

Pastoral Perspective

Holy Spirit's Gifts: Discoveries in Discipleship

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

[The first in a series of eight meditations for the Resurrection-Pentecost season.]

THE GIFT OF GIFTS

Resurrection Day was ending. Yet its dawn is forever — as long as an empty tomb cradles Life Transfigured, as long as the human spirit hungers fullness of life, as long as discoveries in discipleship mark this First Day of the new creation, a day without night (Apocalypse 21:25, 22:5).

Standing among the disciples in the Upper Room, the Resurrected Savior celebrates three life-giving actions (John 20:19ff). He certifies the disciples as full partners in his mission from the Father; He appoints them agents of forgiveness and reconciliation; He breathes upon them the Holy Spirit, the Father's Promise of life renewed, Jesus' supreme Legacy, the Gift of gifts whose most effective power is Presence.

The Old Testament People of God had reflected on the Spirit as a divine force giving human personalities the power for extraordinary deeds. At best the Spirit was looked upon as a now-and-then presence. A new dimension to Israel's thought was added when the prophet Isaiah (11:1ff) spoke of a yet-to-come Ideal King possessing the special qualities of his great predecessors: the wisdom and understanding (of Solomon), the courage and prudence (of David), the knowledge and fear of God (of all the patriarchs and prophets). In a word, the Messiah would embody the outstanding qualities of Israel's finest leaders.

When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, a seventh quality was added, "piety" — a repetition, actually, of the Hebrew "fear of (reverence for) the Lord." This seventh gift was not meant to complete the list, but rather to suggest fullness and perfection. After all, what list can exhaust the inexhaustible ways in which the Spirit of God

works among men?

In the New Testament the Spirit has an all-pervading role. He overshadows Mary at the moment of the Incarnation (Luke 1:35). He "anoints" Jesus for his mission through the baptism at the Jordan (Mark 1:10). He empowers Jesus' preaching with insight and impact (Luke 4:14). He supports Jesus in confronting Satan (Matthew 4:1), in curing illness and in proclaiming the good news (Luke 4:18ff). At Pentecost the apostles launch their mission of witness, "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). Wherever, whenever God's work is being done, the Holy Spirit continues to be "so lavishly poured over us" (Titus 3:6). Paul rightly exclaims: "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living among you, then He who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit living in you." (Romans 8:11).

As the Promise of the Father, the Spirit brings renewed life to our world. Man, the spoiler, has fouled up his world by his self-centeredness, his exploitation of the earth, his capacity for destructiveness. However, as the Spirit of God, brooding over the primeval waters, brought order to the world of creation, so the same Spirit can and must bring divine order to a world made ugly with disobedience and sin.

Since each person must in God's plan be made new, renewal can only occur if we open ourselves to the re-creating power of the Spirit of God. Thus primarily the Spirit is God's Power for renewed life. Hence the psalmist addresses God in these words: "You give breath, fresh life begins, you keep renewing the world!" (Psalm 104:30).

As Jesus' supreme forget-me-not legacy, the Spirit insures the continuance of Jesus' mission: to teach His brothers in the flesh the Father's concrete love for mankind (John 3:16), to teach His brothers how to love one another as He himself had done (John 13:34-35). Thus the Spirit, by His presence, breathes old reminders and new capacities into us, teaches the meaning of and furnishes motivation for the message of Jesus, corrects our failings and confirms our commitment to "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" who is Jesus.

Jesus came to demonstrate that life's horizons are not limited by death, that human evil can be conquered by genuine love, that genuine love is the perfect (because the only) answer to human violence. In a word, Jesus came to show the world "the abundant life" (John 10:10). And that means, on the one hand, a childlike faith in God's love for us, and on the other, a deeply committed love for one another. A love, in fact, which, in Paul's words, is "for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the deep knowledge of the Son of God, to perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13)

All of this is possible only under the direct influence of the Spirit of God, the Source of our strength and consolation, given "to teach us to understand the gifts He has given us." (1 Cor 2:12)

In his remarkable little book, "The Meaning of Gifts," Paul Tournier, penetrating psychiatrist and committed Christian, makes some excellent points about gifts and gift-giving. Among other things, he writes:

"Gift means celebration and celebration means gift. The best gifts communicate the whole concept of life of the giver, by gesture rather than by words. Few things hurt more than to have one's gift refused. A beautiful gift enhances the one who gives, as well as the recipient. Trust is the finest of gifts, for it is a bit of one's life. It is the highest sign of friendship — giving another the privilege of sharing your inner thought. To give is to signify one's self-commitment. The presence of the loved one is also a gift. The meaning of gifts is in the love they express, the love both given and received. There must always be new gifts to complete and confirm those already received. The great gift, the unique and living one, is not a thing, but a person."

Tournier's insights testify to a remarkable series of truths. These insights are grounded on the psychology of human-giving. They become truer still when the Giver is the Holy Spirit, and we are the recipients of the Gift of gifts.

vatican news

Pope: Love Is Remedy for War, Violence

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul highlighted a busy Holy Week of religious functions with an eloquent Easter Sunday appeal for the rebirth of a "strong, generous and persevering love" as the only antidote to the war, violence and unrest troubling the world today.

The 75-year-old Pope mentioned Indochina, Northern Ireland and the Middle East in citing examples of "places where peace does not yet exist, or where it is uncertain or in danger."

Following the Christian theme of peace through the risen Christ, the Pope delivered his message from the center balcony of St. Peter's Basilica overlooking a square jammed with thousands of pilgrims from all parts of the world.

The annual message was read by the pontiff shortly after he completed the offering of an 11 o'clock Easter Sunday Mass at a temporary altar set up on the steps outside Christianity's largest house of worship.

"Indochina, for so long has been the object of the world's attention and fear," he said, adding, "The hopes, only recently enkindled for an end to the years-old conflict there are still exposed to the rough winds of an uncertain situation that makes them fragile and unsure."

This was in reference to the repeated cease-fire violations reported in North and South Vietnam and violence continuing in the Cambodia area.

Of the Middle East, the pontiff said: "May our greetings go to the land where the Lord Jesus was born, where He taught, suffered, died and rose again — that land where His greeting of peace resounded so many times and whence it spread over the whole earth, together with His message of love and justice, that land where, alas, peace does not yet reign."

Pope Paul's assessment of the situation in Northern Ireland carried a specific suggestion for an avenue to peace but warned that the road to that goal will be long and possibly costly.

"The intolerable and distressing state of affairs unhappily continuing there," he said, "is contrary to the will and the aspirations of the majority of the people themselves, in an affront not only to humanity, but to the Christian name."

"Let the voice of violence be silent and let there be heard instead the voice of wisdom and goodwill," the Pope pleaded. "And may the official British proposals which, as is well known, have recently been made, offer a favorable basis for a joint effort which will open the way to true reconciliation in justice and in charity."

The pontiff warned against violence in any situation — finding it more evil than good.

"It is not through violence that good is done," the Pope emphasized. "Still less can a just

human order be established by traveling the ways of injustice. Only love — strong, generous and persevering, but at the same time patient and respectful of the laws of justice and of the rights of all, can ensure a better future for peoples and for all mankind."

It was once again evident that the Pope places in the hands of youth much of his hope for the world.

"Still more does His (Christ's) joyous peace, soaring above the hosts of the younger generation, encounter the boundless ocean of youth that grows and rises, that seeks the right path, truth and life, towards which it can bend its steps — steps that are uncertain and anxious but full of dynamism," the Pope said.

The annual message concluded with words addressed to agnostics and nonbelievers, as well as others.

"To each, and everyone goes the blessed greeting of Easter peace: to you who suffer, to you who are alone and seek comfort, to you who conceal in your hearts the silent but cruel despair of indifference and skepticism, to you who glimpse the summit of human greatness — sacrifice for the love and service of others — and do not know when or from whom to offer this sacrifice."

On Good Friday — the day almost 2,000 years ago that Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross in Jerusalem, the pontiff walked through Rome's ancient pagan



Pope Paul kisses the feet of one of 12 children whose feet he washed during a Holy Thursday Solemn High Mass in Rome's Basilica of St. John Lateran. The washing of feet is a symbolic re-enactment of what Jesus did for the apostles during their last meal together. [RNS]

ruins in the Colosseum, carrying a large, light-weight wooden cross in a candlelit procession re-enacting the final hours of Christ.