

“Life in the Spirit”
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As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, we recognize with thanksgiving one of the many early fruits that God has graciously provided. The initial members, who experienced this New Pentecost, found that those with whom they shared this experience were like the crowd to whom Peter preached his first proclamation.

He proclaimed the unconditional love of the Father by sending his own divine Son as the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of the prophets in the power of the Holy Spirit. When he emphatically stated that the Jesus whom they crucified was Lord and Messiah, they asked what they should do. He responded that they, like the disciples, needed to repent, accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and to ask for the anointing gift of the Holy Spirit. This they did. They were baptized and were filled with the anointing power of the Holy Spirit.

Then the Acts of the Apostles states: “they came together for apostolic instruction, for community, for prayer and the breaking of the bread.” Peter’s message and their subsequent response became the core of the initial Life in the Spirit Seminar (LIS).

In the very beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the leaders took what they experienced and what they read from the Acts to formulate the core teachings of this insightful seminar. Even though it has gone through many developments, adaptations, and titles, the basic teaching of LIS remains the same: God’s unmerited love; the reality of sin; the promised Savior, Jesus; the coming of the Holy Spirit to sanctify, empower and mission us to proclaim the Father’s saving plan to others; and a way to live and grow in the life of the Spirit, fulfilling the biblical plan of God, “to be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Over the years LIS was intended to be and has remained an effective tool for evangelization. Unfortunately, it is not used today as much as it should be. Many prayer groups seldom offer it or do so occasionally. As a result, we see, in the English-speaking Renewal, prayer groups becoming more like prayer clubs for the good of its members rather than evangelizing communities.

The question we need to ask as we approach the Golden Jubilee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is this: should prayer groups wait for people to come or should they go to them? Should they become pro-active by inviting individuals through the use of social media which is so commonplace today?

I will let Pope Francis give us both the answer and the motivation. “Spreading the Gospel means that we are the first to proclaim and live the reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, unity, and love that the Holy Spirit gives us.... Just as the Son of God went out of himself, in a sense, and became man for our sake and just as he gave his total self, embracing the cross for our sake, we are called to go out of our comfort zone to bring the Good News of God’s love and mercy to others... we are called to be radical revolutionaries, not in the world’s understanding, but in God’s. In this day and age, unless Christians are revolutionaries, they are not Christians. They must be revolutionaries through grace.”

The call of Jesus to the Apostles was radical: “Go and be my witnesses to the whole world in the power of the Holy Spirit.” This radical call was emphasized by Pope Paul VI when he wrote: “to be a Christian is to be an evangelizer.”

Pope St John Paul II gave us a new lens to achieve this missionary call flowing from our Baptism and Confirmation. He used three terms: new in its fervor, new in its methods and new in its expressions. What did he mean? While the core message of the plan of God remains the same, we are called to proclaim it with the fresh new zeal and power of the Holy Spirit. It is to be new in its methods. We are called to expand the tools we use to reach out to others. Think about the creative ways that this can be done. The presence of modern media could enable us to reach many more effectively. Some will work and some will not. Don't be discouraged. If nothing else, a seed may have been planted for a future harvest.

Of course, the more effective tool is personal invitation. This was the process that was effectively used in the early years of this renewal. It is the relational aspect of the new expressions that the pope spoke of. People relate to people who in their invitation show personal love and care.

Wasn't this the process manifested in the scriptures? Andrew reached out to his brother, Simon, with a simple invitation: "Come and see." The Samaritan woman, evangelized by Jesus at Jacob's well, went back to the village and simply said: "Come and see."

When was the last time we invited someone to experience the grace of this "New Pentecost"? Andrew and the Samaritan woman invited someone to come to Jesus who had a life-changing message to make a difference in their lives. What would have happened if they did not reach out to another? What happens, when we, who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, do not share with others the marvels God has done in our lives?

We have the experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. We have the revealed Word of God. "For all those who have called upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. So then, in what way will those who have not believed in him call upon him? Or in what way will those who have not heard of him believe in him? And in what way will they hear of him without preaching? And truly, in what way will they preach, unless they have been sent, just as it has been written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who evangelize peace, of those who evangelize what is good!" (Rom 10:13-15).

We have the prophetic exhortations of recent popes. Pope Francis said to the charismatic community of the world: "Bring this grace of the Holy Spirit to the Church." We have these challenging questions. If not you, who? If not now, when? If not the core message of the plan of God, what? If not in the power of the Holy Spirit, how? If not in the daily places where you come into contact with people by divine appointment, where?