

It may not surprise you if I find it quite easy to share with you, the history of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. This is our story and it is a familiar one. Although some of us may be unaware of where this story began.

It would be tempting to look back to that weekend when a group of Catholic students from Duquesne University prayed for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But then, should we not go back further, to the 1st January, 1901 when a group of Protestant Christians did the same thing in Kansas. This was the beginning of the Pentecostal Church. And if we do, should we not also note that on the same day, Pope Leo XIII sang the ancient hymn to the Holy Spirit, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, in the Basilica of St Peter in Rome, expecting the Holy Spirit to do something.

Personally, a question about beginnings is best answered this way: we were conceived in the loving heart of our heavenly Father, brought to birth in the blood and water which flowed from his beloved Son's obedient death on the cross, and empowered to live the mission

Jesus entrusted to us, when the Spirit was poured out upon our world at Pentecost. And then we can say, the rest is history.

But of course, we need to look at things from a more recent perspective. And from this perspective, our beginnings are to be found in the text which defines our ecclesial self-understanding, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. So let me share with you again, these words in *Lumen Gentium*. I could quite happily reflect on these words all day long:

'The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. In them He prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons. The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which He unified in communion and in works of ministry, He both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits'. (LG 4)

These few words are supported by not less than nine references, mainly from the apostle



Paul and one from John's Gospel. Here then, we are brought into the mind and heart of God.

The unfolding story of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is familiar to many of us. We were there at the beginning, or we have become a part of the stream of grace since. You may feel the story is set in stone. But I think there is more for us to discover, and this is rooted in the way we understand the Lord's memory.

The term *memoria dei* generally refers to what we are remembering about God, especially his commandments and his words of instruction to us about how we live our lives. But I wonder if there may be another way we might think about all this. How does God remember things?

St Thomas Aquinas suggests that the Lord most shows his omnipotence in his capacity to show mercy. This was at the heart of the Year of Mercy a few years ago. When the Lord looks at us then, he remembers the loving compassion he has for us. He remembers how he created us in his own image and likeness. He calls to mind his profound pain when we chose to turn

away from him. He remembers the long unfolding journey of salvation which followed the Fall and came to fulfilment in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

St Anselm tells us that God is always greater than our thinking. This is entirely true and correct. But I wonder if we can look at things from a different perspective. The Lord has chosen to reveal himself to us, his being, his plans and his heart for our broken world. It seems to me, that Charismatic Renewal has been about this revelation. It is fundamentally about what the Lord is doing in his Church and in our own life-time.

And this leads me to reflect a little on the charisms. What are they? How are we to understand these gifts from the Lord? It seems to me, we need to become very humble at this point. Pride was our undoing in the Garden. That same pride has beset us ever since. We could say, it has become part of our DNA. And yet we know we were created for something else, nothing less than a share in God's own divine nature. This is the only way we may



taste eternal life. We have no place in heaven unless we are drawn into what the merciful love, the energetic creative life of the Trinity God.

The early Church Fathers, and I am thinking particularly here of St Athanasius and St Irenaeus, were very clear about this. Jesus became man so that human beings might share in his divinity. I suspect we have not always been aware of our roots in all this. We have not always appreciated the rich depths of our story. And I might put it this way. In America and the UK, we have drawn very much from our dear friends in the Protestant tradition. We have seen what the Holy Spirit did within their tradition, and we have naturally fallen in step alongside our brother and sisters across the Protestant ecclesial communities. I sense things have been slightly different in continental Europe. This might be a hunch, rather than a fully-worked out thesis at the moment, but European Catholic culture has provided more inspiration for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal across the channel.

So this is all I want to share with you about where we have come from. And it would be good to hear your reactions to what you have heard, and for you to paint more colours onto this canvas.

But I do want to emphasise the way in which we need to think about our remembering. We see this journey into the mind of God very much present in the unfolding revelation of the Scriptures. Just think for a moment about how the evangelists and especially the apostle Paul, remembered events and words from the Old Testament. These were re-shaped in the New Testament. And then, for the mystagogues, living with the reality of the sacramental life of the Church, re-shaped again so that the living dynamic of encounter with Christ in the Gospel, could be an experience within every age of the Church.

So where are we going? It is clear that the establishment of Charis has re-directed the streams of grace we have received within the Catholic Charismatic renewal.



There is a Bedouin story from the Sinai peninsula which may help us to begin to understand an answer to this question. A Westerner entering the desert beyond Nuweiba once asked an English-speaking Bedouin how far it was to the nearest oasis. The man did not respond. How far is it to Ein El Furtaga? the traveller asked more loudly, distinctly mouthing the words. But the Bedouin still said nothing. Shouting his question the third time into the man's face, and receiving only silence yet again, the traveller finally shook his head and started walking away. About four hours, the Bedouin then called out, in answer to his question. Why didn't you tell me that the first time? the Westerner asked. I couldn't say, the man responded, until I knew how fast you were accustomed to walking.

The ecumenical journey has received new impetus through the work of Charis. But I would put it this way, we who are in communion with the Bishop of Rome have discovered a new boldness to reciprocate all that we have received from our brothers and sisters in other churches. Again, I sense this

goes back to the Second Vatican Council, and through re-discovery of the treasures we find there.

So let me share with you some thoughts from a Catholic perspective. During a ceremony at the Basilica of St Paul's outside the Walls on the Feast of Saint Paul's conversion, 25 January 1959, the final day of what was then known as the World Octave of Prayer for the Unity of Christians, Pope John XXIII announced his intention to convene an ecumenical Council. I think we sometimes forget something he said during this announcement. One of the purposes of the Council was to invite the separated communities of Christendom to seek again that unity for which so many souls are longing for throughout the world.

My hunch is, we need to understand the life we have received from the Lord with the gift of the charisms, within this ecclesiological context. I was thinking about this, when the conversation of Paul came to mind. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? This is how closely Jesus identifies with his beloved



Church. And that's why we need to urgently pray that Jesus' high priestly prayer would be fulfilled; 'Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.' (Jn 17.11)

Then there is the business of evangelisation. We do this because of our faith in Jesus Christ. And we might say further, when we don't do evangelisation this is an indication of our poverty of faith.

I heard someone talking about youth ministry earlier this year. He painted a very bleak picture of the kind of world that many young people find themselves in. They are filled with self hatred, and are asking the question, can I be me and still be loved? They are swimming in the waters of constant judgement. They find meaning in their own self image.

Against this culture, becoming immersed in Christ through baptism and the sacramental life, means that we have a clear identity, which is rooted in belonging. We become who we are meant to be through the cross and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith becomes an awareness of divine action, rather than maintaining religious space. And so the question hangs there, why do we keep this to ourselves, why are we not compelled to share this with others?

Over twelve months ago now, I shared a graph with the priests of my diocese. It really is quite exciting on one level. As you can imagine, and this is no different in other dioceses, the line is falling fairly sharply, and has been for the past 40 years or so. Why do I say this is exciting? Because if we do not do something about it, the whole business is about to flatline. We really should be preparing for a massive funeral event.

The charisms have never been private possessions, but tools for us to evangelise others. When the ship is going down, it's no good saying, but I just cook the breakfasts, it's every hand on deck!

The question we need to ask ourselves is this, what is the Lord saying to the churches in this



time. And then, to keep in mind, this is indeed a moment of opportunity, *kairos* time, as well as historical *chronos* time.

And in all of this, I want to suggest a diabolical problem we are all facing in our day. This is the almost complete loss of the supernatural. There is something of a very distorted sense of the supernatural still around - just call to mind the goings on around Halloween last weekend. We see this in the fascination with the magical and the occult, the rise of new age spiritual forms, much of which is gnostic and esoteric. These are perversions of the human need for the transcendent, which grow in ever-increasing monstrous manifestations of something which passes for the supernatural. As we grow in the life of the Spirit, we are invited to play our part in redirecting the focus to what is truly life-giving and meaningful. I sense that this will involve a closer attention paid to Scripture. The Word of God must become our reference point in all that we do, and not simply something we turn to from time to time.

The search for the esoteric is a spiritual playboy's game, and often avoids the need for social justice and compassionate care of the poor. Authentic Christianity does not walk too far from the church door before it recognises the need to attend to those whose lives are poor and broken in so many ways. (Listen to St James and he would have us make sure we are attending to the poor in our churches!) There are many examples around the world of how the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has led individuals and groups to care for their brothers and sisters, broken by material need. In some cases, it is clear that miracles are involved.

I want to gently push out another boat. In my brief less than three years experience, it seems to me that community is going to be increasingly important moving forward. Our charismatic communities will become, along with other renewal communities, a leaven in the dough so to speak. Parishes are struggling to be places of genuine faith community. The storms and darkness out there are very strong, and we need to build communities of real



faith, hope and love. Not too long ago, a number of bishops were speaking at a meeting about their experiences of the regional Celebrate Conferences. There was a general sense that these were places where families, the different generations could discover their vocation to be a Christian family.

And finally, there is a need for us to draw new life from our Catholic tradition. I can still remember the day I was appointed a parish priest for the first time. It was back in 1988 and I had been ordained for eight years. As providence arranged things, I was over in the States with the Mother of God community when the message came through. I was being led through a powerful personal retreat experience of the Life in the Spirit seminars. John Dillon was leading me in this retreat and he gave me a copy of the Sacred heart Novena. David, he said, when you return home, begin this Novena in your new parish. It is a devotion I began in every parish since, only to discover with great joy during a pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial, the home of this devotion, that this place is also the home of

the Emmanuel Community. On the day I first visited the shrine, there were people everywhere around the basilica, praying with others. It was like coming home!

I think we have much to learn from our theological tradition, from the saints, from everything truly Catholic. The Lord is definitely bringing us to a place in Charismatic Renewal where there is more eucharistic adoration, more contemplative prayer.

I also think we need to affirm our faith, that Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a work of the Lord in our own times, and it is a work for the whole Church. I heard an Irish bishop speak once of the early Celtic missionary saints. They set off across the seas in their small boats. If they had travelled by land, they would have had to use roads which are fixed and certain on the landscape. Because they went by sea, they went where the wind and sails took them. Our Church is experiencing something of this in our own days. And I truly believe, the grace of the Renewal is very much at the heart of this journey.