

The Holy Spirit – Agent of Conversion

EVANGELII NUNTIANDI APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI

75. **Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit.** The Spirit descends on Jesus of Nazareth at the moment of His baptism when the voice of the Father- "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased"[107]- manifests in an external way the election of Jesus and His mission. Jesus is "led by the Spirit" to experience in the desert the decisive combat and the supreme test before beginning this mission.[108] It is "in the power of the Spirit"[109] that He returns to Galilee and begins His preaching at Nazareth, applying to Himself the passage of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." And He proclaims: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled." [110] To the disciples whom He was about to send forth He says, breathing on them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." [111]

In fact, it is only after the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost that the apostles depart to all the ends of the earth in order to begin the great work of the Church's evangelization. Peter explains this event as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel: "I will pour out my spirit." [112] Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit so that he can speak to the people about Jesus, the Son of God. [113] Paul too is filled with the Holy Spirit [114] before dedicating himself to his apostolic ministry, as is Stephen when he is chosen for the ministry of service and later on for the witness of blood. [115] The Spirit, who causes Peter, Paul and the Twelve to speak, and who inspires the words that they are to utter, also comes down "on those who heard the word." [116]

It is in the "consolation of the Holy Spirit" that the Church increases. [117] **The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church.** It is He who explains to the faithful the deep meaning of the teaching of Jesus and of His mystery. **It is the Holy Spirit who, today just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows himself to be possessed and led by Him. The Holy Spirit places on his lips the words which he could not find by himself, and at the same time the Holy Spirit predisposes the soul of the hearer to be open and receptive to the Good News and to the kingdom being proclaimed.**

Techniques of evangelization are good, but even the most advanced ones *could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit.* The most perfect preparation of the evangelizer has no effect without the Holy Spirit. ***Without the Holy Spirit the most convincing dialectic has no power over the heart of man.*** Without Him the most highly developed schemas resting on a sociological or psychological basis are quickly seen to be quite valueless.

We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit. Everywhere people are trying to know Him better, as the Scripture reveals Him. They are happy to place themselves under His inspiration. They are gathering about Him; they want to let themselves be led by Him. Now if the Spirit of God has a preeminent place in the whole life of the Church, it is in her evangelizing mission that He is most active. It is not by chance that the great inauguration of evangelization took place on the morning of Pentecost, under the inspiration of the Spirit.

It must be said that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization: it is He who impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and it is He who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood. [118] But it can equally be said that He is the goal of evangelization: He alone stirs up the new creation, the new humanity of which evangelization is to be the result, with that unity in variety which evangelization wishes to achieve within the Christian community. Through the Holy Spirit the Gospel penetrates to the heart of the world, for it is He who causes people to discern the signs of the times- signs willed by God- which evangelization reveals and puts to use within history.

The Bishops' Synod of 1974, which insisted strongly on the place of the Holy Spirit in evangelization, also expressed the desire that pastors and theologians- and we would also say the faithful marked by the seal of the Spirit by Baptism- should study more thoroughly the nature and manner of the Holy Spirit's action in evangelization today. **This is our desire too,**

and we exhort all evangelizers, whoever they may be, to pray without ceasing to the Holy Spirit with faith and fervor and to let themselves prudently be guided by Him as the decisive inspirer of their plans, their initiatives and their evangelizing activity.

“Recognizing the Holy Spirit” - John Henry Newman

And what the power of the Spirit has been in the world at large, that is also in every human heart to which it comes...(T)he characteristics of the Spirit's influence are, that it is the same everywhere, that it is silent, that it is gradual, that it is thorough; not violent, or abrupt, or fitful, or partial, or detached; and if, on the other hand, the stirrings of heart which we experience, the impulses and the changes, are of this imperfect character, we have cause to suspect that in no sense do they come from the One True Sanctifier, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

For instance: any spirit which professes to come to us alone, and not to others, which makes no claim of having moved the body of the Church as all times and places, is not of God, but a private spirit of error...

Again: vehemence, tumult, confusion, are no attributes of the benignant flood with which God has replenished the earth. That flood of grace is sedate, majestic, gentle in its operation. If at any time it seems to be violent, that violence is occasioned by some accident or imperfection of the earthen vessels into which it vouchsafes to pour itself; and is no token of the coming of Divine Power. Sudden changes of feeling, restlessness, terror, vehement emotions, impetuous resolves, ecstasies and transports, are no signs of it; and often they proceed from false spirits, who are but imitating heavenly influences as best they may and seducing souls to their ruin.

And again: the Divine Baptism, wherewith God visits us, penetrates through our whole soul and body. It leaves no part of us uncleansed, unsanctified. It claims the whole man for God. Any spirit which is content with what is short of this, which does not lead us to utter self-surrender and devotion; which reserves something for ourselves; which indulges our self-will; which flatters this or that natural inclination or affection; which does not tend to consistency of religious character – is not from God. The heavenly influence which He has given us is as intimately present, and as penetrating – as catholic – in an individual heart as it is in the world at large. It is every where, in every where, in every faculty, every affection, every design, every work...

Thus, the heart of every Christian ought to represent in miniature the Catholic Church, since one Spirit makes both the whole Church and every member of it to be His Temple. As He makes the Church one, which, left to itself, would separate into many parts; so He makes the soul one, in spite of its various affections and faculties, and its contradictory aims. As He gives peace to multitude of nations, who are naturally in discord one with another, so does He give an orderly government to the soul, and set reason and conscience as sovereigns over the inferior parts of our nature. As He leavens each rank and pursuit of the community with the principles of the doctrine of Christ, so does that same Divine Leaven spread through every thought of the mind, every member of the body, till the whole is sanctified. And let us be quite sure that these two operations of our Divine Comforter depend upon each other, and that while Christians do not seek after inward unity and peace in their own breasts, the Church itself will never be at unity and peace in the world around them....

...Till we look at home, no good shall we be able to perform for the Church at large; we shall but do mischief, when we intend good, and to us will apply that proverb – “Physician, heal thy-self.” ...And let us not doubt that if we do thus proceed, we shall advance the cause of Christ in the world, whether we see it or not, whether we will it or not, whether the world wills it or not. Let us but raise the level of religion in our hearts, and it will rise in the world. He who attempts to set up God's kingdom in his heart, furthers it in the world. He whose prayers come up for a memorial before God, opens the “windows of Heaven, and the foundations of the great deep, “and the waters rise...

(The Rule of Our Warfare, p.161; “Connexion between Personal and Public Improvement”)

“Let Us Drink the Sober Intoxication of the Spirit with Joy!” Raniero Cantalamessa

Pope Paul VI

“In the fourth-century hymn by St. Ambrose that we read this morning in the breviary, there is a simple phrase that is difficult to translate: *Laeti*, which means “with joy,” *bibamus*, which means, “let us drink,” *sobriam*, which means “sober” or “temperate,” *profusionem Spiritus*, which means “the abundant outpouring of the Spirit.” *Laeti bibamus sobriam profusionem Spiritus*. This could be the motto for your movement: its plan as well as a description of the movement itself.

Cyril of Jerusalem

They are not drunk in the way you might think. They are indeed drunk, but with the sober intoxication (*nephalios methe*) which kills sin and gives life to the heart and which is the opposite of physical drunkenness. Drunkenness makes a person forget what he knows; this kind, instead, brings understanding of things that were not formerly known. They are drunk the wine of that mystical vine which affirms, “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5). (Cantalamessa 2-3).

St. Ambrose

“Every time you drink, you receive the remission of sins and you become intoxicated with the Spirit. It is in that sense that the Apostle said, “Do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). He who becomes intoxicated with wine staggers, but he who becomes intoxicated with the Holy Spirit is rooted in Christ. How truly excellent is this intoxication which produces the sobriety of the soul”(Cantalamessa 3)!

“The Golden Age of the Church”

St. Augustine:

“The Holy Spirit has come to abide in you; do not make him withdraw; do not exclude him from your heart in any way. He is a good guest; He found you empty and He filled you; He found you hungry and He satisfied you; He found you thirsty and He has intoxicated you. May he truly intoxicate you! The Apostle said, “Do not be drunk with wine which leads to debauchery.” Then, as if to clarify what we should be intoxicated with, he adds, “But be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart” (see Ephesians 5:18ff). Does not a person who rejoices in the Lord and sings to Him exuberantly seem like a person who is drunk? I like this kind of intoxication. The Spirit of God is both drink and light” (Cantalamessa 4).

St. Augustine:

“Perhaps you do not have any of these gifts that are listed; but if you have love, that is not a small gift. If, in fact, you love unity, everything that is possessed by someone else is possessed by you as well! Banish envy and all that is mine will be yours, and if I banish envy, all you possess is mine! Envy separates, while love unites. Only the eye, in the body, has the function of seeing, but does the eye really only see for itself? No, the eye sees for the hand, the foot and all the other members; if, in fact, the foot is about to strike a certain obstacle, the eye certainly does not look elsewhere, in order to avoid preventing the accident. Only the hand acts in the body, but does it really act only for itself? No, it also acts for the eye; in fact, if a blow were aimed only at the face and not at the hand, would the hand say, ‘I am not moving because the blow is not directed at me’? In the same way, the foot serves all the members by walking; while the other members are silent, the tongue speaks for all. We have, then, then Holy Spirit is we love the Church, and we love it if we continue to remain within its unity and its charity. In fact, the same Apostle, after having affirmed that men were given different gifts – just as different members of the body are assigned different tasks – continues, saying, “...I will show you a still more excellent way: (1 Corinthians 12:31), and he begins to speak of charity. He places it ahead of tongues of men and angels; he prefers it to miracles done in faith, to knowledge, and to prophecy. He even puts it before the great works of mercy which consist in giving all that one has to the poor; he prefers it, lastly, even to martyrdom. He puts charity, ahead of all other great gifts. If you have charity, then, you have all, because whatever other thing you might have, it will profit you nothing without charity.” (Cantalamessa 66-67)