

BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT

I want to start with a question that seems of the uttermost importance to each of us: are we really convinced that we were really reborn as a new man when brothers and sisters prayed with us for the baptism in the Spirit? Do we listen to the answer Jesus gave Nicodemus: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God*” (John 3,3). We believed it of course, at the moment they prayed with us, and thanks to God, we had in the deepest of our heart and mind an experience that Christ was the Lord of our lives. For some this experience happened at once, while others experienced a gradual growth. For me the question I want to ask you remains: do we believe that the baptism in the Spirit is a reality that continue to influence and to direct our lives? I dare even to use the word: do we see it as an indelible spiritual mark (or character), in a sense as we say about our baptism in water? Is it really an experience that continues to direct whole our live in the Spirit?

For this reason it is really important that those who have responsibilities in the Church continue to stress the importance of the baptism in the Spirit. I still hear archbishop Taveira of Brasil during the second international colloquium organised by ICCRS about ‘*Charismas and the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church*’ say with great urgency: “*It is our vocation to be apostles of the baptism in the Spirit. We must be apostles through our love for the Church. We must offer to the Church the grace of the Renewal. We must offer them the experience that Christ is the Lord of their lives. It is our duty to do this as a community*”. Cardinal Rylko, president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, spoke on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Catholic Charismatic renewal, about the experience of baptism in the Spirit or the outpouring of the Spirit. He said that this experience which is central to Charismatic Renewal and which has embraced millions of Catholics on every continent could be the starting point of the Culture of Pentecost. I am most grateful that next March ICCRS will organise a colloquium, totally consecrated to a reflection about the baptism in the Spirit.

We must be aware that the initial experience had a great impact on our lives. Today the Lord says that this starting point must direct our whole live. As we are called to be apostles of this experience of the outpouring of the Spirit, we must continue to be faithful to this calling in order to foster the growth of the whole Church. Michelle Moran in the ICCRS Newsletter of March – April 2010 wrote about ‘*The culture of Pentecost*’. *When the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles in the Upper Room, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They experienced not only a personal renewal but they were also empowered with gifts such as speech/glossolalia and courage which enabled them to reach out powerfully into the surrounding culture.... So the grace of Pentecost is essentially a missionary grace*”. Since we received our personal Pentecostal experience we have a **responsibility**. We must transmit what we received as channels to the whole Church and to the whole world. In the very important article of Michelle Moran she says rightly that till now we mostly spoke about the **Spirituality of Pentecost**. Making a reference to Peter she says: “*Peter who was an uneducated layman, was able to, so convince the crowds by his arguments that they accepted his message and were baptised*”. Peter received not only a personal renewal but he offers immediately and with strength his experience to all surrounding cultures as we hear the long list of different people and cultures that heard his Pentecostal message. Thus the importance to move from an spirituality of Pentecost to the **Culture of Pentecost**. I am most grateful for this insight that Michelle gives us. I believe that it is essential for the Charismatic Renewal to become aware that is an imperative step. Otherwise we will remain confined to our own prayer groups and our own charismatic communities, where we feel ourselves cosy. Michelle quotes also Pope John-Paul II when he addresses delegates from the Renewal in 2002: “*In*

*our time that is so hungry for hope, make the Holy Spirit known and loved. Help bring to life that 'Culture of Pentecost' that alone can make fruitful the civilisation of love and friendly co-existence among peoples. With fervent insistence, never tire of praying 'Come Holy Spirit! Come! Come!'. Michelle adds: "While recognising that in the Charismatic Renewal we do not have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit, it would seem that we do have a particular calling to be **ambassadors of the Holy Spirit spreading the Culture of Pentecost**".*

Cardinal Suenens said already at the beginning of the Charismatic Renewal in Western Europe: *"When we classify the Charismatic Renewal as one movement in the list of other new movements in the Church, we do not grasp the specificity of it. It is a move of the Holy Spirit for the whole Church. It must renew every aspect of life in the Church. The heart of the Renewal, the Baptism in the Spirit is a grace of new Pentecostal life, meant for all Christians".* Our vocation to be ambassadors of the Holy Spirit and to live this missionary grace is the necessary consequence of our baptism in the Spirit..

Therefore I want to reflect with you upon this experience and to consider which the consequences are in our lives. From this point of view I will draw special attention to four aspects of the baptism in the Spirit.

1° We see the necessity to grow to a Culture of Pentecost. The first question we must ask ourselves is: are we ready to become **witnesses of Christ and to evangelise**? We see what happens to the apostles on Pentecost. They were anxious disciples, locked up in the Upper Room out of fear for the Jews and they become joyous and courageous witnesses. Confronted in Jerusalem with the Jewish rulers, elders and doctors of the law Peter and John say: *"We cannot possibly give up speaking of things we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4,20).

There is the danger that we often reduce evangelisation to evangelisation on the streets. Some Christians received this charisma and they have the duty to exercise this gift for the building up of the Church. The most important is that each Christian in his daily life is called to evangelise in his family, at work, in the simple events of that day. We do this by consistently living according to the Christian values. Recently at a meeting of our diocesan service committee we received a word: *"Don't search it too far away!"* At the moment we didn't understand it but in preparing this talk, I received an insight. In order to evangelise, do not search for extraordinary things, but take with both hands the opportunities that are offered to us. In order to seize an opportunity, we must see it! Paul says: *"At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation. Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Cor 6,2).

The Holy Spirit guides us in order to see when we speak a word of encouragement or of consolation; when we say a short prayer at the bed of a sick person; when we have a nice attention for a person who does not expect it. All these can be simple ways of evangelisation and of missionary zeal. It is essential that all of us are convinced that a Culture of Pentecost never can grow in the Church and in the world when we shut ourselves in small islands of like-minded people. We are called in the world where Christian values are attacked each day, to be witnesses of the evangelical values. We must promote a Culture of Pentecost and answer attacks against our faith in firmly confessing the faith transmitted to us by the Church. When the dignity of the human person and the value of human life from conception on till the end of life are no longer respected, we go against the current and we defend the unique value of each human person. When the meaning of the word 'love' is eroded, we stand up for the message of true love, that the Lord taught us. We fight for a world of peace and justice. These are some of the ways to promote a Culture of Pentecost in the world.. We must unite with all other

Christian denominations to defend this evangelical message. As Peter says: *“Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence”* (1 Peter 4,15). We must offer to the world this hope as witnesses of Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

2° The baptism in the Spirit operates in us a greater love for the Church. At a time when the Church is attacked in many different ways, even from within the Church, the Spirit grants us the strength to love our Church! A Church that offers many treasures but also a Church that shows us so many weaknesses! The tragic events in Belgium and in many countries around the world of priests and even a bishop who are child abusers is the proof: we are also a Church of sinners. Personally I received as one of the fruits of the baptism in the Spirit a great love for the Church, while in my task as private secretary to the cardinal, I was confronted more than others with the weaknesses of the Church. I see Her as my mother, who has many wrinkles. I know that She is built on weak and even sinful men; and I am also sinful. Let us remember that Peter, the first pope, renounced his Lord and that all the apostles, except John, fled when Jesus was crucified. Loving the Church means that we must be with Mary, his mother, at the foot of the cross while He is dying. Loving the Church means also that we listen to her message and that we make efforts to believe that her teaching is guided by the Holy Spirit. The Christian Churches defend strongly the evangelical commandments and it seems to me that it is an essential part of the Pentecostal Culture to go against the current in the world that proclaims: *“Yes to Christ, no to the Church!”*.

3° Growth to unity. A culture of Pentecost means also that we reach out to our brothers and sisters of the other Christian Churches as well as to the whole world.. The baptism in the Spirit operates in us the unity with Christ and with each other. Let us listen to two Scripture passages that show us the way to unity: *“I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, so that the **world** may believe that Thou has sent Me”* (John 17,20-21). We hear that Jesus prays for the world! Paul also insists: *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, **one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who I above all and through all and in all.**”* (Ephesians 4,1-6). This unity of all Christians helps us to believe that Christ is the head of the Body, that all of us are members of this Body and that each of the parts of the Body works properly. The unity of all Christians is necessary to show the world that the evangelical message is intended for all peoples of every culture. Since unity is essential, we must not wonder that the evil one will attack us right here. He will make all possible efforts to divide Christians and too often he succeeds temporarily. Hence we need the power of the Spirit in the spiritual warfare!

4° Receive the word of God. When we listen carefully we will often hear the invitation in the liturgical texts to accept the word of God: *“The word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Psalm 119,105). In the verse before the reading of the Gospel, we are invited at least once every week to listen to the word of God and to act accordingly to this word.. John says: *“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach*

you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14,26). By the power of the baptism in the Spirit we received, we are called to bring humbly, without any arrogance the Scripture, the word of God, to the Church and to the whole world. The word of God guides us in order to accomplish this task; the letter to the Hebrews says: *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”* (Hebrews 4,12). In order to be able to be ambassadors of the Spirit and to promote a Culture of Pentecost, we must together with the Christians of other denominations, it is our duty to rely on the Bible as well as on the charisma’s of the word: prophecy and the word of knowledge. All too often we remain silent Christians! We must become heralds of the word of God!

As you heard, I stressed four aspects of the consequences of our baptism in the Spirit. It seems to me that the Charismatic Renewal received a renewed call to move from a spirituality of Pentecost to a Culture of Pentecost. This implies that we need to reflect on these aspects of the baptism in the Spirit that guide us on this road: the vocation to evangelise; the love for our mother the Church; the growth to unity and the need to listen to the word of God and to obey the word. I am fully aware that there are many other aspects of the baptism in the Spirit that help us to live as disciples of Christ: to accept Jesus as the Lord of our lives; the openness for the fruits of the Spirit; the openness for the charisma’s; the love for the sacraments. These remain of course important fruits but I limited myself this time to what in my opinion is closely linked to the next step to which the Holy Spirit invited us: become apostles of the baptism in the Spirit!

Let us be grateful for the outpouring of the Spirit in our lives and for the call we received to move forward on this road. We are aware that the way to go is still long but the Holy Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness!

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