

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Charles Connolly

My dear brethren, twenty-five years ago this year Blessed Josemaría made a consecration of himself, of all the members of Opus Dei and all its apostolic works to the Holy Spirit. This act was the culmination of a long process which had begun when he was a young priest in Madrid. Even at that time his devotion to the Holy Spirit was deeply rooted and was expressed in a short prayer he composed and frequently said:

Come, o Holy Spirit! Enlighten my understanding so that I may know your commands; strengthen my heart against the snares of the enemy; inflame my will ... I have heard your voice, and I do not want to harden my heart and resist saying: "Later ... tomorrow." *Nunc coepi!* Now I begin! Right now, lest there be no tomorrow for me.

O Spirit of truth and of wisdom, Spirit of understanding and of counsel, Spirit of joy and of peace! I want whatever you want; I want because you want; I want as you want; I want whenever you want.

Stranger no longer

At a later stage in his life, Blessed Josemaría lamented that 'for some people, unfortunately, the Paraclete is the Great Stranger, the Great Unknown. He is merely a name that is mentioned, but not Someone, not one of the three Persons in the one God, with whom we can converse and with whose life we can live.'¹

1. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is passing by*, no. 134.

We might then ask ourselves: 'what exactly does the Holy Spirit do in the minds and hearts of the faithful and how can I come to be on more friendly terms with him?' The answer to the question can be found in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

To prepare us

The Spirit's first task is to *prepare* a people fit for the Lord and thus to draw us all to Christ. This he does in a special way through the liturgy of the Church and the reading of the Scriptures which is always an integral part of that liturgy. To the extent that we allow him, he will awaken our faith, turn our hearts to the Lord and enable us to adhere more perfectly to the will of the Father. For this reason today's *Second Reading*, taken from St Paul's Epistle to the Romans, reminds us that 'the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness' (Rom 8:26). When the Spirit encounters in us a response of faith, which he himself has aroused, he brings about a genuine cooperation on our part in God's work of redemption and salvation.

He helps us understand

Secondly, the Holy Spirit *manifests* the Risen Jesus to us, opening our mind to understand the meaning of his life, death and resurrection. For this reason the Spirit is often called 'the Church's living memory' (cf. Jn 14:26). He calls to mind the great events of salvation, especially in the memorial of the Eū-

charist. We are asked to respond with consent and commitment. How often today do we Christians fail in this matter of consent and commitment!

We find it hard to take on board, to consent to all that God has done for us in his works of creation, redemption and sanctification. We treat creation as if we were its masters and not its servants, forgetting, as the *First Reading* from the Book of Genesis told us, that we are in the world to cultivate and tend it. And to do so through our work. We fail to play our full role in the work of Redemption not realizing that the work of re-evangelization called for by the Holy Father is to be carried out by us, in and from our place in society. We forget that it is *our* apostolic activity which will pave the way for our own sanctification and that of others. We must cooperate too in the work of our sanctification. As St Augustine put it: 'God who made you without you, will not save you without you.' Through our ascetical struggle we allow the Holy Spirit space to manoeuvre in our lives and lead us along that narrow road which leads to salvation (cf. Mt 7:14).

Today's world seems to be lacking in a sense of commitment. Please God ours will *not* be lacking. And when the Lord asks: 'Who shall be my messenger? Who is to go on this errand?' we shall respond with the prophet Isaiah: 'I am here at your command; make me your messenger' (Is 6:8).

Present here and now

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit not only recalls the events which save us, but *actualizes* them, makes them present here and now. And so, in a few min-

utes, we will ask the Father to make holy these gifts of ours 'by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ'² Thus we do not repeat the Paschal Mystery, we celebrate it with 'an outpouring of the Holy Spirit which makes the unique mystery present.'³ For this reason, many years ago, in a homily entitled *The Eucharist, mystery of faith and love* Blessed Josemaría referred us to the teaching of St John Damascene, the last Father of the Eastern Church, who stated that 'by the power of the Holy Spirit the transformation of the bread into the body of Christ takes place'⁴ and then proceeded himself to tell us that 'to live the holy Mass means to pray continually, and to be convinced that, for each one of us, it is a personal meeting with God.'⁵ I hope and pray that this Mass, this evening, will be such a meeting for all of us, not least for myself.

Communion with Christ

Fourthly, the Holy Spirit *brings us into communion with Christ*, so as to form his Body. 'We feel ourselves united in Christ with all Christians.'⁶ And thus we are brought into communion with the Father so that, as branches of the vine, we may bear much fruit. Our *Gospel Reading* this evening reminds us that the Apostles had worked all night without catching anything. Why

2. *Eucharistic Prayer III*.

3. *Catechism*, no. 1104.

4. Quoted in *Christ is passing by*, no. 85.

5. *Christ is passing by*, no. 88.

6. *Ibid.*

so? Because they had worked without Christ. But once he is present in the boat and they cast the net as he commanded, 'they filled the two boats to sinking point' (Lk 5:7). We, the scattered children whom God gathered together in the Spirit, will become a living sacrifice to God, transformed into the image of Christ, concerned for the unity of the Church and acting as witnesses to Christ at the heart of society.

So, the Holy Spirit prepares us, recalls for us the mystery of Christ, makes it actually present and establishes our communion with the Father in Jesus Christ.

Roman at heart

To finish I should like you to know that fifty years ago Blessed Josemaría went to Rome, to *romanize* Opus Dei, as he put it. In *The Way* he had written earlier: 'Thank you, my God, for that love for the Pope you have placed in my heart.'⁷

We are accustomed to speak of Pope St Leo *the Great*, and Pope St Gregory *the Great*. I am sure that in a hundred years time those who come after us in the faith will speak joyfully of Pope John Paul II *the Great*. You and I are extremely privileged to live during the present pontificate and we should thank God for this privilege. But privileges have to be paid for and at our judgment God will ask us to render an account for having lived during the

time of a Pope who has come to us from afar.

Some twenty years ago a Christian philosopher wrote: 'The magical power of the name of Rome was once sensed as a distant hope and a dim promise by monks in the island of St Patrick and far north in the Hebrides There was then only one City, and it was remembered by all men but present to very few of them in those centuries when the forests came back to Europe and civilization dissolved in a swirling vortex of barbarian tribes.

'We enter once again a new dark age. There will soon be only one city of any significance: the *only* City: *Civitas Aeterna* [the Eternal City]: Rome.'⁸

And so, O Holy Spirit 'we beseech you always to assist your Church, and in particular the Holy Father, so that he may guide us with his word and example and attain eternal life with the flock entrusted to him.' (*Consecration to the Holy Spirit*).

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is the text of a homily given at Masses to celebrate the feast of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá in St Anne's Church, Derriaghly, Belfast (June 26), and the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Derry (June 27).

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7. No. 573.

8. Frederick Wilhelmsen in *Position Paper* 270/71 (June/July 1996), p. 220.