Catholic Spirituality

Teacher Background

P. Richard McBrien in Catholicism asserts that: “To be spiritual means to know and to live according to the knowledge, that there is more to life than meets the eye. To be spiritual means, beyond that, to know, and to live according to the knowledge that God is present to us in grace as the principle of personal, interpersonal, social and even cosmic transformation. To be 'open to the Spirit' is to accept explicitly who we are and who we are always to become and to direct our lives accordingly, in response to God's grace within us.” (p. 1019)

Christian Spirituality

Christian spirituality is visionary in that it involves a new way of seeing reality and of seeing through things to their spiritual core, of thus “interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:13). In that sense, Christian spiritual vision is inevitably sacramental. Every created reality is imbued, to one degree or another, with the hidden presence of God. Christian spirituality is also relational. Neither Christian life nor human life itself is ever isolated existence. We are, therefore, relational beings: being in relation to God, neighbour, world and self. To be human is to live in community. To be Christian is also to live in community - the Church. Christian spirituality demands sensitivity to the presence, the needs and the gifts of others, as well as to the created goods of the earth. Finally, Christian spirituality is transformational. The spiritual Christian is consciously in touch with the presence of the Spirit as the power which heals, reconciles, renews, gives life, bestows peace, sustains hope, brings joy and creates unity.

No Single Christian or Catholic Spirituality

There is not and never has been, a single Christian spirituality, nor a single Catholic spirituality. The following historical account should make that unmistakably clear. For example, following the monastic thread alone:

- Early Monastic
  *Thus the spiritual life is divided into three stages: purification (the 'purgative' way), meditation on the word of God (the 'illuminative' way), and union with God (the 'unitive' way)*

- Augustine (d. 430)
  *Spiritual discernment does not bring us knowledge of God in Christ so much as 'self-knowledge' in the light of Christ, the interior teacher of wisdom. On the other hand, ... (he) wrote in the 'City of God' that 'no man must be so committed to contemplation as, in his contemplation, to give no thought to his neighbour's needs, now so absorbed in action as to dispense with the contemplation of God.'*

- John Cassian (d 435)
  *Spirituality is not to seek anything beyond the Kingdom of God, and only purity of heart will open the mystery of the Kingdom to those who seek it. Christian life is one of constant prayer wholly inspired by the Gospel.*

- Benedict (d. c. 550)
  *'The Rule of Benedict' speaks of the divine presence as 'everywhere and ... in every place,' but most especially in the monastic liturgy of the Divine Office.*

Clearly, there is little, if any, discussion about dogma and doctrine, apostolic succession, ritual and the like. The liturgy, the community and God's presence to us, in us, and with us is paramount in spirituality.
**A Catholic Spirituality**

A Catholic spirituality could reference a spirituality that encompasses a sacramental vision that sees God in all things - other people, communities, movements, events, places, objects, the environment, the world at large, and the whole cosmos. The visible, tangible, the finite, the historical — all these are actual or potential carriers of divine presence. Indeed, for Catholicism it is only in and through these material realities that we can encounter the invisible God. The great sacrament of our encounter with God and of God's encounter with us is Jesus Christ. The Church, in turn, is the fundamental sacrament of our encounter with Christ and of Christ with us. And the sacraments, in turn, are the signs and instruments by which the ecclesial encounter with Christ is expressed and celebrated.