, pause for a bit and give the Spirit a moment to speak to you. Expect that he wants to speak, and try to discern what he says. Even if it is a single word like “peace” or “hope” or “trust” accept that word, and try to put it into practice during your day. This is how you are letting God in.
3. When you face a situation that calls for a response or when new thoughts come into your mind as the day progresses, ask yourself, “Are these thoughts up building, or are they divisive? Are they leaving me in a positive state of mind or are they filling me with selfishness, anger, or sadness?” As soon as you sense the source of these thoughts, take action. Focus on the positive thoughts, and reject the negative ones. Make it a point to dwell on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious” (Philippians 4:8).

**We Can’t Do It Alone.** As with every other aspect of the Christian life, following this GISO principle is possible only with God’s help. We are engaged in a spiritual battle against a fierce enemy who wants to destroy our faith. That’s why Paul urges us to draw “strength from the Lord and from his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10).

Even when much of the burden appears to be on your shoulders, know that you are not alone. The Holy Spirit is in you, and he is always ready to fill you with his love and his grace. So try to stay open to the good and pure thoughts that he is sending you. Being open to the Spirit is critical. He is the only One who has the power to give us life, to renew our hearts, and to empower us with his grace.

Brothers and sisters, we can keep our eyes focused on the Lord. We can learn how to yield to the Spirit’s goodness and holiness. And as we do, we’ll find the Spirit filling us more and more and more. We’ll feel more and more and more of his love, his blessing, his comfort, and his assurance-and this will help us resist the distractions of life. It’s like one big circle of grace: we focus on the Lord, and he fills us with his Spirit, which in turn moves us to keep our focus on the Lord.

Our God loves us so much He wants the best for us. As we let his good thoughts reign in our minds, we’ll be more willing to do great things for him. Who knows? Perhaps we’ll even find ourselves walking on water!