

CLOSE OF CHARISMATIC CONFERENCE

Crescent College
Sunday 1 October 2006

The followers of Moses were fighting about which of them had really received the Spirit. Two men began to prophesy; they were not members of the group of seventy elders that Moses had chosen. Some of his followers turned to Moses and asked him to stop them. But he didn't see the presence of the Spirit as something he should try to limit or control. He knew well that God works how and where he wills and speaks through whomever he wills. So, instead of feeling threatened or angry, he rejoiced to see evidence of the presence and action of God where he had not expected to see it: "If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets!" he said; "If only the Lord gave his spirit to them all!"

That wish was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost: the Apostles were so full of the enthusiasm of the Good News that people suspected that they were drunk. No they're not, Peter said, what is happening is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: "In the last days it will be, God declares, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2: 16f).

We have no need to argue about which of us has received the Spirit – we all have, in our Baptism and Confirmation. "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6) So where in today's world can one find the prophets among the followers of Christ? When we speak about our faith, which is not that often, are not, generally speaking, so full of enthusiasm that people wonder whether we are sober! Nor is our Christian community so full of prophecy that people are saying that somebody should be stop it. "If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets!" If Moses were around today, would he feel that his wish has been fulfilled in us? We are the prophets for today's world.

We are all meant to be full of the Holy Spirit, in other words to be prophets. A prophet speaks for God, speaks the truth of God in his or her own situation. The prophet sees the issues and the challenges and the distortions of the time from God's point of view. The prophet speaks for God, not by standing in front of to a barrage of microphones and reading out a carefully crafted written statement. The prophet, in speaking for God, does not simply recite words that are not his or her own. The prophet speaks for God because he or she is open to the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts who cries out with sighs too deep for words and enables us to call God *Abba*.

I believe that it is perfectly clear what the great issue of our time is, what today's prophets need to address. Pope John Paul put it this way: "Our age speaks of the silence or absence of God"¹. For many people, God has disappeared below their horizon². We live at a time which is uncomfortable with talk about religion and Church. We live in a culture which wants religion to know its place and avoid intruding itself into the public arena.

Our time is like the time when God called the prophet Samuel: "the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision" (I Sam 3:1). Who speaks for God in the increasingly important worlds of information technology and multinational companies, of growing inequalities, increasing tensions, of wars and proliferation of nuclear weapons, of scarcer oil supplies and damaged environment? Today's prophet, like all prophets, proclaims God's presence and action, God's presence and action here and now in our world.

It is a world that has largely lost the ability to wonder and to be amazed. We like things to fit; we don't want to have to question our assumptions or to hear a disturbing challenge, or to be called to respond to something greater than we ever thought possible. Perhaps we might list a few of the characteristic of the prophet in the early twenty-first century, especially here in Ireland.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Master in the Faith*, 14.

² JOHN PAUL II, Pontifical Council for Culture, 5 March 1988.

The prophet today must be one **who recognises the newness and the wonder of the Gospel**. As Cardinal Montini put it before he became Paul VI, the great truths that will tend to become routine, the incarnation, the redemption, the descent of the Holy Spirit must become live and fresh and immediate³. That is the first thing we need if we are really to see life as God sees it: to realise that, in Christ, all things are being made new. Our hopes and our vision and our understanding are too limited, too matter-of-fact, too limited by our own sinfulness really to grasp a truth that is beyond anything our minds could conceive, anything our hopes could imagine. We have been called to a fulfilment beyond all our expectations. The false prophet promises more of the same; wealth and power and influence – bread which cannot satisfy. The true prophet promises new, utterly ‘illuminated and transfigured’⁴ life.

A prayer of Cardinal Suenens⁵ expresses it like this:

Send your Spirit, first of all with priority to create me anew, *all of me*.
Set me free from my sins, my fears, my complexes, and fill me to overflowing
with your wisdom, your power, your life.

The great question of our time is whether life has any meaning. We sense the fear of absurdity – is the great history of human life on this planet just going to be snuffed out perhaps by our own stupidity and greed and aggression?

The prophet, filled with the Spirit is a person **who recognises the fundamental truth that God is love, *Deus Caritas Est***. Pope Benedict said that this is “a kind of summary of the Christian life’, and ‘the fundamental decision of [our] life’: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us (I Jn 4:16)⁶. We live in a world which has a great deal of loneliness, in which many people feel unwanted, unappreciated, marginalised. It is a world which needs to learn to cry out, *Abba*, Father needs to know that we are surrounded by our Father’s infinite, merciful love.

Send your Spirit who searches out and reveals your unfathomable Father-tenderness
for all your sons and daughters, whether prodigal or not.
May he teach us to recognise your voice and to tune into it, without interference,
on your own wavelength.
May he teach us to pray, calling you by the name of Father,
with the heart of a child who knows that he is loved and understood...
May the Spirit win the victory over human oppositions and liberate us from the hatred and injustice
which tear us apart.

The prophet filled with the Spirit is a person who **recognises the deepest meaning of reality**. On this Day for Life it is good to remember the crucially important passage in the great encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* of Pope John Paul. The person who can celebrate and communicate the Gospel of Life must have a contemplative outlook. By that he means not a deep mystical experience, but the attitude which takes the time to wonder, to see life and especially to see human life, as a gift and to see the Creator reflected in all reality and in every person. The person who communicates that Good News, in other words the prophet, has an outlook which, as Pope John Paul told us, enables us to see the beauty of life, to accept it as a gift, and to discover in all things the reflection of the Creator and in every person the Creator’s living image⁷. The contemplative outlook is not so much a question of gazing on God, but of seeing the world through God’s eyes, through God’s revelation. It is the outlook of the prophet, who can speak the message, the word of God in a way that speaks to the people of his or her time.

Send your Spirit... may he lead us to understand the Gospel, verse by verse,

³ MONTINI, J. B., *The Priest*, Helicon Dublin 1963, p. 137.

⁴ VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

⁵ Excerpts slightly adapted from Suenens and Camara, *Charismatic Renewal and Social Action*, Darton, Longman & Todd 1980, pp.95-96.

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 83.

in its burning reality.

And may he help us so to translate it at the heart of the world
that when people see how Christians live, they may recognise the light of his face,
the tone of his voice, the compassion of his heart and the tenderness of his smile.

The prophet is not a spectacular fortune teller who knows how everything is going to turn out in a particular crisis, but a person who recognises the fundamental truth and challenge of the present. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit who blows when and where he wills (Jn 3:8).

But in another, more profound sense, the prophet does know the future. The prophet is the person who knows that our future lies in the culmination of God's plan for the world. We cannot give ourselves the gift of prophecy but we can refuse it. We can attach too much importance to things that are good in themselves. If we try to make them the purpose of our lives, they will never satisfy us: our wealth will rot as Jesus dramatically says in the Gospel. Even our own hands and feet and eyes are less important than what God offers us.

To put it another way, the Spirit's presence is not only comforting; it is also uncomfortable and challenging. The realisation that our lives as followers of Christ are founded on the all-powerful action of God is consoling, but it cannot be a source of complacency; it is the very opposite. As Karl Rahner expressed it on one occasion:

The Spirit of Pentecost is the spirit of holy unrest, of eternal discontent, the spirit that again and again startles us with the cry: "You still have far to go", the spirit that makes even the saints dissatisfied with themselves.. the spirit that wills to renew the face of the earth, the spirit of life in ever new forms, on new roads, in new vehicles, on bold ventures⁸.

We are at the service of a goal that is greater and more surprising than we could ever have imagined. We often pray that the Holy Spirit, "will renew the face of the earth". Do we ever stop to think what the fulfilment of that prayer might involve by way of a change in our lives?

It is easy enough to recognise and welcome the action of the Holy Spirit in the search for truth, in efforts for the promotion of justice, in opposition to violence and falsehood. But, as the French bishops put it over thirty years ago:

The Holy Spirit is never really received into our souls except when he disturbs our routine, sets our lives on fire and draws us on to greater courage and sharing in his work for the human race and for the gospel⁹.

The reality strikes when we walk along our road to Emmaus thinking, "We had hoped that this plan or expectation or appointment or undertaking would have been the way that led to a growth of the kingdom of God, and now it seems to be in ruins". We get the response as was given to the first Emmaus disciples: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things before entering his glory" (Lk 24:25,26). God's ways and not our ways, not because they are less wonderful than ours, but because they are infinitely more wonderful than our limited hopes.

May the Spirit create among us that communion in your family
which we gropingly seek,
and which springs from the sovereign communion
of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

"If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets!"

⁸ RAHNER, K., *Servants of the Lord*, Burns and Oates 1986, pp. 123, 124.

⁹ FRENCH BISHOPS, *Let us Proclaim the Mystery of Faith*, Veritas, Dublin 1979.

