

## ICCRS Jubilee Celebration

June 1, 2017: 16h00

### ***Charismatic Renewal: an Ecumenical Grace***

I want to address this theme of the Renewal and Ecumenism through the lens of the younger generation. There are several reasons for this choice: 1. Young people are central to the theme the Holy Father has chosen for the next Synod of Bishops in the autumn of 2018<sup>1</sup>; 2. Young people are more mobile than their elders, they travel the world, they mix with others in a way we elders did not. In the Christian context, this means that young Christians mix with other young Christians much more freely. At big events organized by charismatic Evangelicals, there will be many Catholics, who do not see such participation as in any way disloyal. 3. Young people have had an important place in my teaching ministry in recent years. I am excited by the number of young Catholics who have a love for other Christians, without the dilution of Catholic faith feared by some of their elders.

I approach this subject through a remarkable priest from Poland, now a candidate for beatification, who had a huge influence on young Polish people in the 1960s and 1970s. His name was Frantisek Blachnicki. As a zealous young layman, he was sentenced to death by the Nazis. He

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<sup>1</sup> The official theme is Young People, the Faith. and Vocational Discernment.

promised to dedicate his life to the Lord if he was spared. He was spared – very unusual with the Nazis – and he became a priest. I mention Fr Blachnicki because in Communist Poland in the 1970s he understood what Pope Francis has articulated in *Evangelii Gaudium* that Catholics can reap from what the Holy Spirit has sown among other Christians (para. 246). Fr Blachnicki saw that Evangelical Christians know how to evangelize, and bring people to conversion – more effectively in fact than Catholics. So he invited people first from Campus Crusade (non-charismatic) and then from Youth With a Mission (charismatic) to come and train young Catholics in how to evangelize. Blachnicki's only condition, to which the Evangelicals agreed, was not to do anything to undermine the attachment of the young Catholics to the Catholic Church. He was inviting the Evangelicals to help renew the Catholic Church. One interesting detail. Not surprisingly many Polish bishops were less than enthusiastic about this plan, fearing big dangers; but the bishop who mattered, as Fr Blachnicki's centre was in his diocese, gave his full approval. That bishop was Cardinal Karol Wojtyła of Krakow, later John Paul II.

I want to share something of my experience of teaching young Evangelical Christians in discipleship formation programmes. The invitation was normally to teach highly-motivated young believers for one week within an eight to twelve week course. What should I teach them, especially

where do I begin? I knew I had to start from the Bible, and the teachings had to be deeply biblical. The teaching had to come from the experience of the Holy Spirit in the Renewal, the Spirit that reveals Jesus Christ to the glory of the Father. I wanted it to reflect the Catholic sense for wholeness, for fullness: the fullness of God's revelation, the full plan of God that the apostle Paul calls "the mystery of Christ." The teaching I found to be most essential is one that I call "The Three Cries of the Holy Spirit."

In the New Testament, there are three cries or utterances of Christians that come from the Holy Spirit, that can only be made through the Holy Spirit. Each one expresses something of the heart of God, God's priorities, what He wants to hear from our lips. They all belong to worship. They declare the praises of the Lord, a characteristic of the Renewal. Proclaimed together, they create and deepen unity.

1. Abba, Father (Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4. 6). St Paul tells us we cry out "Abba, Father" because we "have received the spirit of sonship" (Rom. 8: 15), and because "God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal. 4: 6). This is what we experience in baptism in the Spirit. When we cry "Abba, Father" with other Christians into whose hearts the same Spirit has been poured, we can truly know them as our sisters and brothers in Jesus.

2. “Jesus is Lord” “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12: 3). In the first years of the Renewal, this was a slogan often displayed on banners. It is a cry of victory, declaring the victory of Jesus on the cross over all sin, over death, over Satan. We declare that Jesus is the living Lord. He is Lord now, and we owe him worship: “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2: 10 – 11). When we make this proclamation with other Christians we break down the walls of division.

3. “Come, Lord Jesus”. The third cry that the Holy Spirit forms in our hearts is “Come, Lord Jesus”, the cry of the Spirit and the Bride (Rev. 22: 17, 20). It is the cry that the Holy Spirit teaches the Church, the cry the Spirit forms in the Church. It is at the heart of the liturgy! The Catechism says: “Since the apostolic age the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit groaning in the Church. ‘Marana tha!’” (para. 1130). Without the Holy Spirit, we will have no desire to say, “Come, Lord Jesus.” It expresses the longing the Spirit forms within us for the fullness of salvation. Come, Lord, and tread your enemies under foot; come, Lord, and wipe away all tears; come, Lord, and raise all the faithful departed to the glory of the resurrection.

After several visits to these Evangelical groups, I found that they valued my teaching because I brought things they did not hear from their other teachers. My teachings were more historical, had more sense of God moving all history towards its fulfilment (including Israel and the Church). I was giving them a framework for understanding that is Trinitarian, Christ-centred, Spirit-directed and Kingdom-oriented. Most of the other teachers focused on “How to” themes: how to evangelize, how to form leaders, how to intercede (all strengths of the Evangelicals). I saw how my contribution is very Catholic in the deepest sense.

These three cries all belong to worship, whether addressing the Lord (Father; Come, Lord Jesus) or as a proclamation (Jesus is Lord). This is itself significant for Christian unity. We do together what the Holy Spirit has enabled us to do: to pray with a new freedom, spontaneously either in our own language or in other tongues. We share our delight to praise the Lord, we know a common joy. This is especially true when we cry “Abba, Father,” when we proclaim “Jesus is Lord,” and we pray together for the glorious consummation, “Come, Lord Jesus.” So when we come together, we praise the Lord first: not first, a discussion, but first praise. Because God comes first. Love of God comes first. It is an expression of the commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your mind, and all your strength.”

In this gift of praise, the gift of tongues has a special place. Praying in tongues enables us to pray beyond what we can understand. This is a huge asset when we are unsure how to pray. We think of that passage in Romans 8: “for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.” (Rom. 8: 26). First area where we don’t know how to pray: Christian unity. We do not know how to move forward. We seem so small, the walls of division so big. How can we do anything to overcome the hostilities and disagreements of centuries? Well first, we pray in the Spirit, allowing Jesus to express his heart through our lips. To this prayer in the Spirit singing adds a further dimension: we allow the Spirit to form our melody that will harmonize with that of all the others. Every time a gathering of Christians sing in the Spirit, we are enacting a picture of how God reconciles diversity and forms this diversity into a rich harmony.

When we come together with other Christians baptized in the Spirit we should pray in tongues and proclaim these cries of the Spirit that reflect the heart of God and the priorities of the Spirit. Maybe the third cry for the coming of the Lord is the one we make least, probably because we haven’t had much teaching on His second coming. But it is so important because it is our saying Amen to God’s whole plan and its completion. It is our deepest hope. Here also we do not know how to pray! How can we know how to

pray for the coming of the Lord in glory except through being taught by the Holy Spirit?

## Forming the Young Generation

On the day of Pentecost St Peter cites the prophet Joel, that “Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.” (Acts 2: 17). I have a dream about the young men and the young women. My dream is that a new generation can be formed that does not have to go through the stripping off of anti-Protestant and anti-ecumenical attitudes because they have been formed from the start to love other Christians, to cherish what the Holy Spirit has sown in them, to walk together, and to be agents and instruments of reconciliation. This applies to all Christians, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant; Pentecostal, Evangelical and charismatic. .

The young people who have embraced Jesus and who have opened themselves to the Holy Spirit have a capacity and a power to evangelize beyond what the older generation have, weighed down as we are by more baggage from the past. Our task is to encourage and free up the younger generation to run faster than we were able. We have to avoid projecting our hang-ups on to them.

The biblical image that speaks to me here is the story of David preparing to fight the giant Goliath. We are told “Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a helmet of

bronze on his head, and clothed him with a coat of mail.” (1 Sam. 17: 38). But David, a slim teenager, could not even walk properly with Saul’s armour. So David goes to fight Goliath armed with his staff and five smooth stones taken from the nearby stream. David convinced Saul and his advisers to set aside their fears that Goliath would swat David aside like a fly. When Goliath mocks David: “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” (1 Sam. 17: 43), David responds with faith: “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” (1 Sam. 17: 45). Let us not try to force the armour of Saul on the younger generation who have a confidence like David.

So we older ones – clergy and laity - may well think: if we let our young people keep going to these Evangelical groups and events, we, the Catholic Church, will lose many of them. How do we answer this fear? First, know that our fears and warnings are not going to stop young people going to what attracts them. Second, the real danger comes from Catholic ignorance of Scripture. Young people go where they discover they will be fed from the Bible. So I insist: we Catholics have to soak ourselves in the Scriptures. This means developing daily habits of Bible reading and study. It means hard work over many years. This is absolutely necessary for Christian reconciliation.



A second point: we have to understand better the deep connection between the Bible and the liturgy. This link was well understood by the Catholic liturgical pioneers before Vatican Two. The liturgy is the heart of the Catholic tradition. The liturgy is the worship of the Church rooted in and nourished by the Scriptures, by biblical texts, biblical imagery, and biblical symbolism. Promoting liturgy without deep rooting in the Scriptures produces forms of distortion that are not unknown among us.

Rooted in the Scriptures means rooted in both Testaments, New and Old. This has to include an understanding of God's fidelity to Israel, to the Jewish people. The popes since Vatican Two have all emphasized that God's covenant with the Jewish people is still in force. What is at stake here? It is nothing less than the fidelity of God to His promises. It concerns the character of God. If God did not keep His promises to Israel, how can we be sure that He will keep His promises to the Church?

To conclude, we have to live to the full the grace that the Holy Spirit has been pouring out in the Renewal. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to be the inspiration and guide for all that we do as Christians. I just pick out three steps or aspects: 1. Receiving the **light** of the Spirit, that produces light in our minds and fire in our hearts, to know "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1: 13) and "know ... what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance

in the saints” (Eph. 1: 18), 2. Learning to **trust** the Holy Spirit, to receive guidance and direction from the Holy Spirit, and to cast off all fears; this trust includes listening to and honouring the brothers and sisters the Lord has placed around and over us; 3. Receiving the **wisdom** of the Holy Spirit to know God’s order and timing what we present now and what belongs later in evangelism, in catechesis, in formation, in ecumenical reconciliation.

I recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 13: “every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.” (Matt 13: 52). We in the Catholic Church are carriers of great treasure, but we need the Holy Spirit in order to know the treasure and then what to bring out at any given time. It is not our task to bring it all out at every opportunity.