

Filled with Joy
by the
HOLY SPIRIT



“HE GAVE UP HIS SPIRIT”

(Jn 19:30)

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Rejoice in the Spirit

In Chapter 10 of St Luke's Gospel, Jesus sends out seventy-two disciples to tell people that the kingdom of God is very near to them. These were not apostles, nor had they any special training or expertise. But they had followed Jesus and learned from him. Jesus expects all of his followers to be missionaries. Every Christian is sent to tell the world about the Good News which we have received from Jesus Christ.

The disciples came back delighted at the signs they had seen of how powerful the message was. Jesus rejoiced with them: "Filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, he said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children.'" (Luke 10:21)

Everybody has a part to play in spreading the Good News. But we cannot do it as isolated individuals. Jesus did not send the disciples out one by one but in pairs. Each pair went out conscious that they were part of the larger mission of the whole seventy-two. They also went out knowing that they had been sent by Jesus and would be returning to him.

The Listening Process which took place in the parishes at the end of last year – and which we must now try to carry forward – showed a widespread desire to work together in bringing the Good News more effectively to bear on the life of our parishes.

The Pope has asked that this year, 1998, should be dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It should be a year in which we learn to rejoice in the Holy Spirit because we recognise the power of the Gospel message at work. It should be a year in which we realise more fully that the message has been given to all of us so that it can be spread by all of us.

Many factors work against our efforts to show people the wonder of the Gospel of Christ. People's lives, including our own, are caught up in less important questions which blot out the deeper issues. The world is full of people who have not heard the Gospel and who, it would seem, do not wish to hear it.

We can feel powerless and discouraged at the scale of the task. That sense of helplessness comes from thinking that everything depends on us.

The Holy Spirit is the Giver of Life. From the Spirit we receive a share in the life of God, which "can develop and flourish only by the Spirit's action"¹.

That is the foundation for Christian joy and hope: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead has his home in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you" (Rom 8:11).

The Holy Spirit has his home in us, the Spirit who "causes all creation, all history, to flow together to its ultimate end, in the infinite ocean of God"². We may feel helpless, but the Spirit of God is renewing the face of the earth (Ps 104:31). When we try to spread the Good News we are not fighting a losing battle. On the contrary, we are part of that unconquerable flow of God's life.

The question for each of us is not whether God's plan for creation will reach its goal, but whether we will be part of that renewal of creation.

The Presence of the Spirit

It is the Spirit poured into our hearts who enable us to cry out: 'Abba, Father' (Rom 8:15). The first response of someone who knows that he or she has received the gift of the Holy Spirit is to give

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, 58.

² *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 64.

thanks to the Father, Lord of heaven and earth. In fact prayer is one of the signs of the presence of the life-giving Spirit:

“It is a beautiful and salutary thought that, wherever people are praying in the world, there the Holy Spirit is, the living breath of prayer”³.

There are other signs of his presence. This Year of the Holy Spirit is a time when we should be trying to recognise them. The Church, the diocese, the parish are founded on the activity of the Holy Spirit. That is something we acknowledge every time we celebrate Mass. We pray that we may “be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit” or that we “may be filled with the Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ”⁴.

Part of the purpose of our Listening Process was to help us to look for and to rejoice in the rich variety of the gifts which exist in our communities. The Spirit is the giver of gifts: “There are many different gifts, but it is always the same Spirit... There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all. The particular manifestation of the Spirit granted to each one is to be used for the general good” (1 Cor 12: 4, 6).

The gifts of each person are important. We are one body. Every part of the body is important to its overall health. If one part of the body is weak or suffering, the whole person is suffering: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’.” (1 Cor 12:21)

The sense of helplessness that we sometimes feel springs from a lack of trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit. One expression of that lack of trust is the failure to value and encourage the gifts that exist around us.

If we really expected to find the Spirit blowing where he wills, might we not be more ready to see how our own gifts are to be used for the general good? Might we not look more confidently in our community for the talents and gifts which are meant to do new and creative things? Might we be able to hear the Spirit speaking from the lips of someone we look down on or dislike?

Openness to the activity of the Spirit is at the core of the Gospel. “Faith, in its deepest essence is the openness of the human heart to the gift: to God’s *self-communication in the Holy Spirit*”⁵. The Holy Spirit makes the truth of Christ present in every time and place and makes it “alive and active in the soul of each individual”⁶.

Listening to the Spirit

It was good that so many parishes reflected on the needs that exist and on how we might listen together to what the Spirit tells us about meeting those needs.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are the foundation of what many looked for – *a stronger sense of community*⁷. Love and joy and peace and kindness, the building blocks of real community life are the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). Where there is forgiveness and where there is a welcome for all, the Holy Spirit is at work. The presence of the Holy Spirit is at the root of the desires that were widely expressed to find *new ways of communication* within the parish so that everyone can feel part of its life. At the deepest level, communication is not just about information – it is about uniting people. It is a work of the Holy Spirit who brings us together in Christ.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in each member of Christ’s body is the fundamental reason why there should be *participation by everyone in the life of the parish*. In Baptism and Confirmation, the

³ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 65

⁴ Eucharistic Prayers 2, 3.

⁵ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 51.

⁶ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 44.

⁷ The phrases in *italics* are from the report on the Listening Process.

Holy Spirit is given with all the gifts and fruits that are needed for the life of the community. The Holy Spirit speaks especially when people pray and work and reflect and learn together.

The Holy Spirit inspires the concerns which were widely expressed to ensure that the message of Christ will move vibrantly and fruitfully into the new millennium. There was a particular awareness of the importance of *sharing the Good News with the new generation* who will bring that message well into the twenty-first century. Many of them will live into a time when the twentieth century will seem a very distant memory! It will be their responsibility to carry the torch into that unknown and unknowable world. The same Spirit who renews the face of the earth is which them in that task.

In every Mass we pray that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, our gifts of bread and wine may be sanctified so that they “may become the body and blood of... Jesus Christ”⁸. The desire to *enrich our celebration of the liturgy* is a desire to receive the Holy Spirit more fully. In each liturgical celebration “there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery [of Christ’s death and resurrection] present”⁹.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

Many of these thoughts are focused on the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is a sacrament which highlights what it means to be a community. It promises encouragement and example and support to young people as they face the challenge of living as adult followers of Christ. It welcomes them into the adult community and into our responsibility to live and to speak the Good News in and to the world.

It would be a fine way of celebrating the Year of the Holy Spirit if each parish were to look honestly and openly at how it could better fulfil those commitments to its young people. Perhaps the best way to do that is to find ways of listening to how things appear to them.

Once Confirmation Day is over, how do we encourage and support them? Does the way we live our faith and the way we value it inspire and attract them? What opportunities do they have of participating in the adult Christian community and its responsibilities?

Confirmation is not just a ceremony to be performed and forgotten. It is a statement by the whole Church and by a particular parish that young members of the Church are a needed and vital part of any effort to renew and strengthen our Christian life. The Listening Process revealed a great awareness that the welcome for them and commitment of the whole Church to them needs to be more visible and effective.

At the very beginning of his pontificate Pope John Paul said: “Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life takes the catechumen in at a certain stage...”¹⁰. That is the challenge that Confirmation poses for all of us – are we a community of faith and Christian life which receives and encourages its younger members?

The Promise

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the reason why we can have hope. “You have been stamped with the Holy Spirit of the Promise who is the pledge of our inheritance” (Eph 1: 13, 14). The presence of the Holy Spirit is the sign that God has claimed us as his own: “I have called you by your name and you are mine” (Is 43:1).

That claim was ratified when Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit whom he “gave up” on the Cross (Jn 19:30) so that we could cry ‘Abba, Father’, as he does.

⁸ Eucharistic Prayers, 3, 4.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1104.

¹⁰ *Catechesi Tradendae*, On Catechesis in our Time, 24,

This is the basis of a hope which is unshakeable. No one in this life is ever beyond the reach of God's love. But life can sometimes seem a hopeless struggle.

There is an almost endless list of situations which can seem unbearable: the harsh reality of long-term unemployment, the pain of a broken marriage, the deep betrayal of trust involved in child sexual abuse, the suffering caused by the abuse of alcohol and drugs.

There are those whose sense of belonging to the Church is mixed with a sense of alienation or even rejection. There are people on whom the teaching of the Church can weigh heavily – people in second unions, women whose pregnancy brings fear and unhappiness, people of a homosexual orientation, people who find it hard to understand or accept some aspect of the Church's teaching.

There are people who have been struck by tragedy, people whose hopes have been shattered, people whose life is dominated by fear or anxiety.

Each person's life story is different. Each has his or her unique path. For some it seems very hard. For others it seems relatively easy – though appearances can be deceptive.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's pledge that the effort is worthwhile. God has called us, whatever our particular challenges and pains. His Spirit is within us as an assurance of where our journey is intended to lead. Our new life has already begun: we already share in the life of God: "With the sending of this Spirit into our hearts, there begins the fulfilment of that for which 'creation waits with eager longing'."¹¹

May this year lead us in joyful hope to a new awareness of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit so that, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, we may bless the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

+Donal Murray

Lent 1998

Dhá Thóradh Dhéag an Spioraíd Naoimh

Toil Dé go ndéanaimid,
dlí Dé go leanaimd,
ár n-antoil go smachtaimid,
srian lenár dteanga go gcuirimid,
ar Pháis Chríost go smaoineamid,
gach contúirt pheaca go sheachnaímid,
aithrí thráthuil go ndéanaimid,
bás naofa go bhfaighimid,
gnúis Dé go bhfeicimid,
ceol na n-aingil go gcluainimid,
ag moladh agus ag adhradh Dé go rabhaimid,
anois agus ar feadh na síoraíochta.
Amen

¹¹ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 14.