



CHARIS

Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service

1. LET US PRAY TO RECEIVE THE SPIRIT

In the forthcoming Pentecost, CHARIS, the new single body serving the whole current of grace of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, will start operating. It is a unique opportunity for a renewed outpouring of the Spirit upon us and the whole Church. The purpose of this reflection, as well as the following two reflections the coordinating committee asked me to present, is precisely to support and stimulate, with the aid of biblical and theological foundations, the commitment of prayer many brothers and sisters wish to take to contribute to the spiritual success of the event.

How were the apostles preparing for the coming of the Holy Spirit? By praying! *“With one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers¹.”* The prayer of the apostles, gathered together with Mary in the Upper Room, is the first great epiclesis. It is the inauguration of the epiclesis dimension of the Church: that *“Come, Holy Spirit”* that will continue to echo in the Church forever and ever and that the liturgy will use to introduce all its most important actions.

While the Church was praying, *“there came from heaven a sound as of a violent wind ...and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit²”*.

What happened at the baptism of Christ takes place once again: *“After all the people had been baptized, Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon him³.”*

One might say, that for St. Luke it was the prayer of Jesus that pierced the heavens and had the Spirit come down on him. The same happened at Pentecost.

It is surprising how in the Acts of the Apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit is in constant relation with the praying. The decisive role of baptism is not kept silent⁴, but there is even more insistence on prayer. Saul *“was praying”* when the Lord sent Ananias to give him back his sight and fill him with the Holy Spirit⁵. When the apostles heard that Samaria had received the Word, they sent Peter and John; *“when they arrived, they prayed for the believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit⁶”*.

When, on the same occasion, Simon the Magician tried to obtain the Holy Spirit with money, the apostles reacted indignantly⁷. The Holy Spirit cannot be bought; one can only implore it through prayer. Jesus himself bound the gift of the Holy Spirit to prayer, saying, *“As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him⁸!”*

¹ Acts 1:14.

² Acts 2:2-4.

³ Lk 3:21-22.

⁴ Acts 2:38.

⁵ Acts 9:9-11.

⁶ Acts 8:15.

⁷ Acts 8:18 on.

⁸ Lk 11:13.



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He bound it not only to our prayer, but also, and above all, to His prayer, saying, *“I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper⁹.”*

Between prayer and the gift of the Spirit, there is the same circularity and permeation that exists between grace and freedom. We need to receive the Holy Spirit to be able to pray, and we need to pray in order to receive the Holy Spirit. The gift of grace comes first, but then we need to pray for this gift to be preserved and increased.

However, this should not remain some kind of abstract and unspecific teaching. It must say something to me personally. Do you wish to receive the Holy Spirit? Do you feel weak and want to be clothed *“with the power from on high¹⁰?”* Do you feel lukewarm and want to be heated up? Dry and want to be watered? Rigid and want to be bent? Discontented with your past life and want to be renewed? Pray, pray, pray! May the quiet cry never fade: *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, come Holy Spirit!

If a person or a group of faithful, gather in prayer and retreat, determined not to rise before they are clothed with the power from on high and baptized in the Spirit, that person or that group will not rise without first receiving what they have asked for and indeed much more. This is what happened at that first retreat in Duquesne where the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal took place.

Our prayer must be like that of Mary and the apostles ‘unanimous and persevering.’ Unanimous or with one accord (con-corde) (homothymadon) literally means, done with one mind and ‘one soul’ alone. Jesus said, *“In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven¹¹.”*

The second distinctive feature of the prayer of Mary and of the Apostles is ‘perseverance.’ The original Greek word expressing this quality of Christian prayer (proskarterountes) indicates a tenacious, insistent action, the act of being constantly diligent. It is translated with persevering, or assiduous, in prayer, but one could also translate it with “holding on with tenacity” to prayer.

Proskarterountes is a very important word because in the New Testament it is the most common term used to translate this special attitude of prayer. Shortly after, in the Acts we meet it again, when we read about the first believers *“who were added to their number”, and “remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers¹²”*. St. Paul, too, pleaded with them *“be persevering in your prayers and be faithful as you stay awake to pray¹³”*. In a passage from the Letter to the Ephesians, we read, *“In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion¹⁴.”*

The essence of this teaching derives from Jesus, who told the Apostles the Parable of the Persistent Widow, to teach them they *“should always pray and never become discouraged¹⁵”*. The Canaanite woman is the living illustration of an insistent prayer that does not accept getting discouraged and eventually grants her what she wanted. At first, she asks for the healing of her

⁹ Jn 14:16.

¹⁰ Lk 24:49.

¹¹ Mt 18:19.

¹² Acts 2:42.

¹³ Rm 12:12, Col 4:2.

¹⁴ Eph 6:18.

¹⁵ Lk 18:1.



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daughter and Jesus – Scripture says – *“said not a word in answer to her”*. She insists, and Jesus replies, *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel”*. She then throws herself at His feet, and Jesus rebuts, *“It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to little dogs”*. What an answer! Enough to be discouraged! But the Canaanite woman does not give up and retorts, *“Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs...”* and Jesus gladly exclaims: *“Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted”¹⁶*.

Praying for a long time, with perseverance, does not mean using many words, indulging in vain *“babble like the Gentiles”¹⁷*. Persevering in prayer means to ask often, never cease asking, never cease hoping, never surrendering. It means not giving oneself rest and nor giving it to the Lord either, *“No rest for you, as you keep Lord’s remembrance! And give him no rest either until he restores Jerusalem”¹⁸*.

But why should prayer be persevering and why should God not listen to it immediately? Is it not He himself who, in the Bible, promises to listen immediately, as soon as he is called, or rather even before one has stopped praying?

“Thus, before they call, I shall answer, before they stop speaking, I shall have heard”¹⁹. Jesus rebuts, *“Now will God not see justice done to his elect if they keep calling to him day and night even though he still delays helping them? I promise he will see justice done to them”²⁰*.

Does experience not blatantly contradict these words? No, God promised to always listen and to listen to our prayers without delay, and so He does. We are the ones who have to open our eyes. It is absolutely true that He keeps His word. In delaying the rescue, he already rescues; actually, this deferral is itself already a form of rescue.

It is so because He wishes not to grant the petitioner’s will too quickly, but rather wants to assure him a perfect recovery. Here we need to distinguish between fulfilling the request according to the petitioner’s will or according to his or her needs, where the latter eventually amounts to their salvation.

Jesus said: *“Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you”²¹*. On reading these words, we immediately think of Jesus promising to give us all the things we ask for, and we are perplexed when we see it rarely happens. However, he actually meant one thing: *“Look for me and you will find me, knock and I will open to you”*. He promises to offer himself, going beyond the petty things we ask of him, and this promise is always unfailingly kept. He who seeks Him finds Him; he who knocks has His door opened and once this happens all the rest becomes secondary.

When the object of our prayer is the good gift par excellence, that which God himself wants to give us above all things - the Holy Spirit, then we must watch out for all possible deceit. We tend to conceive the Holy Spirit, more or less consciously, as a powerful help from above, a breath of life that comes to pleasantly revive our prayer and fervor, to make our ministry efficient and carrying the cross easier. You have prayed like this for years to have your Pentecost, and it

¹⁶ Mt 15:21.

¹⁷ Mt 6:7.

¹⁸ Is 62:6-7.

¹⁹ Is 65:24.

²⁰ Lk 18:7.

²¹ Mt 7:7.



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seems to you that there has not been a breath of wind. None of what you expected to happen has happened.

The Holy Spirit is not outpoured to empower our selfishness. Just have a better look around yourself. Perhaps all that Holy Spirit you asked for yourself, God granted it to you, but for others. Perhaps the prayer of others around you, thanks to your words, has been renewed and yours has continued hard earned as before. Others before you, have had their hearts pierced, have felt compunction and crying have repented, but you, you are still there asking for that grace.

Let God enjoy His freedom; make it a point of honor to grant God his freedom. This is the way he has chosen to give you his Holy Spirit and it is the most beautiful way. Who knows if some Apostle, on the day of Pentecost, watching the penitent crowd pierced by the Word of God, I wonder, felt some envy and confusion thinking they had not yet cried for crucifying Jesus of Nazareth? Saint Paul, who was accompanied in his preaching by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and its power, pleaded three times to be freed from the thorn in his flesh, but was never heard and had to accept to live with it *"for the power of God to better rest in him"*²².

In the Charismatic Renewal, prayer manifests itself in a new form compared to the past: that of a prayer in-group or a group prayer. By taking part in them one understands what the Apostle meant when he wrote to the Ephesians: *"Be filled with the Spirit. Sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs among yourselves, singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts, always and everywhere giving thanks to God who is our Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"*²³. And again: *"In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion"*²⁴.

We only know two basic types of prayer: liturgical prayer and private prayer. Liturgical prayer is a communal one, but it is not spontaneous; private prayer is spontaneous but is not communal. We need moments in which we can pray spontaneously, as the Spirit dictates, but sharing our own prayer with others, putting together the various gifts and charisms and enriching each other with our fervor; putting together the different 'tongues of fire' to form a single flame. In short, we need a prayer that is both spontaneous and communal.

We have a great example of this 'charismatic' prayer, both spontaneous and communal, in Acts 4. Peter and John, freed from prison with the order to no longer speak in the name of Jesus, return to their community and begin to pray. One proclaims a word of Scripture (*"Princes plot together against the Lord and against his Anointed"*), another has the prophetic gift of applying the word to the situation of the moment; there is like an "uprising" of faith that gives the courage to ask for "healings, signs and wonders". In the end what happened at the first Pentecost takes place again and *"all were filled with the Holy Spirit" and continue to preach Christ "with honesty"*.

A special gift to ask the Holy Spirit to grant us on the occasion of the renewal and unification of the serving organizations is that the wonder of those first charismatic prayer groups should be revived, where the presence of the Holy Spirit could almost be breathed in and the Lordship of Christ was not a truth only proclaimed but almost tangibly experienced. Let us not forget that the group of prayer or the prayer in-group is the basic element common to both prayer groups and charismatic fraternities.

²² 2 Cor 12:8.

²³ Eph 5: 18-20.

²⁴ Eph 6:18.



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With both the above-mentioned praying styles, one can participate in the prayer chain in preparation to Pentecost. To those who like liturgical prayer, I suggest repeating several times a day, at your choice, one of the following invocations to the Holy Spirit used in the liturgy, knowing that you are joining the countless groups of believers who have prayed them before us:

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love”. (For those who still love to pray with the original Latin formulas: “*Veni, Sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum corda fidelium et tui amoris in eis ignem accende*”.) Or: “Send your Spirit, Lord, and renew the face of the earth”. Or: “Come, Creator Spirit, visit our minds, fill the hearts you have created with heavenly grace”.

To the English-speaking brothers and sisters, I suggest repeating, either alone or in the group, the words of that song we received from the Pentecostal brothers and that accompanied millions of believers when receiving the baptism in the Spirit (alternating the singular “me” with the plural “us”):

“Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on US: melt US, mold US, fill US, use US. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on US.

In my book commenting the *Veni Creator*, I have also drafted an invocation to the Holy Spirit of my own. In this circumstance, I gladly share it with those who might feel inspired by it:

Come, Holy Spirit!
Come, strength and sweetness of God!
Come, You, movement and peace!
Renew our courage,
Fill our solitude in the world,
Create in us intimacy with God!
We no longer say, like the prophet: “Come from the four winds”,
As if we did not yet know from where you came;
We say: Come, Spirit from the pierced side of Christ upon the cross!
Come from the mouth of the Risen One!

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap.