

### **Session 3: New Life in the Spirit**



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#### **Opening Prayer:**

In the Scriptures, by the Spirit, may we see the Saviour's face,  
Hear his word and heed his calling, know his will and grow in grace. Amen

#### **Jesus and Mary were filled with the Spirit**

Tonight we have reached the third of our seminars and the focus now is turning to New Life in the Spirit. I want to begin by saying that Jesus and Mary were filled with the Spirit. Although Jesus was the sinless Son of God, and Mary was the sinless Mother of God, they both received an infilling of the Spirit: Jesus after being baptised in the Jordan, and Mary at Pentecost. As both were all-holy already, the question arises, what did their in-filling add to them? I consider that the answer in both cases is that it was **an empowerment to evangelise effectively**. As Jesus explained,

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor"*(Lk 4:18).

There he is acknowledging that he is filled with the Holy Spirit in order to evangelise effectively. It is notable that it was only after his baptism in the Jordan that Jesus exercised the gifts of the Spirit, like healing and miracle-working. Speaking of Mary, St John Paul II referred to her as the *"star of the first and new evangelisation."* Mary was not made holier by Pentecost, but she was empowered in some new way to bear witness to the divinity of her Son and the salvation won by her Son.

#### **The sacraments of initiation and baptism in the Spirit**

In Ephesians 5:18 we read, *"be filled with the Spirit."* Rather than being a word of advice, **it is a command of the Lord**. One could argue that the command has already been fulfilled because we received the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of initiation, namely baptism and confirmation. This is true up to a point. Yes, we did receive the Spirit in the sacraments of initiation. While it was a real **sacramental** event, it wasn't necessarily an **experiential** one. **We need to claim our inheritance of grace by means of personal faith**. Let me offer two explanatory images you might find helpful:

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- ◆ A rich father who is dying leaves five million euro to his six-year-old son. It is to be invested in a trust until the boy is 21. Then he can claim and use it. In the meantime, he is to be given a weekly allowance of €50. A question, who owns the money after the millionaire's death? The son. But while he owns it, he cannot use it until he is 21. Meantime he can only use his modest allowance. It is much the same with Christians. **In the sacraments of initiation we receive a huge inheritance of grace, but we can only access and use it when it is released within as a result of claiming the promises by personal faith.**
- ◆ One of the most infertile areas in the world is the Sahara desert, due to a lack of water. However, it is an ironic fact that one of the greatest underground lakes in the world lies beneath its sands. If that water could be brought to the surface the arid wastes could blossom with life. **When Christians tap into the hidden graces in their hearts, they release the Spirit and produce rich fruits.**

#### ***Philip preaching to the Samaritans***

There is a story in Acts 8:14-17 which is relevant here. The deacon Philip preached the gospel message to Samaritans who accepted it with faith and received Christian baptism. When Peter and John heard about this, they came to see for themselves, and concluded that "*the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them.*" In thinking this, **they were making an experiential rather than a theological judgement.**

In other words, if the Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit as a result of faith and baptism, it hadn't yet been released with **power within them** as it had been on Pentecost Sunday in the lives of the apostles and other disciples. So Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans, who were baptised in the Holy Spirit. It is undeniable that the Samaritans had indeed received the Holy Spirit when they were first baptised, but clearly something was missing. There was a lack of life, a lack of joy and maybe a lack of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Peter and John noticed and they thought, well, what happened to us at Pentecost clearly hasn't happened to them.

You know, when you look down on Catholic congregations nowadays, you could come to the same conclusion and say, well, I'm sure they received the Holy Spirit when they were baptised and confirmed, but there is not much evidence of it; they are more lack sacks of potatoes in the seats rather than people who are on fire with the Spirit of God. So, that's why Pope Frances is so keen that we run *Life in the Spirit Seminars* so that the **riches of grace, that undoubtedly we all received in baptism and confirmation, can be released in an experiential way in the lives of believers.** So, when people do get prayed with, we know now from the example of thousands – indeed, millions – that it can become a real conversion experience, a real breakthrough to the Lord and that as soon as it happens, people do start exercising the gifts of the Spirit, such as the ability to pray in tongues.

#### ***Promise of the Spirit***

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Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit in this way:

*"Wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5).*

By the way, the word 'baptism' comes from the Greek word, *baptizo*, meaning 'to immerse' and it has the connotations 'to drench, to soak, to inundate, to fill with the Holy Spirit'. Baptism in the Spirit is like a sponge being put into a bowl of water; you squeeze the sponge and out comes all the air and then the sponge gets filled, every little nook and cranny in the sponge gets drenched and soaked with the water. When we pray for one another for baptism in the Spirit, we are, as it were, squeezing out worldliness and we are hoping that the person, like the sponge, will be drenched and soaked, not with water, but with the Spirit of God. That Spirit is given:

- 1) To enable the disciples to know and relate to Jesus as the Son of God and to understand what he taught, *"when the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth"* (Jn 16:13) – the truth of who Jesus **is** and the truth of what Jesus **said**.
- 2) To empower them to carry out the **great commission to preach the Good News message to the whole world**.

In two weeks' time, you will have an opportunity of asking for such an infilling or baptism in the Spirit (cf. Ephesians 5:18).

#### **Baptism in the Spirit explained**

The release of the Spirit can be defined as follows:

*"Baptism in the Spirit is a life-transforming experience of the love of God the Father poured into one's heart by the Holy Spirit and received through a total surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This grace:*

- ◆ *Brings alive sacramental baptism and confirmation,*
- ◆ *Deepens communion with God and with fellow Christians,*
- ◆ *Enkindles evangelistic fervour and*
- ◆ *Equips a person with charisms for service and mission."*  
- Doctrinal Commission for the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (2012)

I just want to emphasise – and I know this to be true from my own experience - that baptism in the Spirit is fundamentally a **life-transforming experience of the love of God**. We can know about the love of God in theory, but when you are baptised in the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, the truth falls from your head to your heart in a liberating and joy-giving way.

#### ***A personal testimony***

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I would like to share my own experience of being baptised in the Holy Spirit. I was brought up in a religious home. Like both my parents, I went to mass every day when I was a boy. At 18 years of age, I joined the seminary and eight years later was ordained in 1971. At the time my mind was full of theology and my heart full of good intentions. Within a year or so after my ordination, I was becoming disillusioned. While people sometimes commented favourably on my well-prepared sermons, I noticed that no one ever seemed to be changed by them. I also tried to help troubled people. I gave them good advice, but I began to realise that what was really needed was good news. I began to resent them, because, unconsciously, I saw my own emotional and spiritual poverty mirrored in theirs. In other words, I was part of the problem, not part of the solution. I finally acknowledged this state of affairs as a result of reading an inspiring verse in the book of Revelation 3:17,

*"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."*

From that moment onwards, instead of identifying with the Good Samaritan, as I had heretofore – I go out to help all those in distress - I now identified with the man on the roadside. Like him, I felt wounded and weak. This awareness, which I was reluctant to acknowledge, became the **birthplace of a heartfelt desire for some kind of spiritual awakening**. If you had interviewed me at the time, I would have admitted that I was restless – I told friends that – but I could not put my finger on what I was looking for; all I realised was that I needed something.

Desire gave way to fulfilment in February in 1974. I was invited to attend a conference in the North of Ireland. One of the talks was given by a Protestant clergyman, Rev. Cecil Kerr. He spoke about Jesus as the source of our peace – that was particularly relevant at the time because 'The Troubles' were at their height. Quite frankly, his inspired words moved me to tears – and indeed that was a new experience for me; before that I had been bored by many a sermon, never moved to tears. I found myself wanting to know the Lord the way this man obviously did. Afterwards a nun introduced me to him. We had a brief chat and arranged to meet privately. When we did, I told the minister that I was looking for a new awareness of God in my life. There was no small talk at all. Almost immediately he opened his bible and he read a memorable passage from Ephesians 3:16-20 which asks among other things that one *"may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge --that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* When he read those words, they had a remarkable effect on me. I said earlier that although I knew I was looking for something, I could not put my finger on it, I could not describe exactly what I was looking for, but when he read that passage, it was as if the words jumped off the page and into my heart and I remember thinking to myself – although I did not say it out loud – that is exactly what I am looking for, that expresses it exactly; I'm fed up with the God of the philosophers, the God of the mind. I want to know the God of Love and I want to know him within my own heart. So I was full of desire for God at that moment.

Then Cecil began to pray for me, firstly in English, then in tongues. Suddenly, and effortlessly I too began to pray fluently in tongues. I can tell you, I was amazed! I

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remember thinking to myself, who's that praying in that strange language? – my goodness, it's me! This realisation grew over a number of days as I knew with great conviction that Jesus loved me and accepted me as I was. I knew what St Peter meant when he wrote: *"Though you have not seen him, you love him and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy"*(1 Pt 1:8).

During the following months and years the inner effects have been obvious. It was as if the risen Jesus had walked through the walls of my body to live within me. Prayer was easy, scripture was a revelation, I had fewer fears, a greater ability to love, and to exercise gifts. The main effect was a sense of God's empowering presence.

Ever since then the following scripture texts have meant more and more to me:

- ◆ In John 15:4, Jesus talks about the branch that is grafted into the vine so that it shares the same life: *"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."*
- ◆ As St Paul observed some years later, in 1 Corinthians 6:17: *"The one who is united with the Lord is one spirit with him."* We are so united in the Spirit that Jesus could say that he literally lives in the believers.
- ◆ In Ephesians 3:16-17, Paul echoed this sentiment when he spoke about Christ living in our hearts through faith: *"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."*
- ◆ Again, in Galatians 2:20, he says: *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."*

One of the great effects of being baptised in the Holy Spirit was that I came to know experientially that by his love Christ was living within me. He wasn't outside of me or with me, but within me. It was as if he appeared in the room of my life, walked over to me, walked through the walls of my body, so that I knew 'Christ is within me' – and that sense has never left me since then and it is a wonderful awareness.

Rather than being a once-off event, Baptism in the Spirit **inaugurates a process** which can be deepened and strengthened by subsequent infillings of the Spirit. It is a process of a growing relationship with the Lord. These new infillings of the Spirit are given in order that the person may be **guided by the Spirit** (Gal 5:18), **empowered by the Spirit** (Phil 2:13) and **lead a holy and loving life**.

As you are increasingly empowered by the Spirit, you will come to realise the truth of what Jesus said in John 14:12, *"The things I do, you will do. And you will do even greater things"*. Christ as he lives within us, will empower us and enable us to do the very things that he did during his life - such as to love, pray, serve, forgive, speak about God, heal, deliver from evil spirits, etc. I often use this phrase, that through the action of the Spirit within us, Christ's biography can become our potential autobiography.

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#### ***Sharing Groups***

- 1) What struck you most as you prayed during the last week?
- 2) If you received the Holy Spirit in your baptism and confirmation, how can you receive it again in the baptism in the Holy Spirit?
- 3) Why do you need this outpouring of the Holy Spirit?