

Q: I have read prayers that ask blessings for healing of body, soul and spirit. I always thought that soul and spirit is the same thing. Are “soul” and “spirit” different or are they the same? --- Jo Hadley, Claremont, CA

A: The terms “soul” and “spirit” are often used interchangeably in modern English, and also to some extent in the Scriptures. They are synonymous, in the sense that they are not describing two separate realities. The human spirit is not some third part of the human person, separate from the soul. Rather, as an aspect of the soul, the human spirit (as distinct from the Holy Spirit), is that aspect of our soul that opens us to God. Some theologians speak of this openness of our spirit as giving us *capax Dei* (a capacity for God). That is to say, since our souls are spiritual and rational, we have the capacity to know and interact with God. And thus, the spirit is that aspect of our soul, which most distinguishes us from the animals.

In this distinction of soul and spirit, the Catechism says the following: Sometimes the soul is distinguish from the spirit: St. Paul for instance prays that God may sanctify his people "wholly" with "spirit and soul and body" kept sound and blameless at the Lord's coming (cf 1 Thess 5:23). The church teaches that this distinction does not introduce a duality into the soul. "Spirit" signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end, and that his soul can gratuitously be raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God. (Catechism # 367).

By Msgr. Charles Pope