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Charismatic Renewal

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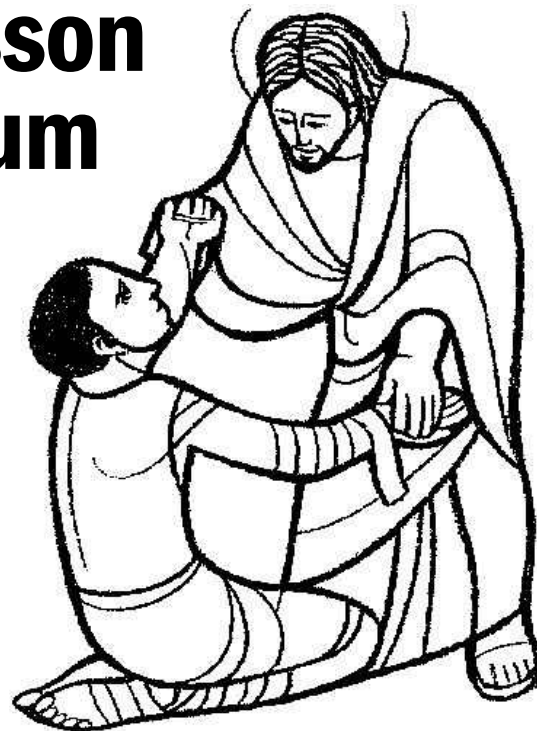
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40 years on: CR take courage!

A spiritual lesson from Pergamum and Thyatira

by Bp. Joe Grech



TEACHING OUTLINE

- I Commitment to Jesus
- II Practical Applications
- III As Christians what we do gets its meaning and purpose from our Relationship with Jesus Christ
- IV Proclaiming Jesus with Zeal and Enthusiasm

In the Book of Revelations Chapter 2:12-29, we find John the Apostle relating two messages from God to the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira. Both these churches were in Asia. These messages contain the same line of thought. While complementing the Christian communities of these churches for their steadfast faith, John also felt the need to remind them of certain aspects of church life that needed to be looked at seriously. To the Christians at Pergamum, John reminds them that there were people who were following the false teachings of Balaam (Rev 2:14). According to the Book of Numbers 3:16, Balaam urged the Israelites to marry the Moabites and to worship their gods. This led many to embrace values and teachings that were foreign to the faith of the people of Israel.

There were others who followed the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:15) who were expounding a similar doctrine of abandoning certain important precepts of the Jewish faith. The same message is also relayed to the Christian Community at Thyatira.

What is interesting to note is that John, always acting under the impulse of God, was not going to let this situation continue. Christians needed to base whatever they say or do on the teachings of Jesus Christ. There was no room for a plurality of beliefs where everybody could pick and choose what they liked or fancied. There was only one way to go. There was only one faith to believe in and that meant that Jesus Christ and nobody else needed to be at the centre. Both messages contain this powerful statement, "Let anyone who has ear to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." (Rev 2:17; Rev 2:29)

We who are living in the twenty first century need to reflect hard and deep on what is contained in these verses. Political correctness is very often quoted in our times. We need to be careful what to say and what to write to make sure we do not cause offence or discomfort to those who may have different ideas or beliefs. This has also permeated in the field of religion and faith. Very often we hear in

many Western Societies, that religion is a private belief and consequently it has no place in the public domain. Moreover, we are often led to believe that one religion is as good as the other and therefore it really does not matter whether you believe in one thing or another. Very often these attitudes breed a sense of indifference towards any belief in God. This attitude also leads to a watering down of the gospel of Jesus. Moreover, in many cases, modern day people are being told that it is very good to have knowledge about different forms of beliefs as long as we do not commit ourselves to any of them.

I. Commitment to Jesus

This is very much opposite to what is crucial for us who are followers of Jesus. As Christians we have a very basic and important message to proclaim. "For God loved the world so much that He sent His beloved Son, so that we who believe in Him will not die but may have eternal life." (Jn 3:16) We cannot water down this reality because this is a message that every person on earth needs to hear and understand. There is no one in the world who could give us this promise except Jesus.

As followers of Jesus Christ within the Catholic community our role is to make sure that whatever we do and whatever we plan has to have one ultimate aim and reason; that is to bring people into a closer and deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. As people involved in Catholic Charismatic Renewal, we are to

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take every opportunity that presents itself to help those whom we meet to be open to the life changing touch of our God in their present life situation. The prayer for a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a potent means that all of us can use to proclaim the message of Jesus.

II. Practical Applications

A very practical example of how this may be done is when people come to visit us. At times the conversation centres around mundane topics. However there would be those times when the person visiting us would start to share with us on a deeper level. There will be those times when the other person will share deep hurts, anxieties and disappointments. This is the moment when, at the end of the necessary dialogue and conversation we might say “Can I now pray with you about the things that you have shared with me.” In this manner Jesus is invited to enter into these areas of concern to bring His healing, encouragement and forgiveness.

Another practical example that comes to mind is when children visit their parents. When your children come to see you, welcome them with a hug and with a little blessing. “It is really good to see you. May God bless you.” In the same manner before they leave, take the opportunity to embrace them and say “May God be with you. Always remember how precious you are because you are a son/daughter of God.” There are sacred moments where we provide opportunities for our God to touch and bless those who we come in contact with.


III. As Christians what we do gets its meaning and purpose from our Relationship with Jesus Christ

It is very important to be involved in programs that aim to bring justice, respect and dignity to those who do not enjoy these basic human conditions. At the same time, we need to remember that as Catholics we are involved in these initiatives because this is precisely what Jesus has done. Jesus Christ has given us everything. He was literally broken in order to be of service to others. This is what we celebrate during the Eucharist. In the same way, basing ourselves on the values, principles and teachings of Jesus Christ, we are prepared to be broken so that others might realize their dignity as being created by God. Social Justice needs to be totally based and contexted within the very life of total dedication and service of Jesus Christ. We embrace social justice not only because we are good people or because we feel the need to help others. We get involved in this area because this is what Jesus expects and invites us to do so. (Mt: 25:31-46) This means that as Christians what we do has to be animated and founded on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Worship of God and practice of our

faith go hand in hand with our outreach to those in need. As a church we exist for this mission. “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the church evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.” (EN14)

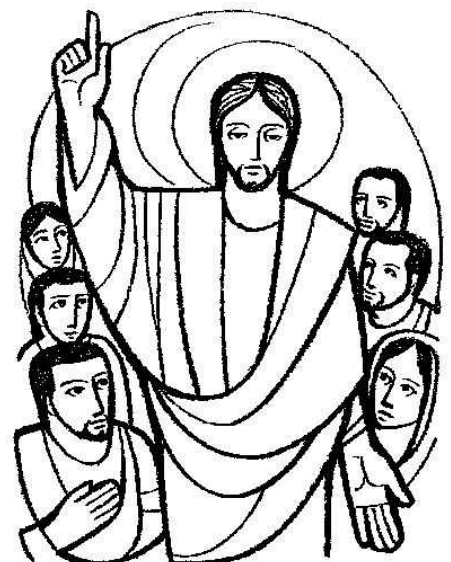
IV. Proclaiming Jesus with Zeal and Enthusiasm

Moreover, this message needs to be proclaimed with enthusiasm and with passion. The two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus initiated the journey in a state of anxiety and confusion. Once they recognized Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to tell the other followers of Jesus what had happened. Their return journey took place at night which was a very dangerous thing to do. However, they were so fired up with the experience of having encountered Jesus that they overcame any fear or difficulties to accomplish this mission (Mt 24:13-35). This is a great lesson for us. The more we are in a close relationship with our God through our prayer life and the assiduous practice of our faith the more we can become conscious of the giftedness that we possess to continue the work of Jesus.

In his Apostolic letter marking the beginning of the new millennium Pope John Paul II captures in a powerful manner the mission that we, as followers of Jesus are called to. “Duc in altum (Throw into the deep)! These words ring out for us today and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever! (Heb 13:8).” 

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Do I spend time each day with my God to be nurtured by his life giving presence?
- 2 As there are areas in my life where Jesus is not the master yet; where I am still in command?
Am I ready to talk about these areas to Jesus so that He can heal me and refresh me?
- 3 Am I involved in voluntary work in service to others?



ICCRS Sub Committee Asia/Oceania: ISAO

by Allan Panozza

Some years ago Fr. Bart Pastor from the Philippines, together with some leaders of Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Asia and Oceania, formed a regional group known as Catholic Charismatic Council for Asia - Pacific (CCCAP). For a number of reasons CCCAP did not continue to function beyond the nineties, and for a time there was no regional link between the countries of Asia and the Pacific region. Then in 2006 after some discussions between the President of ICCRS, Fr. Bart, and some other CCR leaders from the region, it was decided to form a sub Committee of ICCRS in the region of Asia - Oceania similar to those which had been formed in Europe and in Africa.

The European sub Committee of ICCRS (ESCI) was established in Europe in 2000 linking more than twenty countries, and the African sub Committee of ICCRS (ASCI) was established in Africa in 2005, linking the Anglophone and Francophone nations of Africa. The first Pan African Conference is scheduled to be held in Ghana 18 - 25 July 2007, and the next European event celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Catholic Charismatic Renewal will be held in Warsaw during September 2007.

The ICCRS sub Committee for Asia - Oceania (ISAO) was finally established at an inaugural meeting held in Singapore 8 - 10 December 2006. More than forty representatives from fourteen countries within this vast region attended the meeting, and a Committee and Executive Committee were chosen to implement the aims of ISAO. These aims are in accordance with the Statutes of International Catholic Charismatic Renewal (ICCRS), which seeks to serve the Renewal through coordination, promotion, sharing of experiences, reflections and resources in the various regions of the world.

The Executive Committee of ISAO was chosen by the full Committee. Those elected were Chairman - Cyril John (India), Vice Chairman - Felix Ali Chendra (Indonesia), Secretary - Gerard Francisco (Singapore), and Treasurer - Brendan Woodnutt (New Zealand). The President of ICCRS at that time, Allan Panozza (Australia), automatically became a member of the Executive Committee. He will continue to serve on the ISAO Executive representing the incoming President when she is unable to attend meetings in the region.

A decision was made that the office for ISAO would be established in Singapore, and the services of the local National Service Committee of Catholic Charismatic Renewal were offered and gladly accepted by the assembly.

The first Asia - Oceania CCR Leaders' Conference was planned to be held outside Jakarta in November

2007 in the Diocese of Bogor, and the local Bishop Rt. Rev Michael Angkur, O.F.M. who was present at the Singapore meeting indicated his strong support for this new undertaking to be established in the region, and welcomed planning for the first event to be held in his Diocese.

Subsequently, advice was received from a number of Asian countries indicating that the dates chosen in November were unsuitable for their participation, due to local situations and the fact that important exams would be taking place at that time. A new date will be established at the next Executive meeting to be held in Singapore in July 2007.

It is a very important task of ICCRS to sponsor collaboration and support for the Renewal within regional areas. The ICCRS Statutes also highlight the need for ICCRS Council members to be active in their own geographic areas, and it is to facilitate and encourage this co-operation that ICCRS has established these three regional entities. It is crucial for any institution to both foster and experience unity within its different expressions, and this is highlighted within the Statutes: "...in several realities the CCR organizes itself like an Ecclesial Movement, but there are also structures such as Communities, Networks, Schools of Evangelisation, Television Stations, Associations, Religious Institutes and Seminaries, as well as Publishing Houses, Musicians, Missionaries and Preachers. All of these, though not formally associated in a specific structure have a 'charismatic' profile". (From the Preamble to the ICCRS Statutes). ICCRS also enjoys a close relationship of mutual co-operation and support with the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships.

The formation of the ICCRS sub Committee for Asia - Oceania will help to facilitate the enormous task of serving the Charismatic Renewal across such a vast region of the world.

Countries and territories already represented on ISAO include United Arab Emirates, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong (China), New Zealand and Australia. As we develop better lines of communication and implement various regional programs and events, we must look forward in faith to a vibrant and more unified Charismatic Renewal within this part of the world.

We pray that the Holy Spirit may continue to lead and inspire leaders within Catholic Charismatic Renewal in all of its expressions and entities in Asia - Oceania, so that it might truly become a source of God's healing and evangelization within the life of the Church.

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Questions to ICCRS

Please send us your questions at newsletter@iccrs.org or by fax: (0039) 06-69887530.

1 Can you tell me why Protestants add "For this is the kingdom the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen" to the Lord's prayer. At our prayer meeting there are those who insist on adding this to the Our Father?

Firstly, where there is a gathering of an ecumenical nature, it is certainly permitted to use this form of the Lord's prayer. How did it come about? One has to go back to early transcripts of the Gospels. In some handwritten additions this ending was erroneously added. With the early vernacular Protestant translations of the bible the error was perpetuated and has become as it were a small "t" tradition amongst Protestant denominations. The prayer actually comes from 1 Chronicles 29:10b-11 - David's prayer. At the celebration of the Mass, the Our Father is followed by the priest's invocation and then the congregation prays David's prayer of praise.

2 A member of our prayer group insists that since his/her marriage broke up due to adultery of the spouse then Scripture allows him/her to remarry. Is this true?

There are a number of points to be considered. Firstly, if the marriage was sacramentally valid and there are no grounds for a decree of nullity (annulment) then the individual is not free to marry. To do so would be to commit a grave sin and the couple would be in an adulterous relationship. Secondly, the Scripture that the person is no doubt referring to is Matthew 19: 9. In some translations it is rendered as "Therefore I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, unless it be for infidelity and marries another, commits adultery," which seems to imply that infidelity, i.e. adultery, is grounds for divorce and remarriage. This is a misinterpretation of the verse. There are two possible interpretations to this verse.

1. It can mean that where two have married within illegal grounds of consanguinity, i.e. close relationships such as brother and sister, first cousins etc., then the marriage is invalid and the parties would be free to marry another person.

2. Alternately another interpretation of this text concerns the Jewish practice of marriage at the time of Jesus. To be betrothed was to be considered married even though the marriage would not be consummated for a full year. Remember that Joseph and Mary were betrothed when she was found to be with child. Joseph was permitted to divorce Mary and marry another because of the presumed infidelity. Unfortunately the person you speak of has been tainted with some Protestant thinking that tends to give a literal

interpretation to every word in Scripture and seeks to justify divorce and re-marriage on the grounds of adultery.

3 Our prayer group is attended by both Catholics and Protestants and, to accommodate everyone, once a month we have a breaking of bread where one of the leaders takes bread and grape juice, blesses it, and we share it. Is this permitted?

It sounds very nice and accommodating, but unfortunately it can cause great confusion. This practice tends towards a false ecumenism and people who are flawed in their understanding of Eucharist can become easily confused. Catholic and Protestant understandings of Eucharist are profoundly different and can lead to abuse. For a lay person to bless bread and juice may sound good, but it blurs the distinction between the ordained ministry and the laity. Only a validly ordained Catholic or Orthodox priest can consecrate the Eucharist, and he can do so only in the celebration of the Mass where the valid matter is bread and wine, not grape juice. My advice to the leadership of your prayer group would be to drop this practice and to simply join together as Christians of different persuasions in joyful praise and worship to the Lord.

4 Some members of our prayer group complain because we have a picture of Jesus and Mary and burning candles at our prayer meeting. They say this is offensive to our Protestant brothers and sisters who occasionally come to our meeting. Should we remove the picture when there are Protestants present?

NO!! Why? We need to be clear about our Catholic faith and identity and refuse to dilute the truth. It sounds as though you are a Catholic prayer group and not an ecumenical group. To remove the image of Jesus and Mary would be to fall into the trap of false ecumenism and to promote the false understanding that Catholics worship images. This rejection of images dates back to the 8th century and the iconoclastic heresy which was clearly dealt with by the Catholic Church at the 2nd Council of Nicaea in 787 A.D. This heresy continues to re-surface and the usual objection to the veneration of images stems from a misunderstanding of the first commandment where God forbids the worship of graven images. If anyone objects, you can refer them to God's instruction to Moses in Exodus 25:18-19 to have Cherubim carved to stand at each end of the Ark. See also Num.21: 8-9; 1 Kings 6:23-29; and 1 Kings 7:25-45.

5 If I know that my priest is living in sin due to an immoral relationship, how can I go to him for confession?

Pray for him, but do not deny yourself the grace of the Sacrament of Confession. Remember that the validity of the Sacrament is not dependant on the moral state of the Bishop or priest. To say otherwise is to fall into the heresy of Donatism condemned by St. Augustine of Hippo and the early Church.

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