

RETREAT OF THE FRATERNITY

PARAY-LE-MONIAL, 22-27 October 2019

Teachings of Bishop Emmanuel Dassi

II- Faithfulness in welcoming the Holy Spirit as our Paraclete

Our faithfulness in welcoming the Holy Spirit with a view to fruitfulness of the Church also passes by welcoming Him as the Paraclete. It is one of the terms especially used in the series of promises of the Holy Spirit by Jesus in the Gospel according to St. John (John 14-16). We will go through the various occurrences of this promise of the Paraclete before dwelling on one of the passages that seem fundamental in returning to the veracity of our faithfulness to the reception of the Spirit in the present day in the Church and in the world.

This series of promises made by Jesus during the last meal with his disciples begins in Jn 14

1st text: Jn 14:15-17:

'If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth whom the world can never accept since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you.'

One could say that these words of Scripture that we have just heard are fulfilled today. Indeed, the Spirit is in us - and yet the Lord still promises him as Paraclete for all of our life. *'.. this Spirit of truth whom Jesus calls the Paraclete -- and parakletos means "counsellor", and also "intercessor", or "advocate". And he says that the Paraclete is "another" Counsellor, the second one, since he, Jesus himself, is the first Counsellor, being the first bearer and giver of the Good News. The Holy Spirit comes after him and because of him, in order to continue in the world, through the Church, the work of the Good News of salvation.'* (Dominum and Vivificantem No. 3)

2nd text: Jn 14:26

'but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.'

Mgr André Mutien Léonard emphasizes this essential role of the Spirit in his book *Viens Esprit Créateur*:

"Well, the Spirit is, in a way, the living memory of Christ in today's Church. Without the Holy Spirit, Jesus would simply belong to the 'past' of humanity and risk being 'overwhelmed' by the inner course of history. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is its permanent personal memory. But while our memory is only an impersonal faculty of our mind, **the Holy Spirit is a divine Person who is, in the world, the living memory of Jesus, his ever-new reality ...** So, today, that we can live in Jesus and internalize in our lives his death and resurrection is

thanks to the action of the Spirit at the heart of all the realities that make Him actually present.
"1

We understand why the first reaction of a person who has experienced the outpouring of the Spirit is to exclaim that Jesus is alive.

=> **Witness:** I will always remember my first retreat - it was an Ignatian retreat that I experienced as a young student still, far from thinking that I would go to seminary, even if the question of the priesthood came back to me so often in mind. On the third day, the priest who accompanied me told me that I had just experienced an outpouring of the Spirit. I did not even know what it was; but I experienced it in a shattering way. In fact, during one of the prayer times, I had just experienced a moving experience: Jesus is really alive and He is love! And he has loved me for so long - it is as if it was I who until then was absent and indifferent to His living presence and to His love while being a good practicing Christian since the cradle.

And what must be emphasized is that this living memory of the dead and risen Christ did not stop **only at the cognitive level**, it was not a merely intellectual conviction of the living presence of Jesus; this living memory immediately revealed to the person the beauty of the new life that the Risen One proposes to us and leads us to it at the same time. Jesus' insistence on the proclamation of the coming and the primordial role of the Spirit in the lives of the disciples is remarkable, as the rest of the series of promises shows.

3rd text: Jn 15:26-27

It is still using the term Paraclete that the Spirit is promised:

'When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness. And you too will be witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.'

We have already pointed out that the fruitfulness of the Church and that of the Spirit are the same as the fruitfulness of the husband and wife. This is why we should not see here two parallel or juxtaposed testimonies. It is a unique testimony of which the Spirit is obviously the principal author, but whose disciples (that is, the Church) are the instrumental author and are no less important. *'In the witness of the Spirit of truth,* 'said Saint John Paul II, *'the human testimony of the Apostles will find its strongest support. And subsequently it will also find therein the hidden foundation of its continuation among the generations of Christ's disciples and believers who succeed one another down through the ages, (Dominum and Vivificantem No. 5).*

4th text: Jn 16:7-11

But the passage on which I would like to propose that we can linger especially is the last of this series of promises in John, (John 16: 7-11):

'... it is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will show the world how wrong it was, about sin, and about who was in the right, and about judgement: about sin: in

¹ Idem, p14

that they refuse to believe in me; about who was in the right: in that I am going to the Father and you will see me no more; about judgement: in that the prince of this world is already condemned.'

We are still in the Cenacle; and St. John Paul II rightly emphasizes that ***'All the words uttered by the Redeemer in the Upper Room on the eve of his Passion become part of the era of the Church: first of all, the words about the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete and Spirit of truth. These words become part of it in an ever new way, in every generation, in every age.*** (Dominum and Vivificantem No. 29) We must therefore enter more profoundly into the actuality of this last great promise of the Spirit who is coming to establish the guilt of the world of our time in terms of sin, justice and judgment. This will result in three small articulations:

1* He will therefore establish the guilt of the world *'because of sin, because they do not believe in me'* says Jesus. It's very important! Saint John Paul II affirms it:

'when Jesus explains that this sin consists in the fact that they do not believe in him ', this meaning seems to apply only to those who rejected the messianic mission of the Son of Man and condemned him to death on the Cross. But one can hardly fail to notice that this more "limited" and historically specified meaning of sin expands, until it assumes a universal dimension by reason of the universality of the Redemption, accomplished through the Cross. The revelation of the mystery of the Redemption opens the way to an understanding in which every sin wherever and whenever committed has a reference to the Cross of Christ -- and therefore indirectly also to the sin of those who "have not believed in him", and who condemned Jesus Christ to death on the Cross.' (Dominum and Vivificantem No. 29)

Every sin thus reveals, implicitly or explicitly, **unbelief** - a lack of faith in Jesus Christ. That is why the reception of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of light or truth, is capital. Indeed, Saint Paul asserts that without the Holy Spirit, no one can say that Jesus is Lord; and therefore no one can happily let Jesus be Lord of all his life. We will be tempted to pay lip service to Him and not to submit ourselves in practice to his Lordship in our lives. Or, as St. Ignatius of Antioch affirmed in his letter to the Romans before his martyrdom, we would be constantly tempted to have 'Jesus Christ on the lips and the world in our hearts.' The unbelief here is expressed in the fact of not believing what Jesus proposes to us as a true path for our life. Clearly, without the Holy Spirit, we are unaware of the gravity of sin. In some areas, one can even witness totally inadmissible claims by 'good Christians' seduced by the spirit of the world. They can fully participate in movements of thought or action with the explicit or implicit slogan: 'sin for all!' Without the Holy Spirit, one is manipulated by the evil spirit who can even often make us think that *"it is good for you"* (as the advertising of a well-known drink expresses). To think that sin is good for you, and so, take what is bad as a good thing and what has value as something bad. Without the help of the Spirit of God in us, we can even be very faithfully attached to Christian morality, but just as a burden that the Church imposes on us. And then we carry the burden like slaves, with an inner sadness. And we attack the Church terribly while considering ourselves as members.

'As the bishops of the United States of America have rightly pointed out, while the Church insists on the existence of objective moral norms which are valid for everyone, there are those in our culture who portray this teaching as unjust, that is, as opposed to basic human rights. Such claims usually follow from a form of moral relativism that is joined, not without inconsistency, to a belief in the absolute rights of individuals. In this view, the Church is

perceived as promoting a particular prejudice and as interfering with individual freedom'
(*Evangelii Gaudium* n ° 64)

Yes, one of the greatest proofs that it is the Spirit of God leading us and not the Spirit of the world is our aversion to sin. And the more we allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, the more we abhor sin. We have a permanent awareness that sin is like a poison in our life and never a source of happiness despite appearances. Of course, that does not prevent us from having temptations, since we are still in this world. The Holy Spirit maintains this conviction in us and strengthens us in our victorious fight against sin. And even when we have fallen into sin, the Holy Spirit gives us a true and deep contrition and a real desire to rise radically and move forward. This is nothing to do with a certain complacency or compromise that leads to justify our sins or to program them. St. Paul clearly tells us that the Spirit we have received is not a spirit of a slave, but of a son - who makes us call God Father; and above all, makes us live truly like His sons in this world. (see Rm 8:14-17)

The paradigm of this role of the Spirit is given on the very day of Pentecost with Peter's preaching by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the same Spirit will also touch the hearts of his contemporaries who will exclaim: "What must we do?" We know what came next. And Pope John Paul II comments:

'By convincing the "world" concerning the sin of Golgotha, concerning the death of the innocent Lamb, as happens on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit also convinces of every sin, committed in any place and at any moment in human history: for he demonstrates its relationship with the Cross of Christ. The "convincing" is the demonstration of the evil of sin, of every sin, in relation to the Cross of Christ. Sin, shown in this relationship, is recognized in the entire dimension of evil proper to it, through the "mysterium iniquitatis" which is hidden within it. Man does not know this dimension -- he is absolutely ignorant of it apart from the Cross of Christ. So he cannot be "convinced" of it except by the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of truth, but who is also the Counsellor.' (Dominum and Vivificantem No. 32).

This role of Peter and the first apostles is ours. It's a delicate role; but if we present ourselves as poor sinners and do not condemn others, if we send them a message of love, the message of the love of God manifested on the cross, and if we strive ourselves to allow ourselves to be led radically by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, through our humble service, will help our contemporaries to come out of the slavery of lies to find their full freedom in the truth (see John 8:32: *'you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'*)

We understand why our world needs the light of the Spirit more than ever to unmask the mystery of the evil hidden in so many ideologies, in structures of sin, in human behaviour that should have moved us to indignation, and which do not seem to move many people. St. Paul presented this mystery of evil as a reality that goes beyond the field of human existence, presenting this drama of evil as a cosmic reality. (*'the whole creation, until this time, has been groaning in labour pains'*, said the Apostle (see Rm 8:22)). **'It is as if a law of egoism and death imprisons and disfigures all beings, a law which has been redoubled in our time, by our own fault, in the ecological destruction of creation.'**² Laudato Si's message is still fresh in our memories and even yet to be really implemented in our world. But as Mgr.

² Idem p125

Leonard says so well, ‘... **in the very heart of the sufferings of the present time, the Holy Spirit is given to man and to the cosmos as the first fruits of the world to come**, and His divine groans are already joined, inextricably, with the groans of human misery and creation at work.’ That is why, despite the gravity of human and cosmic situations, we forbid ourselves to be the prophets of misfortune. In this area as in others, ‘The Holy Spirit at work in the Church and in the world contradicts this policy of what is worst’³ He makes us enter hope. And St. Paul says it so well: ‘*and a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.*’ (Rom 5:5). Certainly, it is first of all what Pope Benedict XVI rightly calls the great hope that surpasses all our little human hopes for a better tomorrow in this world. But it is a hope well incarnated in the image of the Son of God who has indeed been made man to save us at the root of our humanity. ‘Far from opposing each other, the ultimate Christian hope and earthly liberations promote one another when they are well understood.’⁴ It is with this hope that we are sent into this world to struggle with the mystery of evil, but with the power of the Holy Spirit in order to carry the splendour of Truth.

This brings us quickly to the other two levels of our three articulations on the role of the Paraclete announced in Jesus’ address.

2* The Paraclete, the Defender, will also establish the guilt of the world in matters of justice, said Jesus, because he was going to the Father. Yes, the Holy Spirit helps us to seek and always to do what is right. He gives us that hunger and thirst for justice which is a beatitude, and even to accept being persecuted for justice as the other beatitude expresses it. It helps us to seek, even if we are alone in doing it, to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s. It helps us to live fully as a child of God by remaining fully in Jesus; and in this perspective, He leads us to be compassionate as our heavenly Father is compassionate, to be merciful as our Father is merciful, to strive constantly for perfection in the image of our Father who is perfect. **In a word, He helps us to choose the voice of holiness, because that is what is right; it is our vocation according to the plan of God.** The spirit of the world seeks to lead us to a Christian life without a clear reference to Holiness, explicitly or implicitly perceived as something from another era or for others. It is this current mentality that prompted Pope Francis to publish last year, somewhat to everyone’s surprise, his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate* on the call to holiness in the world today. ‘My modest goal is to **repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time**, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. For the Lord has chosen each one of us “to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4) (*Gaudete and Exultate* No. 2) And more explicitly still, he says in No 10: ‘Yet with this Exhortation I would like to insist primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each of us, the call that he also addresses, personally, to you’. I think we should be with him because it is one of the two reasons for our calling in the Emmanuel and the Fraternity of Jesus - our common sanctification, with each other, one by the other, the others for each other, and the mission of evangelization which naturally goes with this. In the light of *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Gaudete et Exultate*, it must be clearly understood with Pope Francis whether holiness, especially in our time, is missionary or not. Taking seriously our vocation to holiness today immediately implies a great compassion for those who are far from the Gospel and also a missionary audacity to embody with our brothers and sisters the missionary dynamics of the Church. The Pope therefore

³ Idem p133

⁴ Ibidem

emphasizes that a Christian who does not aim for sanctification in his life is like a football player who does not aim for the trophy. This year, for those who love sport and especially football, we have again seen what it is that the 'remontada' (A team won the European champions league after being beaten 3-0 in the semi-final by the one of the most feared teams in the world, and in the return match there was a dramatic reversal of the situation with a 4-0 lead, the secret was that they believed that even though they started very badly, they could finish very well, and they went to it with this conviction). The secret of our sanctification is first of all to believe in this in spite of the repeated failures that we are trailing behind us and which may lead us to give up and declare it to be 'mission impossible'. The Virgin Mary then reminds us of what the Angel told her, and certainly with regard to us, 'Nothing is impossible for God.' The Holy Spirit who comes to the aid of our weakness reminds us of what Jesus said, 'What is impossible for man is possible for God.' It is He who sanctifies us - but he cannot do it without us. If we all agree, we all become supportive of one another in our different places of life and mission. So this is the second axis of the work of this precious Defender in our lives - provided that we agree to listen to Him continuously.

3* Finally, the Holy Spirit will also establish the guilt of the world *'about judgement: in that the prince of this world is already condemned.'* says Jesus (Jn 16:11). Yes, the Holy Spirit helps us to fear in this world he who has power over the body and the soul and not only the one who can kill the body. By the power of the spirit of the world, many, indeed, including Christians of course, are concerned about how the world sees them, and are concerned about how to be in accord with the world and its values or ideas – on how not to be out of step with progress in the world. And suddenly, even if you have to be out of step with the Gospel, what does it matter? - provided they are in tune with the world as people say. With our divine Counsellor, we are constantly convinced of the opposite. Certainly, we assume ourselves to be in the world - but accepting happily to be not of the world. This can bring arrows down on us, that is to say all kinds of persecutions, intimidations and humiliations - but we are joyful because it prepares our final victory on the day of true judgment! This is reminiscent of what we emphasized from the beginning of retreat - namely the need for vigilance against not being a disciple of Christ while being guided daily by the spirit of the world that influences our judgment.

St. Oscar Romero, martyr of justice and peace in El Salvador in 1980, said from his own experience: *'The Church is persecuted because she really wants to be the Church of Christ. When the Church preaches eternal salvation without becoming involved in the real problems of the world, the Church is respected and glorified, and even given privileges. But if she is faithful to her mission to denounce the sin that throws many into misery and if she proclaims her hope in a more humane and just world, then she is persecuted, outraged, treated as subversive ...'* At the end of the 1970s, when he was asked to explain himself to the Holy Father, he affirmed: *'In all my actions, I prayed to have the light of the Holy Spirit so as not to separate myself from the Gospel ...'* In 1980, he died a martyr to this testimony to the truth for the liberation of an oppressed people. He had predicted it while considering that he was not worthy of it: *'Martyrdom is a grace of God that I do not think I deserve. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, let my blood be a seed of freedom and the sign that hope will soon become reality. May my death, if accepted by God, be for the liberation of my people and as a witness of hope for the future.'* A hymn from the Office of the Martyrs reveals the significance of this supreme testimony: *'In your martyrs it is you who are killed, but you who are glorified, for your Church in them salutes the **strength of the Spirit.**'* This is true for bloody martyrdom, but also non-bloody martyrdom of daily witness that is not done without a

cross. That is why we need this missionary audacity in the strength of the Spirit to witness to the Truth in the domain of the family, the economy, politics, the relations between states, between the peoples of the North and those of the South. ... We must really let ourselves be won over by the power of the Spirit in daring to dissociate ourselves from the common thoughts and to be witnesses of a truly new world; a world in which the dignity of man, of every man and of all men, is preserved with the point of honour of their vocation to life in God.

Speaking of the sin of Golgotha, Peter told his listeners on the day of Pentecost: 'I know you did it out of ignorance.' He reiterates what Jesus himself said about his executioners when dying on the cross. But with the light of the Spirit and through the testimony of the apostles, they will immediately repent and receive baptism in the name of the Lord. Yes, with the Holy Spirit, the mystery of iniquity, the mystery of evil hidden in all sin is revealed - truth is established. And whoever in spite of this would stubbornly stay in evil falls into sin against the Holy Spirit. This reminds me of what the Cure of Ars says in his catechesis on the role of the Holy Spirit:

'if you say to people who are in hell, why are you in hell, they will say: for having resisted the Holy Spirit; and if they say to those who are in heaven: how did you come to heaven, they will say: for obeying the Holy Spirit.'

May we allow the Paraclete to constantly enlighten our judgment so that we may courageously take up our vocation to holiness at the very heart of this world where we are sent to be the light of the world in Christ!