

We build up a lot of clutter in drawers, closets, the garage, and rented storage units. Any space we can close a door over becomes a good hiding place for things we don't use very often. The clutter is so much that we stop thinking about it. We sometimes buy things we already own because we can't find them. A lot of what we have is junk, but some of it is very useful. We just forget it's there, and we don't use it to its potential.

Our character is like that too. We have a lot of experiences and skills stored up inside. But our lives become so cluttered that we often forget what is there. Some of the things we've learned seem useless; others are rather valuable. But we do not always put them into practice. We forget who we are, how our parents and teachers have taught us, and how our good friends have shaped us. So when temptation comes out of laziness, peer pressure, or fear of the future, it can be more powerful than it needs to be. We have the tools to resist, but do not always use them. We have learned to be honest, reliable, and forgiving toward others, but we don't always act that way.

St. Paul describes it this way to the Romans: The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Paul refers to baptism here. God pours out the Holy Spirit like water, and that Spirit dwells within us like a well from which we can always draw. Jesus describes the Spirit this way to the woman at the well. When you have the Spirit within you, you will never be thirsty again. Of course we do sin again, we do thirst for God again, but it's like an object in the back of the drawer; the Spirit is there, if you know where to look for it. We the baptized have that Spirit dwelling within us.

Several members of our community have not yet been baptized, but we are planning to take care of that this Easter. Amber Schalk, Austin Hughes and Haylee Akins are all requesting baptism from us, and they have spent time preparing for it. Over the next few weeks we will offer for them a special prayer called a scrutiny. Scrutinies have been part of the Catholic Church since the fourth century, and there are versions of them even in the baptism of infants today, when we ask God to free them from original sin. The scrutinies aim to drive out whatever keeps the catechumens from Christ, and to strengthen what is good within them. During each scrutiny I impose hands on those to be baptized, praying for a spirit transfusion – out with the bad spirit, in with the good. By the eighth century the names of godparents were mentioned in the eucharistic prayer at the scrutiny masses, and the Church also retains that custom today.

If (As) you witness the scrutinies over the next few weeks, let them remind you of something you have: the presence of the Holy Spirit, poured out into your heart through the love of God. If you are struggling with any sin, with any strife, with any weakness, with any desire to know what to say to a certain person or how to act in a particular situation, don't forget you already have the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is a tool in a cluttered garage; you may forget you have it, but it's there when you need it most. All you have to do is use it.