

Keep on Being Filled with the Spirit

It was rightly said during the course of the seminars that Baptism in the Spirit is the beginning of a new beginning. At that stage the person aims to grow, as St Paul pointed out: "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Paul said in 1 Thess 4:1-3: "we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified." On another occasion St Paul said that the aim is to: "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24).

St Thomas Aquinas said that when people are filled with the Spirit, the Spirit *dwells* in them in such a way as to *make them new*. Instead of being a one-off event, baptism in the Spirit initiates a process of growth that can be deepened and strengthened, as the years go by, by new infillings. Thomas wrote: "There is an invisible sending with respect to an advance in virtue or an increase of grace . . . Such an invisible sending is especially to be seen in that kind of increase of grace whereby a person moves forward into some new act or some new state of grace."

I intend to propose a number of ways in which we can grow in personal holiness which presupposes regular reception of the sacraments, esp., of reconciliation and the Eucharist. In his Apostolic Declaration, *Rejoice and be Glad*, Pope Francis had interesting things to say about holiness. Here are two of them. "At its core, holiness is *experiencing*, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life" (par. 20). "Holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full" (par. 21).

In this input I'm going to share some personal reflections on ways in which I have tried to grow in the Spirit over the years, in the hope that they will be helpful for you. It will involve the following five points. Needless to say, many others could have been added.

- 1) Have an abiding sense of having been put at rights with God by grace through trust in Jesus.
- 2) Have a strong sense of the divine indwelling.
- 3) Express the spirit of love by keeping the Golden Rule of Mt 7:12
- 4) Prayerfully ponder the scriptures in order to know the person, word and will of the Lord more deeply.
- 5) Share the Gospel with others, in word and deed. In blessing others, in this way, you will be blessed.

I'm sure a lot more could be said, about growth in the Spirit, which is synonymous with discipleship and holiness, but subjectively, the following are points that have helped me greatly over the years.

1. Justified by faith

When I was baptised in the Spirit, I realised with great conviction that I was being saved, not because I earned, merited or deserved salvation, but solely because of what Jesus did by offering me the free gift of his mercy and love. As a result, I came

to love what St Paul said in Eph 2:7-8 in the *Amplified Bible* translation: "For it is by grace [God's remarkable compassion and favour drawing you to Christ] that you have been saved [actually delivered from judgment and given eternal life] through faith. And this [salvation] is not of yourselves [not through your own effort], but it is the [undeserved, gracious] gift of God." No wonder the well-known hymn talks about amazing grace. Although this truth lies at the heart of the kerygma, as Pope Francis says in par. 164 of *The Joy of the Gospel*: "This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, *the one which we must hear again and again in different ways.*" It is my belief that we need to be grounded in this life-giving truth, by means of daily meditation and prayer.

In par 56 of *Rejoice and be Glad*, Pope Francis said: "Only on the basis of God's gift, freely accepted and humbly received, can we cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation. We must first belong to God, offering ourselves to him who was there first, and entrusting to him our abilities, our efforts, our struggle against evil and our creativity, so that his free gift may grow and develop within us."

2] Be Aware of the Divine Indwelling

In 1974, I can remember how I tried to explain to a priest colleague what had happened to me when I was baptised in the Spirit. I can recall saying to him that when Jesus rose from the dead he could walk through the walls of buildings. Well, when I was baptised in the Spirit, Jesus, who up to then had been with me, walked through the walls of my body to live within me. From then on, I was able to say yes in response to St Paul's question in 2 Cor 13:5, "do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?" Many years later I came across par 521 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which says, "Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us." This statement is rooted in the teaching of St John Eudes (1601-1688). He quoted a well-known Pauline text, "I make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Jesus Christ for the sake of his body the Church" (Col 1:24). Then, he went on to observe that what Paul says about our sufferings can be extended to all our other activities.

Here is a quotation from Eude's book *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls*: "We can say that any true Christian, who is a member of Jesus Christ, and who is united to him by his grace, *continues* and *completes*, through all the actions that he carries out in the spirit of Christ, the actions that Jesus Christ accomplished during the time of his temporary life on earth. So that when a Christian prays, he continues and fulfils the prayer that Jesus Christ offered on earth. Whenever he works, he continues and fulfils the laborious life of Jesus Christ. Whenever he relates to his or her neighbour in a spirit of charity, then he continues and fulfils the relational life of Jesus Christ. Whenever he eats or rests in a Christian manner, he continues and fulfils the subjection that Jesus Christ wished to have to these necessities. The same can be said of any other action that is carried out in a Christian manner." So, when I am about to do anything, such as praying, teaching, preaching, loving and forgiving others I assert in faith that Christ is doing those things within me. I have come to love this prayer of St John Gabriel Perboyre CM which clearly expresses this belief:

"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)."

3] Pray the Scriptures

When I visited Mount Tabor a few years ago, the words God the Father addressed to the three apostles and through them to all Christian disciples, made a huge impression on me, namely: "This is my Son, whom I love. *Listen to him!*" (Mk 9:7). In this context, I was also impressed by the fact that the last recorded words of Mary in the Gospels were: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). The principal way in which we tune in to the word and the will of God is by reading and praying the scriptures by using *lectio divina*, which is so highly recommended by the Church.

The first three stages of *lectio* stress the importance of what the praying person does, i.e., reading, reflecting and praying. However, the key to *lectio* is what God does when we engage in contemplation. At this point there is a need for physical stillness and an inner stillness of the mind and imagination. I find that praying silently in tongues is a great help in this regard, as St Paul said: "if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful" (1 Cor 14:14). Speaking about what is likely to happen at this point, St Vincent de Paul said: "In this the soul, in the presence of God, does nothing else but receive from him what he bestows. It is without action, and God himself inspires it, without any effort on the soul's part, with all it can desire, and far more." He added, "God communicates many and excellent lights to his servants. In prayer, he enlightens their understanding with many truths incomprehensible to all save those who give themselves to prayer." In the words of St Paul in 2 Cor 3:18, this kind of contemplative prayer gradually transforms the person into the image of Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

As we conclude our prayer, we needed to be guided by the Spirit. This can happen in a number of ways. I will only mention two.

- Firstly, be for others what God has been for you in prayer, e.g., understanding, merciful, generous, non-judgmental etc.
- Secondly, the Lord may have given you a prompting to do something. Pope Francis says in par. 23 of *Rejoice and be Glad*: "Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision, you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world." At the end of prayer make a resolution which is single, precise and possible.

4] Express the Spirit of Love

Many years ago, I asked Jesus, over a period of months for a new revelation of his love in my life that I might better love others. My prayers were finally answered when I had a vision of Jesus standing before a monstrosity exposed on the altar. Red and white light were not only streaming from his raised hands, I felt the light of his mercy and love were being poured into my heart in a new way. I felt that Jesus was saying to me that he wanted me to express his love to others by ministering, with my hands, so to speak, in order to impart God's loving blessing to them.

Then I asked God how I was to show that love in a ministerial way. Eventually the answer I received was in the form of Mt 7:12, which says: "in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." When I thought about it I could see that the Golden Rule consisted of two interrelated elements, good-will and empathy.

- 1) Good-will means that one escapes the gravitational pull of self-absorption in order to want what is best for another person, especially if he or she is unattractive, poor and needy.
- 2) Empathy is the ability to stand in another person's shoes in order to sense in an understanding way what the other person is experiencing in order to react appropriately in emotional and practical ways. Because we are all so different, we cannot want what is best for another person until we know as a result of empathy what he or she is experiencing. This is a prayer I wrote asking for empathy:

"Lord Jesus, you told us that the teaching of the law and the prophets can be summed up in the words, "in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12). Grant me two precious gifts, the kind of love that wants what is best for others, and the empathy which not only senses in an understanding way what other people are experiencing but also the ability to respond to them with sensitivity in emotional and practical ways. Amen."

St Paul said that unless the things I do are done in love: "I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1). St John of the Cross reminded us that: "In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone." As a result, when I go to the sacrament of confession, I focus mainly on the ways in which I have failed to show love to others.

5] Have the Courage to Evangelise

St John Paul II said in par. 90 of *The Mission of the Redeemer*: "The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission. This was the earnest desire of the Council. The Church's missionary spirituality is a journey toward holiness." In other words, a person will not be truly holy who does not evangelise, and one cannot evangelise effectively without being holy. Pope Francis has pointed out that like the earliest disciples, modern Christians will need the grace of boldness and courage in order to overcome the inhibiting effects of such things as shyness, political correctness, human respect, fear of rejection, contempt and mockery. Like the apostles in Acts 4:29 we need to pray that the Lord will bless us with confidence and fearless courage through

an anointing of the Holy Spirit, while remembering that “For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Lk 6:38). Here is a prayer which asks for such courage:

“Lord Jesus, the good I wish to do, I cannot do, but you are living out the mysteries of your life in me. Enable me, by the same Spirit that animated your life of loving service, to continue and fulfil your mission in my life. Give me the ability to do evangelise with confidence and courage, and I thank you, that you will enable me to achieve even more than I can ask, or imagine, through the power of your Spirit at work within me. Amen.”

Conclusion

In the Autumn 2021, a book I wrote was published, entitled, *Providence and Blessing: Living a Purpose Filled Life*, which expands on what I have said in this talk. It describes how each one of us needs to discover our personal vocation within the context of God’s providential purposes for creation and the Christian Church. I want to conclude with a quotation of Pope Benedict XVI, which is taken from part two of his *Jesus of Nazareth*, “Lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into Heaven” (Lk 24:50-51). Jesus departs in the act of blessing. He goes while blessing, and he remains in that gesture of blessing.”

“Holy Spirit, inspire me;
Love of God, consume me;
On the true path, lead me;
Mary my mother, look upon me;
With Jesus, bless me;
From all evil, from all illusion,
from all danger, preserve me.”
(Prayer of St *Mary of Jesus Crucified Baouardy 1846-1876*)

This will be chapter 16 of a book *The Life in the Spirit Seminars Revised* which will be published by the New Springtime Community later this year.