

Spiritual LIFE

APR
MAY
JUN
2004

J O U R N A L

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F T H E S P I R I T U A L L I F E C O M M I S S I O N

eucharistic + charismatic + contemplative + marian

Come, Creator Spirit

Excerpts from Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M.Cap., taught the history of Christian origins at the Catholic University of Milan. Since 1980 he has been Preacher to the Papal Household. Following are excerpts from his book based on the ancient prayer "Veni Creator".

For as long as the Word had not yet become "flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14), neither was the Spirit able to dwell among us. Before the Spirit had descended on Jesus and rested on him, the Spirit was not able to descend on us and remain with us. Consequently we can say, in language that is somewhat more developed, that before Pentecost, the Spirit was present in the world through the Spirit's gifts and power, but since the time of Pentecost onward the Spirit has been *hypostatically* present, that is present in person: "The Prophets enjoyed a profound illumination by the Holy Spirit, but the faithful enjoy more than only this illumination: the Holy Spirit himself dwells in us and remains with us. We are called temples of the Holy Spirit, something that was never said of the Prophets" (Cyril of Alexandria).

Estrangement from God and conversion to God, are two subjective movements, two decisions made by free human choice. It is in this process of conversion that the Holy Spirit is now seen in action. The first thing that jumps out at us when we read the New Testament, especially Paul, is the close similarity, not to say equivalence, between the Holy Spirit and grace. The two realities are actually linked together in one text, "the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:29). The identification of grace as Holy Spirit and Holy Spirit as grace is explicit in the Fathers from the very earliest reflections on the divine nature of the Paraclete. The Spirit came into history with Christ and comes into the life of each Christian at the moment of baptism. Grace is not simply a benevolent disposition, a good intention, but something real, an event, a very specific act, a new and personal intervention by God, of a sort comparable

to God's initial act of creation. It is that specific act of God that justifies this particular human person and makes this person pleasing to him. Once received, grace is not merely a kind of juridical title to salvation, a sort of certificate of safe conduct, a passport; grace is a power that is real, in the same sense that the Holy Spirit is a power that is real. Grace is something we experience, and it is normal that we should experience it as a coming-to-us, perennial and unceasing.

What sense can it make to say, "come, visit, fill!" to someone who is already present? St. Thomas Aquinas has this theological explanation to offer concerning the new "comings" of the Holy Spirit upon us. He notes that "by grace he begins to be, in a new way, in those whom he makes temples of God" (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*). The new Pentecost is actual and it is happening now. It always was so, but in the last century it has taken on new proportions of a scale never known before. Many seriously believe that this is the greatest spiritual upsurge in all the history of the Church: in a mere eighty years, from zero to about four hundred million people.

In this context we take note of what is called the baptism of, or in, the Holy Spirit, which is the special grace at the core of all of this vast spiritual revival. It occurs as a rite of very simple gestures, shared in an attitude of humility and repentance and personal readiness to become little children, "for of such is the kingdom." It is a renewal and a reactivation and actualization, not only of baptism, but of all that Christian initiation involves. Those who want it prepare themselves, not only by confessing and repenting sincerely of their sins, but also by taking part in meetings where they receive teaching and where they come into a living and joyous contact with the great truths and realities of the faith: the love of God, sin, salvation, new life, transformation in Christ, charisms, and the fruits of the Spirit. And all of this in an atmosphere marked chiefly by a profound sense of belonging and being loved and cared for.

the catechism on prayer

Jesus prays

²⁶⁰⁰ The Gospel according to St. Luke emphasizes the action of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of prayer in Christ's ministry. Jesus prays before the decisive moments of his mission: before his Father's witness to him during his baptism and Transfiguration, and before his own fulfillment of the Father's plan of love by his Passion. He also prays before the decisive moments involving the mission of his apostles: at his election and call of the Twelve, before Peter's confession of him as "the Christ of God," and again that the faith of the chief of the Apostles may not fail when tempted. Jesus' prayer before the events of salvation that the Father has asked him to fulfill is a humble and trusting commitment of his human will to the living will of the Father.

²⁶⁰¹ "He was praying in a certain place and when he had ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'" In seeing the Master at prayer the disciple of Christ also wants to pray. By contemplating and hearing the Son, the master of prayer, the children learn to pray to the Father.

²⁶⁰² Jesus often draws apart to pray in solitude, on a mountain, preferably at night. He includes all men in his prayer, for he has taken on humanity in his incarnation, and he offers them to the Father when he offers himself. Jesus, the Word who has become flesh, shares by his human prayer in all that "his brethren" experience; he sympathizes with their weaknesses in order to free them. It was for this that the Father sent him. His words and works are the visible manifestation of his prayer in secret.

²⁶⁰³ The evangelists have preserved two more explicit prayers offered by Christ during his public ministry. Each begins with thanksgiving. In the first, Jesus confesses the Father, acknowledges, and blesses him because he has hidden the mysteries of the Kingdom from those who think themselves learned and has revealed them to infants, the poor of the Beatitudes. His exclamation, "Yes, Father!" expresses the depth of his heart, his adherence to the Father's "good pleasure," echoing his mother's Fiat at the time of his conception and prefiguring what he will say to the Father in his agony. The whole prayer of Jesus is contained in this loving adherence of his human heart to the mystery of the will of the Father.

The most common result of this grace is that the Holy Spirit who before was the more-or-less abstract object of a person's intellectual assent of faith, becomes a fact of experience. Through what aptly has come to be called the baptism in the Spirit, we experience the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's anointing in our prayer, power in our apostolic service, consolation in our trials, light upon the choices we make. More basic than any manifestation of the Spirit in the charisms, this is the first way we perceive the Holy Spirit, as transforming us from within, giving us a desire to praise God and a taste for praise, leading us to discover a new joy our life, opening our mind to understand the Scripture, and above all teaching us to proclaim Jesus our "Lord".

This is the description of the effects of the Spirit given by a person who took part in the retreat in 1967 that was the start of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church:

Our faith has come alive; our believing has become a kind of knowing. Suddenly, the world of the supernatural has become more real than the natural. In brief, Jesus Christ is a real person to us, a real person who is our Lord and who is active in our lives. We read the New Testament as if it were literally true now, every word every line. Prayer and the sacraments have become truly our daily bread instead of practices which we recognize as "good for us". A love of Scripture, a love of the Church I never thought possible, a transformation of our relationships with others, a need and a power of witness beyond all expectation, have all become a part of our lives.

(P. Gallagher Mansfield, *As by a New Pentecost*)

Pentecost was the very first baptism in the Spirit. John the Baptist presented Jesus as "the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (see John 1:33). Not only through the sacrament of baptism, but throughout the whole of his work, Jesus "baptizes in the Holy Spirit". His entire messianic mission consists in pouring out the Holy Spirit upon the world. The baptism in the Holy Spirit, that once again we have started to recognize and discuss in the Church, is one of the ways in which the risen Jesus continues his essential work, which is to baptize all of humankind "in the Spirit". It has been described as a renewal of the Pentecost event and, as importantly, also of the sacrament of baptism and of Christian initiation in general, even though the two realities coincide and therefore never come about separately or in opposition one to the other.

From *Come, Creator Spirit* by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M.Cap., 2003, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN

Papal Preacher Focuses on Two Aspects of Christ's Easter

Fr. Cantalamessa's Meditation Addressed to Pope and Curia Officials

To understand that the passion, death and resurrection of Christ constitute the most important event in history, it is necessary to understand the allegorical meaning of Scripture, says the Papal Household preacher. The spiritual or allegorical meaning of the New Testament accounts on those moments of Jesus' life was the subject of Father Raniero Cantalamessa's meditation, addressed to John Paul II and officials in the Roman Curia as part of a series of Lenten reflections.

The Capuchin addressed the technically allegorical meaning of the Scriptures, namely, "what must be believed" when reading them. He said this is seen clearly in these formulas: "He died for our sins; he rose for our justification."

"'Died,' 'rose' indicate events; they are historical affirmations." For our sins, 'for our justification' are historical affirmations, but of faith; they indicate the mystical meaning of the events. In essence, this is precisely the meaning of faith, which makes the death and resurrection of Christ historical events, if by historical we refer not only to the naked fact, but to the event and its meaning," he said.

"In this connection, the death and resurrection of Christ is the most historical event of the history of the world, as it is the one that has had the most influence on humanity's end. Also in these days we are seeing how everything that affects this event has the power to stir consciences and to elicit reactions," the priest said.

Father Cantalamessa said that the person who best explained "the meaning for the faith of the event of Christ's Easter is the Apostle Paul," who stresses two elements: "a negative aspect, which consists in the elimination of sin, or justification of the impious; and a positive aspect, which consists of the gift of the Spirit and of the new life."

After the Protestant Reformation, theological controversies have resulted in almost exclusive emphasis on the negative, "the elimination of sin," the Capuchin said.

"However, in reality, for Paul, of the two aspects of salvation -- justification of the impious and the gift of

the Spirit -- the latter is the most important. He speaks of it in all his letters, while he speaks of justification by faith only in letters in which he has to defend his own mission with the Gentiles. For Paul, justification of the impious and the remission of sins are no more than the conditions to receive the most beautiful and complete gift of Christ's Easter, namely, his Spirit.

"Many are convinced that the birth and magnetic development of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement within the different Christian churches can be explained, in part, as a reaction to a too-unilateral insistence on the problem of justification by faith which has left in the shadows the doctrine and the experience of the Spirit," Father Cantalamessa said.

Because of this, the preacher added, "according to statistics," the Charismatic Renewal is today "the fastest growing segment of Christianity."

This view "might help at last to find the solution to problems that have been with us for centuries on which not even the joint declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Federation," on the doctrine of justification, has succeeded in finding full agreement, he said.

"In the theology and spirituality of the Pentecostal movement, justification by faith is not seen only as an external element of justice which leaves the believer as he was previously," Father Cantalamessa said. On the contrary, he insisted, there is an understanding that "the Holy Spirit really transforms the person, giving him a new heart and dwelling in the person. It would be very sad if all this remained confined within only one ecclesial movement and did not spread, as a consequence, in substance and in form, to the whole Church, as a current of fruitful grace. However, it is not enough to determine the meaning of faith contained in Easter -- liberation from sin and the gift of the Spirit. It is also necessary to be concerned about the intensity with which one believes. We are talking about existential faith. What can we do to reinforce it, to make it grow, if it is essentially a gift of God, not the fruit of our will? We must begin by revitalizing the capacity to wonder before it. We must be conscious of the enormous gift, of the incredible privilege of being able to believe. We must be amazed and not cease to thank God the Father for it. "

From *Zenit*, March 26, 2004

Deacon Steve Thomashefski

SLJ introduces our deacons beginning with this interview with Deacon Steve Thomashefski. Steve was ordained in June 2003. He and Lucia recently celebrated their 32nd wedding anniversary and have seven children.

SLJ: *Describe your experience of being converted.*

Steve: I'm 55 now and when I gave my life to the Lord and repented of my sins I was 19 years old. Growing up in the Bronx I had gotten away from the church, and was heavily into drugs and alcohol. One night I had a very bad experience with drugs, alcohol and LSD and lost my grip on reality. I became very fearful of death and thought I was dying right then. Somehow I made my way back to the church I had attended as a boy and at 3:00 in the morning I knocked on the door of the rectory. The priest looked at me and said "My God, Steve! Do you want me to take you to a hospital?" I said "No. Father, hear my confession." Where that came from, I don't know because it was the last thing on my mind. I think the Holy Spirit put the words in my mouth. That morning I made the best confession of my entire life. The moment Father said the words of absolution the LSD trip ended and the high from the marijuana and the alcohol ended immediately and I experienced for the first time in a tangible way the reality that God loves me...he loves me despite the fact that I had not done well with my life and had almost flushed it down the toilet. I experienced his forgiveness, mercy and love in a way that I had never dreamt was possible. As I was being taken home we passed an outdoor shrine at St. Lucy's Church. It was a depiction of Calvary, lit up at night, and when we passed by the Cross, looking upon Jesus lifted up on the cross, I knew that I was judged. As a Catholic I knew that Christ had died for my sins. I recognized that I put him there and that in itself was judgment. Yet I experienced his mercy and love for me.

The next morning I told my parents everything I had done, and asked their forgiveness. After that I would frequently go to the shrine and pray whenever I had the opportunity, morning and night. I began to pray and read Scripture every day. I knew I had to change my life. I told my friends that Jesus Christ forgave my sins and that I knew him. This was an incredible experience realizing that I knew Jesus, that he was real and that he was alive. It was like going from death to life. I was in such deep sin that for me forgiveness was like experiencing resurrec-

tion. I was dead and then I was alive. There was no misunderstanding about that reality.

Unfortunately my friends and even some of my family thought I was more crazy after my conversion than when I was on drugs. The great change was my love of the Lord, my desire to listen to his voice and obey him, to be his disciple, to hunger to do his will, to serve him and to want to be like him.

SLJ: *How did you come to be "baptized in the Spirit"?*

Steve: Later on I met a young deacon named Frank McGrath and he recommended I get involved in a small prayer group in the Village. There were a handful of people there and they were on fire. I thought it was beautiful the way they prayed. It was like a love song. I didn't know then that they were praying in tongues and singing in the Spirit. Then one night they asked if anyone would like to be baptized with to receive the baptism in the Spirit. I didn't know what the baptism in the Spirit was, but I got down on my knees and they prayed with me. I just began to gush! It was like living water was coming up out of my belly and flowing out of my mouth. It was praise of God. I was able to just let go and yield myself to God in a way that I didn't realize was possible.

So I look at the baptism of the Spirit as a release of the gift of the Spirit we receive at baptism and are sealed with at Confirmation. I use the analogy of a gift certificate for a few rounds of golf which I received from my children at a birthday, for which I was very touched. I carefully put it safely away in my wallet. Three or four years later, cleaning out my wallet I discovered it. I thought, "This whole time I've been carrying this around and never used it!" That's how it is with the life of the Holy Spirit. He's been with us since baptism and for various reasons people forget about him. We don't tap into the incredible grace that the Holy Spirit is.

SLJ: *Are you saying that the experience of being baptized in the Spirit would be considered normative for any Catholic?*

Steve: The baptism in the Spirit is normative. I've done some research and read the Church Fathers on this topic, and it's very evident that for the first three or four hundred years in the life of the Church, when people were baptized, they received the Holy Spirit, they spoke in tongues, they often received prophetic utterances, and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit were in operation. Preaching, teaching, healing, all of these things were for so long a part of the life of the Church.