

Session 7: Transformation in Christ



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Introduction and Opening Prayer

Welcome to everyone! This is our last night of the *Life in the Spirit Seminars* and our topic tonight is *Transformation in Christ*.

I want to begin with a prayer by St. John Gabriel Perboyre (French: Jean-Gabriel Perboyre) who was martyred for the faith in Wuhan, China, on 11th September 1840, where the pandemic started. Like Fr. Pat, he was a member of the Vincentians (Congregation of the Mission). He was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1889, and later canonised by Pope John Paul II in 1996.

O my Divine Saviour, transform me into yourself.
May my hands be the hands of Jesus.
May my tongue be the tongue of Jesus,
Grant that every faculty of my body may serve only to glorify you.
Above all, transform my soul and all its powers,
so that my memory, my will and my affections
may be the memory, the will and the affections of Jesus.
I pray you to destroy in me all that *is* not you.
Grant that I may live but in you and for you,
and that I may truly say with St. Paul:
"I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).
- St. Jean Gabriel Perboyre CM

FOSTERING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In last week's seminar we saw that **Baptism in the Spirit is the beginning of a new beginning** where our new life in Christ is concerned. That relationship with the Lord has to be deepened and strengthened over the years. It is a spiritual awakening that leads to Christian discipleship. At this point the person aims to grow to be spiritually mature as a Christian. As St Paul said, we have to keep growing until "*we become mature people reaching Christ's full stature*" (Ephesians 4:13). In another place he explained:

"Your hearts and minds must be made completely new. You must put on the new self which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy." Ephesians 4:23-25)

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Paul went on to explain in Phil 3:12-17:

"I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect ... the one thing I do, however is to forget that which is behind me, and to do my best to reach what is ahead. So, I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above. All of us, who are spiritually mature should have the same attitude."

What I want to point out in this talk is that a number of activities can help in this ongoing process of growth.

Trials and temptations are inevitable

A. Trials

In Sirach 2:1 we are warned:

"My child, if you aspire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for an ordeal."

These sufferings are neither a curse nor the work of the devil as many people think. They are part of life in a broken world.

That point was reiterated in the New Testament. Jesus said in John 16:33,

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

James 1:2-4 added,

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

So, we grow through the things we endure. St Paul stated that such trials and tribulations had a silver lining when he said,

"we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope"(Romans 5:3-4).

St Peter added,

"The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast"(1 Peter 5:10).

By the way, psychologists would concur with that from a human point of view. If you study developmental psychology, it would say that all of us can expect to go through a predictable transitional crisis in every decade of our lives and usually these crises will last from 2½ to 3 years. Psychologists would also say that we don't grow much in times of stability in our lives. Paradoxically, it is during the times of instability and difficulty that the real growth comes about. When I used to teach developmental psychology, I

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would go into this in great detail, showing that growth is most likely to occur during the more unstable periods of our lives. There was a phrase I really liked that the psychologist Mary Douglas used, *"the potency of disorder"*.

Some of us would know that from personal experience. When I was in my late thirties, although I had been baptised in the Spirit a number of years before, I went through a very difficult crisis, it was really burnout and involved a lot of stress and I would say that it lasted at least three years and it was a time when I did not feel God's presence very much, he seemed distant from me, I really struggled to get anything out of prayer or scripture reading. I just had to go through the valley of darkness, believing that the Lord was in it. Sometimes I would get very angry, sometimes I would repress the anger and at other times I would express it to the Lord. When I came out of that period of trial, I think I can say that I had grown immensely. It was after this trial that I began to write and I have never stopped writing since then and most of the insights I would share in the things I write were things that I began to learn in the darkest period of my life. It was only when the darkness had passed that I realised how much I had changed deep down in my personality and in my spirituality. I had matured greatly – does that mean that the process is over? By no means! It continues, as St. Paul says, right up to the end. So there is a silver lining to suffering, that is for sure, and to trials and tribulations.

By the way, what is true of an individual can also be **true of a whole culture** and we are going through such a period of trial and tribulation now in the world and it is an invitation to growth. Some people when they suffer get bitter, and others will get better – and really the choice is ours. St. Paul is saying that suffering produces *endurance*, endurance produces *character*, and character produces *hope*.

B. Temptation

The other thing that is true of our Christian life is that, not only will we have trials and tribulations, but we will experience considerable temptation. We know that Jesus, when he was filled with the Spirit, immediately was tempted on three occasions by the devil. We are told in **Hebrews 4:15**,

"we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin.."

Inevitably, like Jesus, we too will be tempted by the devil. In his prayer, Jesus taught us to say, *"lead us not into temptation."* The wording of this petition is misleading because it implies that perhaps the Lord leads us into occasions of sin. It is obvious that such a view is quite mistaken. As James 1:13 states:

"When tempted, no one should say 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone."

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This final petition of the Lord's Prayer could be better translated as, *"when we meet with the inevitable temptations of the evil one, do not allow us to succumb to them."*

It is worth noting in this context that in 2017 Pope Francis said in a television interview that the common rendering of *"lead us not into temptation"* was not a good translation. He went on to explain:

"Even the French have now changed that text, translating it as follows, 'don't let me fall into temptation.' I am the one that's falling. It's not Him who's leading me into temptation in order to see how I get on. No, a father doesn't do this ... The one who is leading you into temptation is Satan. That is Satan's mission. The prayer that we say means: 'When Satan leads me into temptation, please give me your hand.'"

Temptation comes to all of us. St Paul assures us that:

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it"(1 Cor 10:13).

I think it is very important to take this promise of God on board as we live the life of the Spirit. I believe that this promise is true if and when **a number of conditions are met.**

- ◆ Firstly, one needs to **acknowledge the existence and activity of the devil** who is perverted and perverting. In the Aramaic of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew, Jesus says, "deliver us from the *evil One*" i.e. Satan, not from abstract evil. As St Paul was later to comment:

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"
(Ephesians 6:12).

As Christians we need to learn, not only to discern "the tail of the serpent," in a realistic, non- mythological way, but how to **resist him firm in faith.**

- ◆ Secondly, the person needs to have the kind of **humility** which is the fruit of a self-awareness that may have been the result of a humiliating fall. Otherwise he or she may suffer from spiritual presumption and pride. Although, the person may have the desire to resist temptation, he or she will not have the power to do so. St Peter was an example of this kind of well-intentioned self-complacency and spiritual immaturity. Although he promised to die with Jesus, if necessary, in the event Satan sifted him like wheat. Instead of being faithful

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to Christ he denied him three times. **Only those who truly acknowledge their desperate need of God's power** can resist in the day of temptation. As St Paul discovered, God's grace is sufficient, the Lord's power is made perfect in weakness (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9).

c. Spiritual Warfare

A related issue to this notion of resisting temptation is the idea of engaging in Spiritual Warfare. A number of years ago, I came across a parable I really liked because it has a good deal to say about avoiding the temptations, illusions and false inspirations of the devil and carrying out the advice of St James,

"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"
(James 4:7).

May I say in passing that a lot of people ring me up and they will be talking about the activity of the devil in their lives and I often remind them of that short, simple but powerful sentence where we are asked to submit ourselves to God, our focus should be totally on God and not on the devil. Don't focus either on the problem or the temptation; focus solely on God, hand yourself over to God, submit to God. Resist the devil, relying on God's power at work within you to do the resisting. We have the promise of Scripture, which is infallible, that *'he will flee from you'*.

Notice the verbs that are used here: submit yourself to God, resist the devil – these are the two things we have to do ... and what will happen as a result? He will flee from you, sooner or later. We are told in Scripture that *"the word of God is the sword of the Spirit"* (Ephesians 6:17). Use that sword in your spiritual combat.

A Parable

I first read this parable about 35 years ago and it just came back to me the other day and fortunately I found it. It was written by a Lutheran pastor, who has since died.

Think of yourself as living in a block of flats. You live there under a landlord who has made your life miserable. He charges you exorbitant rent. When you can't pay, he lends you money at a fearful rate of interest, to get you even further into debt. He barges into your flat at all hours of the day and night, wrecks and dirties the place up, then charges you extra for not maintaining the premises. Your life is miserable.

Then comes Someone who says, "I've taken over this block of flats. I've purchased it. You can live here as long as you like, free. The rent is paid up. I am going to be living here with you, in the manager's flat."

What a joy! You are saved! You are delivered out of the clutches of the old landlord! But what happens? You have hardly time to rejoice in your new-found freedom, when a knock comes at the door. And there he is, the old landlord! Mean, glowering, and demanding as ever. He has come for the rent he says. What do you do? Do you pay him? Of course not. Do you go out and punch him in the face? No, he's bigger than you are!

You confidently tell him, you'll have to take that up with the new Landlord. He may bellow and threaten, wheedle and cajole. You just quietly tell him, take it up

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with the new Landlord. In the end he has to. He knows it too. He just hopes that he can bluff and threaten and deceive you into doubting that the Landlord will really take care of things.

Now this is the situation of the Christian who has been filled with the Spirit. Once Christ has delivered you from the power of sin and the devil, you can depend on it: that the old landlord will soon come back knocking at your door. And what is your defence? How do you keep him from getting the whip hand over you again? You send him to the new Landlord. You send him to Jesus, nestle in Jesus by means of faith, do not wrestle with the old landlord.

Daily Prayer to the Holy Spirit



'May he strengthen you inwardly through the working of his Spirit' (Eph. 3:16)

DAILY PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

MORNING

Relax your body ...

Calm your mind and imagination ...

Affirm that God is present ...

Ponder these words from scripture:

'Be filled with the Spirit.'

'Be guided by the Spirit.'

'Walk by the Spirit.' (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16 & 5:25)

PRAYER FOR DIVINE INFILLING

Father in heaven, Yours is a Spirit of truth and love. Pour that same Holy Spirit into my body, my mind and my soul. Preserve me this day from all illusions and false inspirations. Reveal your presence your word and your will to me in a way I can understand.

I thank you that you will do this, while giving me the ability to respond, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

[Pause for a moment's reflection]

NIGHT

Relax your body ...

Calm your mind and imagination ...

Affirm that God is present ...

Consider these words:

God's presence is not discerned at the time when it is upon us, but afterwards when we look back upon what is gone and over. - St. John Henry Newman

Use one or more of the following three prayers:

PRAYERS FOR DISCERNMENT

Father in heaven, help me to recall with gratitude those occasions when I was aware of your presence today and to savour again what you meant to me ...
(Pause for a moment's reflection)

Help me to become aware of the promptings and inspirations you have given me today, and to know whether I responded to them or not ...

(Pause for a moment's reflection)

Enlighten my heart to recognise any un-loving mood, attitude, desire or action that saddened your Holy Spirit today ...

(Pause for a moment's reflection)

FINAL PRAYER

Father in heaven, Thank you for the gift of your Spirit. Today, it has urged me to see you more clearly, to love you more dearly and to follow you more nearly. As for my

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	shortcomings, please forgive them. And now, bless me as I sleep, so that refreshed by your Spirit, I may rise to praise you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
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[A copy of this prayer in leaflet format is given in a separate file: ZLSS Holy Spirit Prayer]

Conclusion

As you try to live your new life in Christ you can take courage from the following words of St Paul,

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).

Sharing groups

1. What was your most notable memory/experience/learning of the last seven weeks?
2. Hebrews 10:24-25 says: *"let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another."* What group could you be associated with, now that the Seminars are coming to an end, which would help you to grow as a Christian by providing you with adult faith formation?

Final prayer

Holy Spirit, divine consoler,
I adore you as my true God, with God the Father and God the Son.
I give you my heart and offer you my ardent thanksgiving
for all the graces you never cease to bestow on me.
Grant me the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude,
knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord,
so that I might rightly direct all my actions, referring them to God my last
end; so that having loved him and served him in this life,
I may have the happiness of possessing him eternally in the next. Amen.