

Welcome, or welcome back, one and all! We're *simply red* this morning in our Mass of the Holy Spirit, *we're in this together* as the new term begins. This morning, join me on a Spirit-filled journey with the help of two everyday items found in kitchens around the world – the two items are an ironing board and a tin of sardines. (Sardines are small fishes that come usually in a tin from a supermarket.) Now, you may be thinking: what could ironing and sardines possibly have to do with the Holy Spirit? Stick with me, and we'll see how these two everyday items can give us profound insights into the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

First, let's talk about ironing. We all know what it's like to deal with a wrinkled shirt. No matter how clean it is, those creases make it look messy. Our lives are often like that wrinkled shirt, full of creases caused by sin, stress, and the pressures of life. We may look fine on the outside, but deep down, we know there are wrinkles that need smoothing out.

The Holy Spirit acts as a divine iron in our lives. He smooths out our wrinkles, the flaws and imperfections that keep us from reflecting the image of Christ. But, as you know, ironing requires heat. In a similar way, the Spirit is compared to hot fire, levelling out the wrinkles in our character. It's not always comfortable – we might flinch when the iron gets too hot, we might resist the Spirit's heat. But this heat isn't meant to harm us; it's meant to refine us.

And as an iron needs steam to work effectively, the Holy Spirit uses the “steam” of grace to soften our hearts. This grace makes us pliable and receptive to the Spirit's work, helping us to let go of old habits and embrace a new life with God.

Let's be honest – ironing takes time. You can't rush through it if you want a smooth result. The Spirit is in no rush; He takes His time, carefully working out every wrinkle in our lives. Sometimes we wish for instant transformation, but God knows that true change takes time. The Spirit patiently works on us, one wrinkle at a time, ensuring that the end result is a life that reflects God's glory.

Now, let's turn to the sardines. If you've ever struggled to open a tin of sardines, you know those little fish are packed tightly together, shoulder to shoulder, with barely any room to breathe. It's not the most pleasant image, but it's a powerful one when we think about the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit doesn't only work on us individually, ironing out our personal wrinkles. He also works to pack us together, like those sardines, into one unified body. Our first readings says, *we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body*. Just as those sardines are packed closely in the tin, the Spirit brings us together in close community.

And let's be honest—sometimes being packed together can feel uncomfortable. We're different people with different personalities, backgrounds, and opinions. But the Spirit doesn't pack us together haphazardly. Like a skilled artisan, He arranges us in a way that brings out the best in each of us, making sure we fit together perfectly for God's purpose.

Just as sardines are preserved in oil, so we are preserved in love – the oil of the Holy Spirit that keeps us from spoiling, from falling apart when things get tough. The tight packing ensures that we support each other, that we're not a bunch of isolated individuals, but a united body, strong and resilient.

So, what do ironing and sardines teach us about the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is at work both within us and among us. He irons out the wrinkles in our lives, smoothing us into the image of God, even when it requires some heat and pressure. At the same time, He packs us together, uniting us in love, so that we can stand strong as God's people here at Downside.

Let's embrace the Spirit's work in our lives, allowing Him to press out our imperfections and bind us together in perfect unity. And the next time you pick up an iron or open a tin of sardines, remember how the Holy Spirit is at work—smoothing us out, packing us in, and making us ready for God's purpose.

I'll conclude with the lovely collect prayer, found on the front of your Mass leaflet:

*O God, to whom every heart lies open, every desire speaks plainly and from whom no secret is hidden, cleanse, we pray, the thoughts of our heart by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that we may merit to love you perfectly and offer you worthy praise. Amen*