

## **New Life in the Spirit**

Many of us have been blessed over the years with the Pentecostal Lifestyle newsletter that was put out by Fr. Tom Bill so faithfully. At the urging of Fr. Tom and the WOCCR team I am going to try to continue in that vein. I know Fr. Tom put a lot of work and effort into keeping up on things and keeping us all informed, encouraged, enthused, and connected.

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*Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God (Leon Bloy).*

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### **A New and Charismatic look at our Lenten Practices**

When we think of Lent we often think of things penitential, of solemn music, and of denying ourselves. All this is part of Lent but for us it often becomes the dominant theme, and so we can miss much of what is also part of Lent. The focus of Lent is baptism, which is new life in Christ. And with baptism comes the Holy Spirit. Immediately after Jesus is baptized the Holy Spirit comes upon him and he then prepares himself, in the wilderness, for his public ministry.

The three traditional Lenten practices have been prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The practice of fasting is often the more dominant aspect of our understanding of Lent. This represents all ascetical practices, and we see it in our notion of giving something up for Lent, of making a sacrifice. This is essentially a religious take of our earthly practice of cleaning up our homes so as to make them more livable and welcoming to guests. We are encouraged to examine our lives and to deal with the things that lead to the spiritual versions of clutter, dirt, things needing repair and cleaning, and even some renovation or removal. These all help us to refocus on what is spiritually important and essential for our lives. From a charismatic perspective, we want our hearts and lives to be more open to and welcoming of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps there are some things the Lord has put on our heart that need to be dealt with. And perhaps that will involve some commitment from us, and inviting the Holy Spirit more deeply into those aspects of our lives. The Hispanics have a saying, “*mi casa es su casa*” which literally means “my house is your house.” That’s how we want to approach the Lord and be welcoming of the Spirit in our lives.

Usually we see prayer in the form additional devotional practices such as Stations of the Cross, special Reconciliation services, and extra prayer options. However, prayer is our relationship with God, our friendship with God. In any friendship, that relationship develops through time spent with another, getting to know them better, and loving what they love. The same is true of our relationship with God. It grows and deepens through in these ways, and is damaged in a similar fashion to our earthly relationships. That damage is usually sin. When we damage our earthly relationships we usually apologize, make good what we did or said, and move on together. This is also what we do with God, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We have this sacrament, not because we are so bad, but because God loves us so much. We can also strengthen our prayer life this Lent, perhaps by praying

regularly every day, perhaps by praying a little longer and more deeply, and by greater use the spiritual gifts during our prayer. When we get a word from the Lord, write it down, reflect on it, pray about it, and let the Lord move our heart and spirit. We can also use scripture to focus our prayer, perhaps taking a Gospel and reading it from the perspective of growing in understanding of Jesus as a friend.

Finally, we have the discipline of almsgiving, which is usually seen as giving money to the poor in some form. The heart of this Lenten practice much more than giving money. It is really about growing in generosity of heart and of service in every way. We are challenged to look beyond ourselves, our own desires and wants, and to see those of others and to respond to them in some way. The purpose is to help us become less selfish and more selfless, in other words to love as Jesus loved and serve as he served. We can volunteer to help at our local prayer meeting in new ways. We can support our days of renewal, retreats, and other evangelistic events in ways we haven't done before. We can give extra time and energy in prayer praying for the needs of others and for the spread of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. God has blessed us in many ways, we need to bless others.

So let us make this Lent a season of transformation for ourselves, of growing in our relationship with the Lord, of serving as he did, and in seeking to grow in holiness as he calls us to..

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### *Evangelizing Everyone*

*"Nothing is more useless than a Christian who does not try to save others. Don't tell me that you are poor: the widow's two mites confront you; Peter, too, who said, 'Silver and gold have I none,' and Paul, so poor that he was often hungry. Don't plead your modest circumstances: they too were lowly and of humble station. Don't plead your ignorance: they too were uneducated. You may be a slave on the run; so was One simus. You may be ill; so was Timothy. Anybody can help his neighbor if he is only willing really to do what he can"*

*St. John Chrysostom, [Homily on Acts of the Apostles](#).*

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### **"The New Man We Are Called to Become"**

*Pope Benedict, Audience 12/10/08*

At this audience Pope Benedict had some important things to say about the Holy Spirit and new life. Here are some edited portions of his comments.

Human history, in fact, has two "beginnings," the first is "tainted by the abuse of freedom. But there exists "a second beginning of history, in Jesus Christ.

"We are linked to the first humanity through biological descent," but "how is the new humanity

realized, how does Jesus enter my life?"

St. Paul says that this takes place through the **Holy Spirit**. In the first place, "the Spirit knocks at the door of my heart, but in order that he may truly unite us, in order that he may overcome divisions and gather together those who are different, two elements are necessary, the word and proclamation, and the sacraments."

"St. Paul says, how can we call upon Jesus without having heard about him, without anyone to proclaim him, and how will they proclaim if they have not been sent?" Faith "comes from hearing, it is not a product of our mind, it is a product of proclamation, of listening, it is not only an interior journey, but a relationship, it presupposes an encounter between the proclamation and the other, it presupposes the existence of the other who proclaims and creates communion. And the one who proclaims is sent, he is part of a structure of mission that begins with Jesus, sent by the Father, and continues with the apostles and with the Church."

In other words the Holy Father reminds us of the mission we have from Christ, and of which we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the Gospel and Christ himself. The Apostles and disciples were charged with continuing the mission of Jesus. That means us! The Acts of the Apostles is the story of this beginning. And we are called to continue writing that story today, with our words, actions, and lives.

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### ***Obedience To God.***

*"Abraham said: 'Here I am!' (Gn. 22:1); Moses said: 'Here I am!' (Ex. 3:4); Samuel said: 'Here I am!' (1 Sam. 3:4); Isaiah said: 'Here I am!' (Is. 6:8); Mary said: 'Here I am!' (Lk. 1:38); Jesus said: 'Here I am!' (Heb. 10:9). But among all the others in the Bible one 'Here I am!' is missing. When, after Adam had sinned, God called him, perhaps to pardon him, instead of answering, 'Here I am' Adam went and hid himself*

*Raniero Cantalamessa, Obedience, pp. 76-77*

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### **Testimonies: Getting our Attention through Answered Prayer**

Jim does consumer research on new products for large food companies. This frequently takes him to supermarkets where he interviews consumers as they interact with products. As a result, he usually develops a pretty good relationship with store managers.

Not long ago, Jim was in a store in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he met Mike, the manager. It was Wednesday and Mike was looking forward to a busy week. Many people would be getting their government checks and would be coming in over the next few days to load up for the month. This

sounded good to Jim since it would mean more opportunities to interview a lot of customers, allowing him to provide solid consumer feedback to his clients.

But Thursday and Friday turned out to be very slow. When Jim visited the store on Saturday, he asked Mike how it was going. Mike was not happy. "Not good," Mike said. "I'm not going to make my payroll at this rate. I don't know what I am going to do. My employees won't get paid." Jim could see the worry in Mike's eyes. His body almost shook with anxiety.

Jim was not unfamiliar with tough times, having been in business for more than 30 years. He had experienced his share of difficult business years, but he had also experienced the presence of the Lord through them and his confidence in the Lord spilled over in him.

Jim said, "Mike, let me pray with you and ask Jesus to increase your store traffic." Mike agreed. Jim prayed, "Lord Jesus, increase the number of shoppers here in the store RIGHT NOW so Mike will be able to meet his payroll. Amen!"

Mike timidly replied, "I sure hope that works."

Jim stayed around for a while and could see the difference within 30 minutes. The number of shoppers had increased dramatically, 2 to 3 times. It was great being in a busy store. It was going strong a couple of hours later when Jim had to leave to check on another location. He left, thanking the Lord for His immediate generosity.

On Monday, Jim returned to the store to thank Mike for being able to use his store and to say goodbye. As soon as Mike saw Jim, he jumped out of his chair, went to him and said, "Jim, I not only met my payroll, but I told my boss that I had \$2,000 in additional profit from business just on Saturday. Those prayers really worked. Thanks." Then Mike gave Jim a big bear hug!

Jim said, "Mike, you matter to God and are special in His eyes. This is just the beginning. Always remember who met your payroll and know that God is just getting started with you. He wants you to know Him, and to embrace and serve Him."

Mike said, "I know."

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Finally, let us all keep those suffering in the current economic crisis in our prayers. This is a time of great stress and anxiety for many people. Things we placed our trust and security in are no longer providing them. This is also a time of fear for many. Let us pray that people are protected from the evil one, that their needs will be met, and that their hearts may be more open to the saving presence of Jesus and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Come in your love and power Lord!

Fr Peter Smith