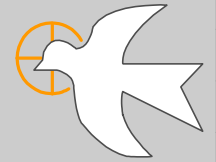


# NEW EVANGELISATION



Issue No. 34

Nov 2008 - Jan 2009

Website: [www.newevangelisation.wellington.net.nz](http://www.newevangelisation.wellington.net.nz)

Editorial Team: Pat Clegg & Frits Bergman

P.O. Box 31495 Lower Hutt, New Zealand

Fax/Tel: 04 566 5786 Email: [Pat.Clegg@xtra.co.nz](mailto:Pat.Clegg@xtra.co.nz)

## Evangelisation Is Not A Solitary Task: We Need Dedicated Parish Teams

**Rt Rev Malcolm McMahon, Bishop of Nottingham and Chair of the Bishops' Conference Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis (England and Wales), on the eve of Home Mission Sunday (21st September) explains why every parish should have a dedicated evangelisation team.**

The model of a modern parish is of a people centred on Christ who are not inward-looking, but are constantly looking for and using opportunities to share their faith: this is something that we must strive to make incarnate as an urgent priority. As a Christian Community, we believe that Christ is in the midst of us and that he invites us to spend time with him, especially during moments of prayer, but that's as a precursor to being sent out.

During this year of St Paul, it's timely to reflect that the Apostle starts several of his letters, "I Paul, called an apostle." He's not here simply telling people who he is and naming his job, but he is clearly sharing that he is a person who has been called and sent out.

Similarly, we are all called to holiness and to centre our lives on Christ as a member of a parish, but we are also called to go beyond our Church walls to share the Word of God with others.

In a parish setting, clearly it's not possible for everyone to commit in the same way to the Church's mission. Yes, we are all called on a daily basis to share our faith, to be missionaries in our times, but committed groups of people are needed to animate, train and help equip parishioners to do this vital work. Parish evangelisation teams are essential therefore, otherwise there is a danger that this vital work, the reason the Church exists no less, will be sidelined and in some cases completely overlooked in

favour of an insular-looking, "maintenance model" of Church, where an awareness of mission is lost in the mire of modern life.

A parish evangelisation team helps to form and support parishioners in the living out of the Gospel in their daily lives, in turn people will be given the confidence to explicitly share their faith with others. The starting point is our evangelisation and a team can help the baptised to reflect on their lives, draw closer to the Lord and then equip and encourage people to turn outwards, to publicly witness to others of the joy of knowing, personally and as a Catholic family, Jesus Christ.

*The new DVD "Alive in Christ—Making Mission Possible in your Parish" is being sent to all Parishes in England and Wales. In the New Year all Dioceses in Australia and New Zealand will receive the DVDs for distribution to every Parish. How blessed we are to receive the gift of this new resource, to inspire and equip fresh mission in our Parishes.*

**Editors**

The General Directory for Catechesis makes it clear that evangelisation is at the heart of good catechesis and also that evangelisation is at the heart of Adult Formation and the formation of young children. All the activities of the parish should have in view the overall work of evangelisation, so that more and more parishes begin to see themselves as evangelising communities.

Team work isn't something that we should just associate with sporting endeavours, but is firmly rooted in the life of Jesus and the early Church: we're not called to be solitary evangelists, even St. Paul travelled with companions. Jesus was the first to set up an evangelisation team of twelve, then came the seventy two and other groups of disciples who are mentioned in the New Testament. It is a good way to work. It is a way that was taken up by Cardinal Cardijn who founded the Young Christian Workers. He saw the value of teams who are able to reflect on the situation in which they found themselves and coined the phrase, "See. Judge. Act." It's something which empowered young team members to become leaders in their own milieu and this is a good model for any Christian.

---

To support the baptised in this task, for the first time, this year parishes in England and Wales have been sent a DVD – we’re delivering the material in a medium that is familiar to people in the modern world, so hopefully it will be picked up and used by parish groups, not just evangelisation teams but RCIA, Youth SVP and everyone. We hope its effect will be to support and encourage the foundation of evangelisation teams in our parishes. It also sends out a message that the Church embraces the modern means of social communication.

**S**econdly, we are supporting parishes through offering a nationwide evangelisation training day programme. The person who is an evangelist has to have a deeper understanding of their own faith, so that when they share, they know what they are talking about. Every baptised person has to realise the need for formation and training to enable them to live out what they believe in their ordinary life situations of home, work and leisure. So some training to help them be up front Catholics is very important. The DVD models many different ways of evangelising in today’s world.

The Gospel of day on Home Mission Sunday (Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard) reminds us that the Lord gives us life. The denarius that the workers were given kept them alive for one day, that’s why the Lord gave them the same amount. In

response to the gift of life, we have a job for life which is to make the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus, and all that means for us as individuals and as a community, known and celebrated. The gift that we’re given demands a response for life, which is a job for life. This is what the bishops are hoping for and we believe all people of Christian virtue are called to give this example to others, that we are all capable of becoming evangelists, no matter how humble a worker in the vineyard we might be.

**A**s Christians, we are not called to be hostile to the world we live in, but we are under an obligation to live and manifest the treasure of the Gospel we have been entrusted with. If we experience opposition, misunderstanding and marginalisation because of the way we live and share our faith, we are probably doing well, precisely because of the contrast between God’s ways of doing things and what comes naturally to human beings. Our way of living and being should provoke questions within those with whom we come in contact. As a Catholic Community we are called to be witnesses and I encourage the baptised to take a new step to respectfully make their faith known to those around them.

*The resources referred to in this article can be accessed from [www.caseresources.org.uk](http://www.caseresources.org.uk) and [www.faithcafe.org](http://www.faithcafe.org)*

---

## Editorial



**B**ishop Malcolm McMahon speaking in advance of Home Mission Sunday said **“As Christians ... we are under an obligation to live and manifest the treasure of the Gospel we have been entrusted with. If we experience opposition and misunderstanding because of the way we live and share our faith, we are probably doing well, precisely because of the contrast between God’s way of doing things and what comes naturally to human beings. But as a Catholic community, we need to be supported and equipped to enable us to be effective evangelisers. To that end, I encourage you to set up a parish team, attend a regional training day and use the DVD provided.”**

The DVD which has been produced by Catholic Evangelisation Services (producers of CaFE resources) in collaboration with the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE). The DVD is titled *‘Alive in Christ—Making Mission Possible in Your Parish’*. It covers many areas, such as mission inside and outside the parish, to the youth, evangelisation by serving the poor and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Parishes are also being invited to send representatives to regional evangelisation training days which will take place between January-April 2009.

The hope is that in 2009 every member of the Catholic Community will grow in awareness that they have a job for life—to evangelise—which is both their duty but also a life-giving and freeing activity. The church teaches that the task of evangelisation is not something that burdens but frees.

Homily notes, bidding prayers, a children’s liturgy sheet, information about the latest evangelisation initiatives, the CASE newsletter and tips about how to set up a parish evangelisation team can be downloaded from [www.caseresources.org.uk](http://www.caseresources.org.uk) SMS technology will also support this years initiative. Text ‘TEAM’ to receive additional help.

**M**gr Keith Barltrop, Director of CASE said **“It would be wonderful, if as a fruit of Home Mission Sunday, every parish felt enabled to build in what they’re already doing by taking a new and concrete step towards becoming a more evangelistic community. All we need is to be willing to make a start, to take a baby step so to speak, perhaps through attending one of the regional evangelisation training days. In faith we rely on God’s generosity and power that He will show us the way and provide the opportunity and means to be effective labourers in the vineyard.”**

The contents of the DVD provides a unique opportunity for Lay people in collaboration with their Bishops, Clergy and Religious to become engaged in this new mission and entrust to God the fruitfulness of their efforts.

*Pat Clegg & Frits Bergman — Editors*

# Who, Me? An Evangelist?

By Greg Trainor, Catholic Lay Evangelist

## "Who, me?"

Perhaps you are still thinking, "Who, me? How I am going to tell someone about Jesus? I don't know very much about the Bible or the teachings of the Church. Who is going to listen to me?" This used to be one of my main concerns. I shied away from witnessing to others because I felt that I didn't know very much. One day, while I was praying, I heard the Lord say: "Greg, it's not your knowledge or understanding that is going to bring others to me, it's my power that will bring them. Are you willing to tell others what you know about me?" "Yes," I answered. "If you are willing to tell them what you know about me," God continued, "then I will send those that need to hear it."

In the coming weeks I was amazed at how many people were brought across my path to hear about God. What was most amazing was that they needed to hear things that I could tell them! I always read the Bible during my prayer time. I would read something like Psalm 91 which talks about God's protection. Soon after, someone would be telling me about their fear. I would witness to them about how God desires to protect us and his promises in Psalm 91. If they had come a few days earlier, I would not have known what to tell them. God is a good coordinator in this sense. He knows just what you know about him; knows what he has done for you and what he is teaching you. God will bring people into your path for whom you can act as a teacher and witness.

I talk to a lot of people about God. If I find them in the grocery store, on the subway, or in a park. I'll ask them: "Do you know that God loves you? Did you know that you can live with him forever in heaven?" As people open up and talk, I take notice of what they are saying. I particularly take notice of what is said by those who don't go to church or who profess not to believe in Jesus Christ. Many of them offer objections and excuses. They say, "I'm not going to church because you Christians are all hypocrites." They say that the evangelists are the biggest phonies of all (they don't know that I am one), especially those on radio and television.

You see, most non-Christians have found a way to put Christianity in a tidy little box and put it up on the shelf. They are not hearing the Word of God in a church on Sunday; they don't listen to it on the radio or on television. But when God sends you to them, they don't have a little box to put you in and dismiss you. They know you as the mechanic in the next bay in the garage, or the neighbour over the back fence or another parent of a child in the sixth

grade class. When you befriend them and love them with the love of God, their heart is touched and opened.

Most people aren't looking for scripture scholars, theologians, or polished public speakers. What they need is someone like you that can speak honestly from the depth of the heart about the greatest need in their life: their need to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and be reconciled with God.

## Decision

You have an important decision to make: will you give God permission to use your life for the spreading of the Gospel? I'm not asking you to become a priest, a nun, or a religious brother. I'm not asking you to be a foreign missionary, a sidewalk preacher, or a door-to-door evangelist. I'm asking if you will give God permission to use you to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you give God this permission, he will use you. Most likely, very few of the circumstances of your life will change. You will most likely still live in the same house, work at the same job and drive the same car. You will still have the same family. But, there will be a new meaning and purpose in your life. You will begin to live the Christian life with a greater anointing of the Holy Spirit.

If you give God permission to use you to bring the Gospel to others, he will use you to reap a harvest of souls in our day. There will be people that will reign in heaven with God forever instead of suffering in Hell because you said "yes." Please notice that I am not asking you if you feel qualified or adequately prepared to share the Gospel. I am simply asking this: are you willing? If so, God will use you. If you are willing, God is able to use you. God will use what you learn in this book to get you ready to share the Gospel. He will use many other things to teach, further prepare and equip you. As long as you remain willing to be used, God will continue to equip and use you. Remember this saying: "If I am willing, God is able."

## Prayer

If you are willing to let God use you to spread the Gospel, then pray this prayer:

*"Lord, I give you permission to use my life to spread the Good News of the Gospel. I am trusting in you. I trust that you will give me the words. I trust that you will show me the right people and the right times. I pray that you will use my life to bring in a harvest of souls. Here I am Lord, send me. Amen."*

From Holy Spirit Missionary Assn : <http://www.hsma.net/>



# Friendship: the key to evangelising men

By Fr John McCloskey

Not so long ago when I was having lunch in Rome, I noticed a group of seven or eight men at the next table. They were engaged in a boisterous conversation and obviously enjoying themselves. It was my impression that this was not a singular event but rather one of frequent meetings.

Reflecting on this some weeks afterwards I realised that in my own country when you see groups of men together on a regular basis, it is in front of the television, at home or in a bar or club, watching a sporting event. The drink is there the food is there but something is missing. The purpose is the watching of the sporting event rather than then meeting for friendships sake and enjoying one another's company. As I reflected on this there came to my mind a suspicion that there is a undiagnosed disease common among western men - a disease that could be responsible in part for some of our social ills, and could even be a grave deterrent to an effective new evangelisation in our country. I have named the disease the Friendship Deficit Syndrome. (FDS) This article is meant to provoke the reader into observing the phenomena and to offer their own suggestions and solutions.

## Friendship and Evangelisation

Friendship, for a Christian, can be an effective form of evangelisation. This entails a friendship that is sincere and authentic and in a natural way must be looked at as an end in itself. There are many examples in history and in literature of admirable friendships. Friendship can however be uplifted to reach its highest level in sharing the ultimate good: to introduce or re-introduce Jesus Christ to another man is the greatest good of human friendship. Christianity has been spread principally through one on one encounters. I hope that these observations will help readers to understand the Friendship Deficit Syndrome and how damaging it can be to the development of men's personalities.

I am addressing men but also women, wives, mothers, sisters to take a strong interest in the true Christian manliness of the males in

their lives. Their own livelihood and happiness and that of their children, may depend on the ability of the men they love to cope with the increasing perilous culture in which we find ourselves.

In coping with the FDS, wives can encourage their husbands to spend more time with their friends.



## The pursuit of loneliness

FDS may be among the causes of what is perhaps the greatest plague affecting modern American society: loneliness. The causes of this plague are multiple, small families (brought about through contraception and abortion), absent fathers or mothers, separation, divorce, the pressure for women to work outside the home as a result of a tax system that doesn't favour the family, frequent moves to pursue a career path and the tendency to value material possessions above human relationships, the worship of youth. All these factors increase the fragmentation of our community and the loneliness of individuals. There are very powerful images of the strong, isolated male figure in American culture, A man who hides his private feelings behind a crusty exterior, impervious to the forces outside himself. A man who is ultimately answerable only to his own conscience. The definition of what it means to be a Catholic man should include the capacity to "make a sincere gift of self" as quoted by Pope John Paul II. This gift of self is made primarily in holy matrimony, but it is made as well in the male friendships in the course of his life.

## Causes and Symptoms

For many Catholic men "friendships" can mean a largely

artificial tie, based on a common interest in beer, sports, cars, hunting, fishing etc. In today's society many male relationships are openly homosexual. One of the many unhappy side-effects of this open public perversion is the fact that when any small group of adult males is seen together, at least in some urban centres, they are assumed to be homosexual. The enormous defection from the Catholic priesthood over the last 30 years and the ensuing sex-abuse scandals have also played a role in undermining strong male friendships. Having been disillusioned by paternal abandonment or the examples of priests' infidelity in their vocation, they find themselves incapable of giving or receiving the trust and healthy affection that is essential to forming deep and lasting friendships.

## What is friendship?

Any human person, formed in the image of Holy Trinity, exists in relation to others and indeed is defined by his relationships. For the vast majority of men, aside from his marriage and his family, the most important relationships will be friendships with other men. We might say that friendship is a social relation that is distinguished by mutual affection. Love does not necessarily demand reciprocity, but friendship requires it. It takes two to form a friendship. True friendship carries with it "an exchange of gifts". John Paul II has also used this expression to describe "dialogue," one of the principal means of creating a friendship. Jesus Christ, the Saviour, tells us, "I have called you friends." Friendship with Christ is the very purpose of the life of the Christian, as He is the way, the truth, and the life. He grew up as the very reason of the Holy Family, and thus felt the human love and affection of Mary his Mother and St Joseph, his Guardian.

## Apostolic Friendship

The wonderful example of charity of the first Christians, particularly in their willingness to risk their lives in taking care of the victims of the intermittent plagues and persecutions that struck the early believers during the first centuries of the Christian era, no doubt had a

powerful role in evangelisation. So did the attractiveness of the moral life of Christian families. However, without the personal influence of friendship, all otherwise useful and admirable means of evangelisation and apostolate would have been largely ineffective. Although friendship is a great good and end in itself, still there is at least one treasure that applies both naturally and supernaturally: What is the number of friends and the quality of those friendships we leave behind? We might ask ourselves a series of questions:

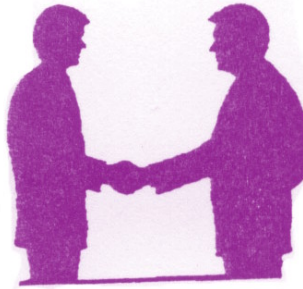
- How many true friends do I have?
- How many people are there to whom I can go to open up my heart and soul with total trust?
- How many lives were changed in a positive way by my friendship?
- How many persons were reconciled, converted, or grew in the life of the Church on account of my friendship?
- Finally, are my friendships a fundamental part of my prayer life? Do I talk about my friends - pleading for their needs and trying to better my understanding of them, with The Friend?

### Being a friend

There is an old saying: "To make a friend, be a friend." It is important to make a distinction

between "acquaintances", of whom we have many and "friends." Friendship is a sacred word, full of meaning, and one I do not use lightly.

Friendship, ideally, is forever. Friendship requires spending time with another. There are no short cuts. Whether it is at meals, or a shared interest in sport or a hobby, we need to share what we are and what we have to give, in order to receive the same gift from our friend. We have to be "present" to our friends.



We cannot really say that true friendship exists until we have opened up the deepest human questions: who man is, where he comes from, where he is headed, the meaning of life, the value of suffering. True friends talk about what is most important to them: faith, family, work. And this exploration of serious topics helps friendships to become apostolic. Such friendships lead men to grow and be transformed in Christ, with the inevitable result of creating a Christian environment around them.

Friendship also means loving our friends with all their faults; we forgive them when necessary, and

although out of charity, from time to time, we correct them.

Strong male friendships must be revived if the Catholic men and their progeny are to get on with the holy and ambitious task in this young millennium to build the civilisation of love and truth in the 21st century. The personal apostolate of friendship is the key to the transformation of our society.

To be sure we need many holy, courageous, and zealous bishops and priests, who will preach the word of Christ and administer his sacraments, deeply influenced by the message of the Second Vatican Council and its authentic interpretation. I am confident we will get them. However, the Gospel will be most effectively spread throughout society not from the sanctuary of the local parishes but through friendship.

*Fr John McCloskey is an Opus Dei Priest who has been in charge of the Catholic Information Centre in Washington DC for many years. His answers to questions sent into the Centre have converted many to Catholicism. We have condensed his 8 page article from his website ([www.catholicity.com/mccloskey/articles/friendship.html](http://www.catholicity.com/mccloskey/articles/friendship.html)). If interested we recommend you read the full text.*



**ARE YOU ONE**

**Are you an active member, the kind that would be missed.**

**Or are you just contented that your name is on the List?**

**Do you attend the meetings and mingle with the flock.**

**Or do you stay at home to criticise and knock.**

**Do you take an active part to help the work along?**

**Or are you satisfied to simply just belong.**

**Are you on committees—to do this is no trick**

**Or leave the work to just a few, and talk about the clique?**

**So come to meetings often and help with hand and heart.**

**Don't be just a member, but take an active part.**

**Think it over member, you know right from wrong.**

**Are you an active member or do you just belong.**



## All are Called

In fact, the Christian vocation is, of its nature a vocation to the apostolate as well. In the organism of a living body no member plays a purely passive part, sharing in the life of the body it shares at the same time in its activity. The same is true for the Body of Christ, the Church: "the whole Body achieves full growth in dependence on the full functioning of each part" (Eph.4:16). Between the members of this body there exists, further, such a unity and solidarity (cf.Eph.4:16) that a member who does not work at the growth of the body to the extent of his possibilities must be considered useless both to the Church and to himself.

*Vat. 2 Decree on Laity 2*



## PLENTY OF POTENTIAL — NO FIRE

In the nineties in response to the growth of the Evangelical & Pentecostal churches and the establishment of a number of large non-denominational Christian churches, Gallop conducted a significant research project into Evangelisation (spreading the Good News).

One of the most profound findings of this study was that the 'sleeping giant' of evangelism is the Catholic Church. It went on to say that the Catholic Church, more than any other church, has the potential to spread the gospel throughout the world — it has the numbers, it has the structure-BUT it has no fire!

Initially I was very defensive about this study — it might be true in America but not in Australia and certainly not in Petrie (Brisbane). Then, I started to ask myself some sobering questions — How prepared am I to share my faith with non Christians and those Catholics who no longer attend church? When was the last time I did this? If I was charged with being a Christian, is there enough evidence to convict me? Am I proud to be a Catholic, and am I proud to belong to this Parish or do I keep this quiet — a secret Catholic! Am I a Contagious Christian or don't I have the disease yet? These questions really challenged me in my response to my faith and the grace of faith to which I have been gifted through the Sacraments.

Jesus Christ, through the power of his Spirit, is calling us to grow in our faith — to keep maturing in knowledge, wisdom, acts of service, compassion and prayer.

In the words of Pope Paul VI, "that is still insufficient." We are called to spread this Good News — "to make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Matt 28"

We are called to go out — beyond ourselves and our comfort zones, beyond our house and into our neighbourhoods, beyond our parish and into the wide world.

In a world that is crying out for purpose and meaning- we have Good News. So what about our Parish?- Petrie Catholic community is committed to bringing the message of Jesus Christ to all — How are we doing?

The process of renewal and strategic planning which we have commenced will ensure that we are not a stagnant or go no where church community but dynamic, and growing. Our church community takes seriously its responsibility to provide opportunities for us to grow into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ and then to constantly encourage us to go out!

This week we will be given prayer cards to pray for this parish & its growth in Christ. Please join with us in prayer for the future of our Parish. And together we will light a fire that will never go out!

*From the Petrie Parish Bulletin written by John Brady, Head of Pastoral Planning and the Leadership Development Group*

## ST MARY OF THE ANGELS, WELLINGTON

### CALLED TO BE MISSIONARIES PARISH BULLETIN 19 October 2008

In his letter addressed to the people of Australia just before this year's World Youth Day, Pope Benedict said: "My prayer is that the hearts of the young people who gather in Sydney will truly find rest in the Lord, and that they will be filled with joy and fervour for spreading the Good News among their friends, their families, and all whom they meet."

Benedict reiterated here that to be a Christian is to truly find in the Lord, rest for one's heart. That simple word "truly", implies that Christ's peace, love and guidance has the potential to profoundly answer the deepest heartfelt desires of any person. Believing this, the Church is obliged to respond to Christ's last farewell mandate, "Go, make disciples of all the nations ... And know that I am with you always" (Mt 28:19-20). Obligated because "to find rest and to be filled with joy" are such ingrained God-given hopes, and here we are knowing, believing and experiencing Christ as the Way, Truth and Life for attaining such universal ends, even here and now! In Christ, God has spoken His greatest Word in answer to all our deepest needs, both personally and collectively.

So how might we "spread the Good News among our friends and family?"

- ◆ First, deepen your own relationship with God in prayer — "you cannot give to others what you do not have yourself."
- ◆ Propose, don't pressure: when appropriate, offer to pray for a persons expressed need — an affirmative response in reply would say much.
- ◆ Personalise grace before meals: ask a blessing on one's visitors.
- ◆ End emails, letters, cards 'devoutly,' e.g. "You're in my thoughts and prayers" etc.
- ◆ Invite people into church with you outside of Mass: e.g. for a musical event; to light a candle for a mutual cause; just to see inside a church!
- ◆ Have a crucifix, icon, religious calendar visible in your home/room.
- ◆ Be able to share how your faith has made a difference for you — concrete experiences are neither right or wrong, and so are relatively neutral.

In short, remember the words of the Brazilian prelate Dom Helder Camara "Mission is always to set out, but not always to devour kilometres. It is, above all, to open up to others as brothers and sisters, to discover and meet them."

*Fr David Kennerley SM*

# Receiving the Spirit

by Fr. Jack McArdle

**W**e all have the Spirit of God within us; otherwise we would die, because God would recall his Spirit, and only the clay would remain. "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

We have the Spirit, but the Spirit may not have us! We can have the Spirit but lead very corporeal materialistic lives. We can have any kind of god we choose to invent, and we can get our power from money, pleasure, or status. There must be a very hollow ring to a life that is lived without God's Spirit. When the Spirit is absent or ignored, other spirits are more than ready to move in, and fill the vacuum. Not only is my life incomplete, but I myself am not complete unless I am filled with the Spirit of God.

Getting the Spirit is the simplest part of the process. "Will the Father not surely give the Spirit to those who ask?". We speak about a 'release of the Spirit'. In other words, like the spring of living water at the core of the human heart, there is something blocking that Spirit, or that water, from gurgling up into a fountain within us. No matter how much water lies beneath the sand of a desert, an oasis is a rare sight. When we come to ask for the Spirit, it is important to remember that Jesus offered to send his Spirit long before anybody thought of asking him. In other words, it is very clearly the desire of Jesus that we should ask for, and receive his Spirit. In the last few chapters, I have lined up my insights into some sort of coherent sequence. We have got to the point now where we have to stop talking about the Spirit, and prepare our hearts to receive that Spirit. At my Baptism somebody else said 'yes' for me.

**I**t's now my turn to say my own 'yes'. Pentecost for me, or Annunciation for Mary, are interchangeable words. God has a special plan and purpose for each of us. That plan cannot begin until we say 'yes' to it, and accept the central truth that it is only by the power of God's Spirit that any of this can happen. The biggest barrier to receiving the Spirit is the way the human mind works. We tend to filter everything through the mind, to make sense out of it first, to analyse it in the laboratory of our intelligence.

The problem here is that we are approaching the whole thing from the wrong angle. It is not possible to make sense of the Spirit in our minds, nor is it possible to use our brains to unravel a mystery. Like the fountain of living water, the Spirit rises up from within a person. I experience it firstly, and come to understand it later, if at all. I was speaking about the Spirit to a group of Sisters about thirty years ago. After that particular talk, I was having a cup of coffee in the parlour, when there was a

knock on the door. A Sister entered the room, and I discovered later that she was 92 years of age. She looked at me with a serious childlike expression, and she blurted out "Father, whatever it is you're talking about, I want it, I want it all, and I want it now."

I nearly spluttered my coffee all over the place as I jumped to my feet. I took her by the arm, and I said "Come on, dear. We're going to the prayer-room, and I want you to say those self-same words to Jesus, because I'm sure he hasn't heard a prayer like that for a while." We went to the prayer-room, and she blurted out "Jesus, whatever it is you're talking about, I want it, I want it all, and I want it now". I laid my hands on her head, and I asked the Lord to fill her with his Spirit. I could almost hear the shell crack, as she began to cry. She cried her eyes out for quite a while, and I just sat there, and left her to it.

**T**he following morning she came to me to tell about how she felt that night. She felt as if she was weightless, as she laughed and cried to herself all night. The following day was the last day of the Retreat. At the closing Mass I invited Sisters to share in the Prayers of the Faithful. Sr. Peter's little voice got louder, and less crackly, as she prayed "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant in peace, O Lord, because my eyes have seen your salvation".

She died ten days later. Her entry into Religious Life was a conversion. Thousands of conversions later, she came to the point of sheer simplicity where she could ask for 'all of whatever it is!' She had read many books, listened to many lectures, made many Retreats, etc. during her long life-time. At last, at 92 years of age, she was prepared to get down off her sycamore tree, and welcome the Spirit into her heart.

We are going to look at three different scenarios now, to help situate the actual receiving of the spirit. The first happens when I celebrate Eucharist. If English was not my first language, or if I were newly ordained, I would not let that book on the altar out of my sight for a moment. If you are paying close attention to what is going on, and listening to the words, there is one thing you should notice. After the 'Holy Holy', I begin to say some prayers. Listen carefully, and you will notice a switch from saying prayers to reading a passage from the gospel. "When they were at supper, he took bread, etc.....When supper was ended, he took the chalice....". What's happening here is that I am actually reading the account in the gospels of what happened at the Last Supper. And, wait for it, the miracle of the Last Supper happens again right there in our presence.

**T**he second scenario has to do with Pentecost. John XXIII, God bless him, asked the Lord for another, or a New Pentecost, because the Church seemed to have lost the fire and enthusiasm of the first one. A group of people came together, not



exactly sure what to pray for, but willing to do something about the Pope's wishes. They prayed quietly that the Spirit might come, not expecting anything very dramatic to happen. As they prayed, someone stood up, and read the account of the First Pentecost from the Acts of the Apostles. As the person read, everybody in the room was 'zapped' with a wonderful anointing of the Spirit, and Charismatic Renewal, as we know it, began in that room.

The third scenario has to do with Mary and the Annunciation. You imagine Mary as kneeling beside you, with her eyes closed, and her head slightly bowed. Watch her very carefully. Suddenly an Angel of the Lord is standing there in front of her. She lifts her head, and clasps her hands in fear. She is looking straight at the angel. The angel spoke. "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you." 'Mary listened and was troubled at these words, wondering what this greeting could mean. But the angel said "Do not fear, Mary, for God looked kindly on you. You shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call him Jesus. He will be great, and shall rightly be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the kingdom of David, his ancestor, and he will rule over the people of Jacob forever, and his reign shall have no end." Then Mary said to the angel 'How can this happen if I am a virgin?' And the angel said to her 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the holy child to be born shall be called Son of God....For with God nothing is impossible'. Then Mary said 'I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me as you have said". It was at that moment that the Holy Spirit flooded Mary's soul, and the plan for our salvation was put into operation.

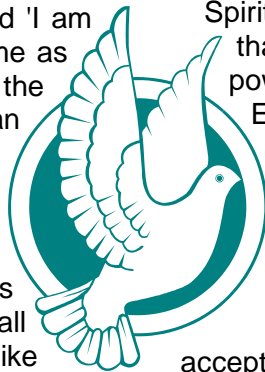
Let us look at that scene again, and make some changes. This time, you close your eyes, and Mary is watching you. The angel stands in front of you, and says those very same words to you. We are all called to form Jesus within us, so that, like Mary at the Visitation, we can bring Jesus to those we meet. How can I do this? I get the same answer as Mary got, as I clearly hear the words "For there is nothing impossible for God". Now the angel draws to one side, awaiting our answer. Nothing happens without my 'yes'. 'Yes, Lord, I want what you want. Please do with me whatever you wish to do. Knowing that the Spirit will never leave me, I am willing to be led by that Spirit in whatever direction you choose for me.' I whisper my 'yes' again and again. 'Be it done onto me according to your word'.....again and again. I make that my only prayer of this day. I kneel beside Mary, and I join with her in saying 'yes'. I hand the Holy Spirit the key of willingness, allowing him free access to my mind, heart and soul.

A young woman who discovers that she is pregnant, and is delighted with the news, is the

person who could best describe to me how to react at this stage. To sit and reflect on what has just happened; to let the whole thing sink in. To breathe deeply, and to be very conscious of the power of God's Breath within me. My thoughts are inner thoughts. I feel like Mary 'pondering the words within her heart'. What has happened is REAL, and, like the young pregnant woman, I will become more and more aware of that as time goes by. I have hoisted the sails, and the gentle breeze of the Spirit is gently moving me out into the deep. The biggest consolation I have are the words of Jesus "The Spirit will never leave you". This Spirit will be there tomorrow and every day.

In the following chapter, I will speak about 'learning to live and to walk in the Spirit'. When a passenger ship comes within sight of New York, Southampton, or Cobh, it stops, and a pilot goes out in a tug boat, gets on board, and brings it into harbour. My days of rowing are over! I have surrendered to a Power greater than myself, and I am about to be guided out into uncharted waters, and to discover an inner Power that inspires my every thought and action. As well as getting a spring in my steps, I begin to experience the awakening of Spring within, as new flowers break through to the surface. Like the crow, in an earlier story, I now can sing like a blackbird. I can identify with the apostles as they came out of that Upper Room. I wonder would they have had enough patience, hope, and trust to wait nine whole days for this to happen. The Spirit came because the

Spirit was expected to come, and I feel certain that Mary's presence among them had a powerful effect on their sense of expectation. Elizabeth praised Mary, and said "All these things happened to you because you believed that the promises of the Lord would be fulfilled." When I ask for the Spirit...Come, Holy Spirit...then I can expect the Spirit to come.



NOTE: Gentle reader, do you believe/ accept/feel that something has happened to you as you made your way through this chapter?. Don't be in any hurry going on to the next chapter. Savour the moment. Breathe deeply of the Spirit. Think of that oasis in the desert. Experience that fountain of living water bubbling up with you. Now that you have read this chapter, you may have to go back and read it again, this time with prayer and reflection. The Holy Spirit is not confined to churches! He knows where you are, and only you can set limits to what he does in you. Open your mind, your heart, and your hands....and wait like Mary in the Upper Room. IT WILL HAPPEN EXACTLY AS YOU ARE TOLD, just as the shepherds found when they went to Bethlehem to see for themselves.

*Taken from the website of Holy Spirit Interactive who produce a weekly presentation on a variety of Catholic topics. [www.holyspiritinteractive.net](http://www.holyspiritinteractive.net)*