

## **New Life in the Spirit: Pentecost 2009**

As we celebrate Pentecost and the empowering of the Apostles and disciples by the Holy Spirit, let us be grateful for what the Holy Spirit has done in our lives. The baptism in the Spirit, however one experiences it, is a life changer. It is also a gift we bring to the Church in that we become far more vibrant Christians and this affects our lives as Catholics. Cardinal Suenens wrote that "The soul of Renewal, Baptism in the Spirit, is a grace of Pentecostal refreshment offered to all Christians". This grace can lead us into a personal, living relationship with God, and will help us to seek holiness. With the Baptism in the Holy Spirit come the spiritual gifts or charisms, which the second Vatican Council reminds us are "fitting and useful for the needs of the Church" (Lumen Gentium 12).

Charles Whitehead, a leader in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the UK and internationally, lists a variety of ways in which the Holy Spirit has blessed the Church through the Renewal:

- Among the gifts we bring are prayer, and praise and worship, empowered by the gift of tongues.
- Equally important is our expectant faith, we are confident that God is going to act. Sadly this expectancy is often missing in the Church, many have a creedal faith but no expectation that the Lord will ever do anything.
- A strong belief that the Lord heals and works miracles through ordinary people, and we have seen many healings through prayer and the laying on of hands. But we must also admit that there have been many more occasions when people have not been healed. We do not know why the Lord heals one and not another, but we do know that we must persist in prayer for those who are sick.
- Other gifts we bring to the Church are a sense of joy and celebration, it's exciting to be a Christian today!
- We have a desire to be witnesses, secure in the knowledge that we are empowered for the New Evangelization and for service, we have received all that we need to proclaim Christ.
- The Charismatic Renewal has helped to bring alive one of the theological virtues, hope. Millions of people now know they can trust in God's promises, he is faithful.
- Another important gift we bring is our prophetic voice in the Church and in the world. The charismatic gift of prophecy is one of the ways God speaks to us, and in our materialistic and selfish society, we desperately need to hear his voice. We are called both to speak and to act in a prophetic way.
- Because the Spirit is very much alive in us, we are also aware of the need for intercession and spiritual warfare. Through the Holy Spirit we understand that there is a spiritual battle going on and we are part of it. We recognize the presence of evil spirits as well as the Holy Spirit. We therefore have a role and a task to defend the Church against the power of the evil one, which those who are not aware of the spiritual battle cannot do.
- Finally, the Spirit has given us a concern for justice, peace, and social issues. These things are important, and we are called to bring them to greater prominence. We know we must be practical as well as spiritual.

Perhaps we could remind ourselves of these blessings by taking these points raised by Charles, and sharing with one another in our prayer groups how we have experienced them in our lives and have seen them in the lives of those around us. God blesses us greatly, but we don't always realize that. It's good to remind ourselves of God's goodness to us as it arouses in us gratitude to Him and a deeper willingness to be open to Him and to serve Him.

**May the Lord renew the grace of Pentecost in each of us, and make us his witnesses in word and action!**

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*EVANGELIZING CATHOLICS : "The basic reality in this country is that most Catholics have never been evangelized. That is a very sad thing to say, but we have never engaged our people in a process in which they themselves come to discover the person of Jesus Christ, the power of the gospel and the excitement of discipleship in following the Lord. What has happened is we have been able to give the sacraments, and we have been able to catechize, but without that underpinning of evangelization first" - Cardinal Mahony.*

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## Prayer Meeting Formats

One of the issues that came up in discussion during my visit to the prayer group at St Mary's, Eugene, was that of the format of prayer meetings. The concern was that once the newness of it became normal, it soon became the same old thing from week to week. It is true that in some cases variety is the spice of life, and this can also be true of prayer meetings. One thing that I know worked reasonably well from my past involvement in campus prayer meetings was in changing the format and focus of the meetings from week to week. We utilized several different formats in sequence so people did not settle into a prayer meeting rut.

### 1. Regular meeting

These meetings followed the traditional format and had a progression something like this.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord
- d. A period of personal sharings
- e. A brief period of praying for intercessions and particular needs of people
- f. Announcements
- g. A final song

### 2. Scripture Study meeting

These meetings began like normal meetings and then went in a very different direction

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord
- d. People are split up into groups of about five or six people each, and a group facilitator is named
- e. Everyone gets a copy of the scripture study and then is asked to take five minutes or more to prayerfully read the scripture and reflect on the questions
- f. For the rest of the meeting until just before the close, the groups discuss the questions and the scriptures
- g. Gather for any announcements
- h. Final song

For these meetings we prepared a handout for people that was a single page, one or both sides being used. It began with one or more scriptures printed on it. Thereafter we had a series of five to eight questions that were based on the scriptures. The questions were design to lead people in a particular progression and to certain answers. The discussion was not meant to rigidly adhere to the questions but to serve as a guide or focus to the discussion. The overall purpose was to help people become more familiar with scripture, more familiar with how to do simple scripture studies, and how to participate in group discussions.

### 3. Personal Sharing meeting

These meetings also began in the normal fashion but the focus was on sharing how God had worked in our lives, or how we had seen God at work around us over the previous few weeks. What is different about this is that we did this in small groups, similar to the scripture study meetings.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord
- d. People are split up into groups of about five or six people each, and a group facilitator is named
- e. Then the groups take the bulk of the remaining time and share with one another how God was working in their lives, how they had seen God at work around them over the previous few weeks

- f. Gather for any announcements
- g. Final song

When group leaders hear a sharing that is really inspiring or would be very helpful for everyone to hear, they should encourage that person to share that at the next regular meeting so everyone can hear it. This allows the core team to distill some really good sharings from all those given so that when they all come during one regular meeting, people are really moved and inspired. And only those in the small group where it was first shared would be hearing it for the second time. It also allows the small group leader to help the person sharing, to hone their sharing and make especially effective in the larger group

#### **4. Praying with people meeting.**

These meetings begin the normal way but have a large part them focused on praying with one another

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord
- d. People are split up into groups of about five or six people each, and a group facilitator is named
- e. Then the groups take the bulk of the remaining time and pray with each member for whatever particular needs they may have. Remind people that the goal is for everyone in each group to receive prayer if they desire it so they can't monopolize the group for their own needs
- f. About ten minutes from the end let people know so they can make sure everyone has an opportunity for prayer
- f. Gather for any announcements
- g. Final song

#### **5. Inspired Sharing motivated Praise and worship**

This is a variation on the regular meeting and the personal sharing meeting

- a. Begin with an opening song, then have everyone sit
- b. Then have three to five people give good sharings, ones that really move people
- c. Then continue with the praise and worship, but key the songs off the sharings, and let it go on for some time
- d. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit
- e. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord
- f. The leader then draws the meeting to a close with a short commentary on what was heard, what may have come through spiritual gifts, and what to remember in the week ahead
- g. Announcement
- h. Closing song

In this format we use the selected sharings, and any others that may be given, to inspire and move those present to praise and worship the Lord more deeply. That in turn will usually lead to a greater depth of spiritual gifts and a greater openness to the Lord. If these kind of meetings go well, people can really be touched by the Lord in them and experience his presence deeply. It is important to remind people what they heard at the end, and to give them something to focus on in the week ahead.

#### **6. Fellowship meeting**

This type of meeting is focused on developing relationships and friendships among prayer group members.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord
- d. Announcements
- e. Break into the party for the rest of the evening. Encourage people to talk to at least one person they don't

know, or don't know well.

In this way people become more attached to the meeting and to some of the people attending. It also provides another opportunity for informal sharing of life among the participants. In addition, it allows people to relax and enjoy each others company in a setting that's familiar to them

You may want to experiment with some of these general formats to see what works best for your prayer group. Next time I will attach a couple of samples of scripture study outlines we used.

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*Do not let your life be like a shooting star, which lights up the sky for only a brief moment. Let your life be like the sun, which always burns brightly in the Heavens, bringing light and warmth to all those on earth. Let your light shine! - Matthew Kelly*

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### **Testimony: Prayer Breaks Through the Battle of Distraction**

*The following story is from Tom, a young man who recently entered the workplace .*

It was an early Monday morning and I was really tired, not too excited about going to work, and late in getting out the door. After barely catching the bus, I began my prayer time, as I usually did. I felt like my prayer time was reflective of my morning: not very effective.

On a larger scale, I felt like I wasn't doing anything to build God's Kingdom and had even begun questioning some of my most important beliefs. I thought about everything for a moment and it all became clear. The evil one was at work and didn't want me to get in the way of his plans. I decided that I wasn't going to put up with this; that I was going to be Christ to every person and situation that I encountered that day.

From the moment I reached work, things began to happen. I work for an industrial and control component distributor on the "inside sales team" providing technical support to customers and setting up new accounts. Today, however, they needed help in the warehouse because the lead shipper was not at work. To make matters worse, the shipper who was doing all the heavy lifting, Bill, had a severely injured back. I was sent out back to help him.

It turned out that Bill was worse off than had been described. He could barely walk and was so overcome with pain that he said he would have rather been shot (which he had been once before). Immediately, I was overcome with a desire to pray with and heal Bill. I knew this was the Lord!

But right away, I was tempted to back out because I had never prayed with anyone at work before and besides, he would probably say no. I refused to believe that thought and pressed on. When I got a chance, I explained to Bill that I believed in the healing power of Jesus Christ and asked if I could say a quick prayer with him. His response: "Knock yourself out, man." So in the middle of the warehouse I said a quick prayer with him and then moved on with my day.

When I got to work the following morning, I happened to bump into Bill. He had a bigger smile on his face than I had ever seen on him before. I asked him how his back was doing and he said, "A hell of a lot better than yesterday! I think it might have been you, Tom!"

It was amazing! Bill was able to get back to work and walk without blinding pain. He began to ask me questions about my parish, questions I never would have expected him to ask. It was clear that the Lord had healed him and given him more faith!

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