

Chapter Five

The Three Cries of the Holy Spirit

Purpose: The purpose of this teaching is to encourage young people to allow the Holy Spirit to guide and shape their personal prayer, by showing how the Holy Spirit enables us to cry out to God from the depths of our beings. In presenting the three cries of the Spirit we should aim to promote the praying of these three cries and to emphasize their “cry” character, that is to urge a full-blooded putting into practice, throwing oneself into these cries, and not just making simple, quiet and polite petitions.

Presentation: With all these teachings, it is important to give time for digestion, for discussion and for personal prayer. Here again the combination of teaching and personal prayer ministry is very important. Sharings about how being baptized/filled with the Spirit brought these cries alive are helpful in giving this teaching a practical orientation.

New Testament Cries

In the New Testament we find three cries of Christians to the Lord that are directed related to the Holy Spirit. They are:

- “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4: 6);
- “Jesus is Lord!” (1 Cor. 12: 3);
- “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22: 20; see also 1 Cor. 16: 22; Rev. 22: 17).

These cries are clearly arising from the heart of New Testament faith. They concern our fundamental way of relating to the Father and the Son. They are not just the kind of cries people are always making in times of desperate need, like, “O God, help me!”. People will only make this kind of cry when they have committed their lives to the Father in and through Jesus. They express core faith convictions and relationships.

“Abba, Father!”

Paul has just written in Romans: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Rom. 8: 14). So he continues, “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8: 15 - 16). The word “Abba” is the intimate term used by a small child of their father, like “Papa” or “Daddy”. In the Middle East today, you can sometimes hear children calling their fathers “Abba”. It expresses the complete childlike trust of a small child in their father’s love, protection, wisdom and knowledge.

The Holy Spirit makes us sons and daughters of the Father. “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’.” (Gal. 4: 6). Jesus is the Son, the only Son of the Father. But the Father gives us “the Spirit of his Son” to make us sons and daughters in Jesus. So we cannot become sons and daughters of the Father without being connected to Jesus, who is “the way to the Father [for] no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14: 6). We become sons and daughters of the Father through baptism into the death of Jesus (see Rom. 6: 3 - 4) and incorporation into (inclusion in) the Church, the body of Christ. By becoming a son or daughter of the Father, we are given a share in the relationship of Jesus to his Father. In the same way, when we become sons and daughters of the Father, we are brought into the family of the Church acquiring millions of brothers and sisters in Jesus.

Because the Father loves his children, He desires the best for them all. As a Father he speaks to his children. We hear the Father when we hear the voice of his beloved Son. Jesus says of himself as the good shepherd: “the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” (John 10: 4). In and through Jesus the Father speaks to our hearts. What is it that the Father most wants to give us: is it power for ministry? Or success in evangelization? Is it more vocations for the Church? No. Most of all the Father wants to open his heart and reveal his Son Jesus to us. In Matthew 11, we read the words of Jesus: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Matt. 11: 27). The Father’s deepest desire is to reveal his Son to us and through his Son to make himself known. When we know the Father’s heart, all the things we do for the Lord will carry the mark of this love and knowledge.

As Christians we are called to live as deeply-loved children of the Father. We are also invited and enabled to pray as sons and daughters of the Church. That is shown in the answer of Jesus to the disciples’ request that he would teach them how to pray: The disciples would have seen Jesus praying. They must have been awestruck and had a deep yearning: I wish I could pray like that. So Jesus answered the disciples by saying: “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be thy name.’” (Luke 11: 2). In Israel, only the king or a person representing the whole nation is able to call God “Father”, recognizing God as the father of his son Israel (see Ex. 4: 22) and of the whole people. But now in Jesus this relationship of sonship becomes the privilege of each believer. This should not be understood as “once the king only, now all of us”, but as now each one enters personally into the privilege of the whole chosen people in Christ.

Jesus is Lord!

In some ways, “Jesus is Lord!” was the first Christian Creed. In the New Testament, we find several key statements of this foundational Christian belief:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2: 36).

“if you confess with your lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Rom. 10: 9).

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2: 9).

So what does it mean to confess that Jesus is Lord? It means first that I believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and then established him at his right hand as Lord and Messiah. This is why Ps 110 has been cited several times in the New Testament and then used so extensively in the liturgy of the Church: “The Lord says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies my footstool.’” (Ps. 110: 1). In his resurrection from the dead, Jesus has defeated all the powers of sin and darkness, and has overcome death, which was the ultimate outcome of sin (Rom. 5: 12; see Gen. 3: 19). By his obedience unto death, Jesus has destroyed our disobedience unto death. To profess that “Jesus is Lord” is then to proclaim and to stand upon the salvation-fact that in his death and his resurrection, Jesus has freed us from subservience to the powers of evil and of death. Jesus is Lord means that I do not have to be dominated by sin any more. In him I can turn my back on sin. I can stand against all temptation.

In his resurrection and ascension, Jesus enters fully as man into the glory of the Godhead. His humanity is totally transfigured - as foreseen by the three apostles on Mount Tabor - so that every part of his human existence is penetrated with and filled by the Holy Spirit of God. Now in this fullness of glory, he can in perfect union with the Father, pour out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, upon the Church and upon God's creation. "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out that which you see and hear" (Acts 2: 33).

To say that "Jesus is Lord" means acknowledging that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [him]" (Matt. 28: 18). Jesus is Lord now. He is fully Lord now. This means that all things are already in his hands. So to confess that "Jesus is Lord" means that he is my Lord now, that I place all that I do under his Lordship. I look to Jesus the reigning Lord to speak to me, to guide me, to protect me - all through his Spirit. This is the strong affirmation of Paul to the Corinthians: "I want you to understand that ... no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12: 3). By the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts as children of the Father we can say "Jesus is Lord". By the Holy Spirit we can live with Jesus as the Lord of our lives. Only with the Holy Spirit can the Church live with Jesus as Lord and so be faithful to her calling and nature.

Come, Lord Jesus!

The third cry of the Holy Spirit that is poured into the hearts of Christians is "Come, Lord Jesus!" The cry "Come, Lord Jesus!" is the cry of each Christian filled with the Holy Spirit and it is the cry of the Church. "Come, Lord Jesus!" is the expression of the hope "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." (Rom. 5: 5). What is this hope? He has just said it: "we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5: 2). Note the language of "poured out". God's gift of love and hope is not a rationed dose, a measured portion. It overflows like a fountain. Paul again uses the language of profusion later in same epistle: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Rom. 15: 13).

The cry "Come, Lord Jesus" is in effect the same as the petition "Thy kingdom come", but it makes the role of Jesus clear. The Catechism of the Catholic Church in its teaching on the Our Father states: "This petition is '*Marana tha*' that is the cry of the Spirit and the Bride: 'Come, Lord Jesus.'" (CCC, para. 2817). What are we praying for when we utter this cry? What does the coming of the kingdom mean? It is praying for the realization of the "blessed hope", "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2: 13). It is a longing to see his glory face to face: "we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3: 2). It is a longing for the total rule of Lord Jesus when all things will be subject to the righteous king. It is the longing of the "saints" to share his glory in the resurrection of the body, the completion of our salvation: "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8: 23). It is the longing for an end to our suffering, an end to the attacks of the evil one, an end to temptation and to all the ambiguities of this present life. It is the longing for the glory of God to shine upon the whole creation, a longing for total harmony between humankind and rest of creation, when the creation "will obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8: 21).

This longing is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We may say, the longing is the Holy Spirit in us, manifesting the total commitment of God to the fullness of salvation and to the reign of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is like a coiled spring - except that the spring's

bursting open is constant. The Holy Spirit is like God's arrow, expressing God's total orientation towards the one target. The longing of the Spirit poured into us is so strong that we "groan" from the depths of our beings: "here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling" (2 Cor. 5: 2). The groaning issues from the depth of longing for the completion and for decisive deliverance in the midst of the travails of this world. The prayer of groaning is itself part of the birth pangs of the coming kingdom. This third cry is the Christian's cooperation with the Holy Spirit in the work of preparation. The Lord will come when the groaning has reached the necessary intensity and extent - in fact when it comes forth from the one church that will result from the reconciliation of Israel and the church.

All this longing and groaning rise up from the one hope that the Holy Spirit has placed in each Christian and in the Church. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call" (Eph. 4: 4). There is great variety and multiplicity in God's creation, but there is only one hope. There are many peoples, many cultures, many languages, many generations, many species - but there is only one king and one kingdom. But in the purposes of God pursued and realised by the one Spirit all are to be brought into harmony and unity in, with and under Jesus, the one Lord and the one Christ.

The third cry like the first two arises from the Church that is filled with the Holy Spirit. All three cries are in fact found throughout the liturgy of the Church. In the liturgy, all our worship of God is directed to the Father through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The whole liturgy is a confession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and an act of the risen Lord active and present in the Church. And all liturgy takes place within the horizons of "the blessed hope", "as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ" (prayer after the Our Father). In fact, the acclamation after the consecration: "Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory" expresses the cry "Jesus is Lord" in the first two clauses and the third cry in the third.

Items for Discussion Groups

1. Describe your experience of God as Father.
2. Have you consciously surrendered your life to Jesus as the one Lord and as your Lord?
3. How have you experienced the longing of the Spirit for the coming of King Jesus? What helped to release this prayer within you?