

Exercising Prophetic Leadership:

The gift of Encouragement

Denise Bergeron



Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others. (1Pet 4:10)

What is the grace of encouragement?

To encourage is to give the desire and the means to undertake or to manage an action; to help or sustain someone in an intellectual or moral initiative. To encourage is to give courage, but not to carry the load. It is to promote the achievement of something, that is to say, to approve of it. To incite or to call to action. To encourage is to hearten to the creation of the necessary space so that the Holy Spirit can be deployed in every person and the community. The grace of encouragement is thus a component of prophetic leadership.

Saint Paul, in his epistle to the Thessalonians, exhorts his brethren to do everything so that everyone and the community can flourish and allow the gifts of the Spirit to flow.

“We urge you, brothers, to admonish those who are undisciplined, encourage the apprehensive, support the weak and be patient with everyone. Make sure that people do not try to repay evil for evil; always aim at what is best for each other and for everyone. Always be joyful; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks; this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not stifle the Spirit or despise the gift of prophecy with contempt; test everything and hold on to what is good and shun every form of evil.” (1Th 5:14–22).

The True Leader

The true leader is one who is not afraid to give himself to the Holy Spirit, who enables all members to release the gifts that are in them, whether they are ordinary or extraordinary charisms. Such a community allows the Holy Spirit to lead it.

In Saint Paul’s footsteps, we are invited, as brothers and sisters of the Charismatic Renewal, to encourage each other, to challenge and to bear with each other on our journey of faith, and above all, not to give in to the tempta-

tion of discouragement.

As Pope Francis recalled in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (para. 264): “But if this is

to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others.”

Through his being and his words, the leader therefore has the responsibility to awaken the desire to move forward in the ways of the Spirit. This is the spiritual journey.

Through his docility, perseverance, and faith, the leader becomes the joyful servant and shepherd in the manner of Jesus, who guides, gathers, and seeks the lost. By his word of encouragement, he compels the sheep to go even further. He helps to release the gifts that are deep in their heart to let the Spirit spring out, and to give all the glory to God. To encourage others is to invest in the power of the community.

The Leader’s Vision

He must first be a visionary, with a distant outlook to discover the potential and gifts of each person. He ensures that the grace of Pentecost is present and alive in the group such that the charisms and ministries are not exercised by only one person, but by the community.

The leader is concerned above all with discovering the particular charism of the community. For example, a community may tend more toward praise, intercession, deliverance, healing, hospitality, or some other charism.

He then has to discern the charisms of each member of the community and ensure that these charisms are engaged in harmony.

As the Apostle Paul invites us in his exhortation to Timothy, the leader strives to ensure that the charisms of each person are put to best use.

“That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess through the laying on of my hands. God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power and love and self-control.” (2Tm 1: 6–7).

How do we get there?

- By developing an objective look at people to make room for the Spirit to act as He wishes;
- By exercising patience and perseverance: using patience to exhort, encourage, challenge, and make upright so that the Spirit can act freely;
- By not being afraid to submit to the Holy Spirit;

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- By believing in the charisms and welcoming them fully;
- By praying they flourish in the heart of the community; and
- By arousing the generosity of people to offer themselves to serve the community.

The leader must “dare to risk faith and abandonment.” This is not always obvious. Every exhortation awaits an answer. The answer can come only from a person. It will sometimes be difficult to encourage someone when that person is struggling with fears, selfishness, timidity, and vulnerabilities. Bishop Gilbert Louis recalled one day to youths that, “the Lord does not choose qualified people; He qualifies those He chooses.”

How do we encourage?

We encourage by being joyful, gentle, and self-effacing. Gifts and charisms are rooted in the grace of baptism. We are baptized to be sent. The leader has the responsibility and duty to allow each one to experience the richness of his baptism. How? By encouraging him:

- to feed on the Word and to let it operate at the heart of his life;
- to experience the power of the Spirit in prayer and in the heart of the sacraments; and
- to implore the Holy Spirit to help him discover the gift with which he can serve the community.

By fostering opportunities:

- during prayer meetings;
- during the laying on of hands;
- while providing training and practice; and
- while creating conditions that allow the use of charisms to flourish.

A community that has no charisms is not a charismatic community and is in the process of dying. People get discouraged.

Now, what is the fruit that shows that a community is growing in the life in the Spirit? The main fruit is the unity that is manifested and is shared through the testimony of each member. The solidarity of hearts and minds is the testimony of a community whose members encourage each other in a continual desire to live charity. The community itself then becomes a source of encouragement as each person in it contributes to the edification of the community.

“If anyone is a speaker, let it be as the words of God, if anyone serves, let it be as in strength granted by God; so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ, since to him alone belong all glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.” (1Pet 4:11)

The Formative and Exhortative Qualities of Encouragement

a) Formative Quality

One of the strengths of a good leader is learning to encourage individuals and the community as a whole while exercising discernment and ensuring good order in the assembly, allowing the Spirit

to act as He wills. He constantly strives to place himself under the anointing of the Holy Spirit so that this anointing emerges and touches hearts. It is only by drawing on a life of intimacy with Christ that he will become more docile to the promptings of the Spirit and thus become a coach for his brothers and sisters.

b) Exhortative Quality

Enthusiasm in evangelisation is founded on a personal experience of the Word of God at the heart of our life. To encourage is to exhort each person to find and develop their individual charisms.

Therefore, the leader should not hesitate to reassure the frightened, encourage the timid, and stimulate the lukewarm, that is to say those who are “running on the spot.”

The awareness that we are part of the same body leads us to put our gifts and charisms in the service of the community.

“As it is, God has put all the separate parts into the body as he chose. If they were all the same part, how could it be a body? As it is, the parts are many but the body is one.” (1Cor 12:18–20).

This is not about being a nice quiet group that just stares at the leader, but rather, it is about knowing that the Holy Spirit has His eyes on us.

The Price to Pay

It is obvious that encouragement carries a great responsibility to the whole community and to the person itself. But encouragement can sometimes lead to dispute:

- the refusal to accept and exercise the charisms discerned;
- the possibility that people are mistaken in the exercise of charisms; and
- the disorderly acquisition of charisms.

The leader must be generous enough to go to the little ones and the poor. He will also have to be vigilant to discern the manifestations of the person’s charisms and to help him grow in this surge of the Spirit.

Conclusion

Exercising prophetic leadership is a call from God. The joy of seeing the action of the Spirit in the heart of daily living compels the leader to encourage, exhort, spread peace, and make upright. Thus, everyone has the opportunity to become fulfilled and to help his brothers in their personal encounter with the God of tenderness and love. How can we not rejoice in the power of God’s action in the heart of his life and in his community?

By agreeing to become prophetic leaders, we welcome the fruit of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that is to say, the flow of life, praise, the allocation of gifts, and the charisms that bring deliverance, healing, and growth. Thus, we become living witnesses of the Risen Lord. As at Pentecost, leaders welcome the fulfillment of the word, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:4) 🏠

What is it? Is it a dream or a mission?

■ Jude Muscat



In March of 2002 while addressing a delegation of the Italian Rinovamento nello Spirito, Blessed Pope John Paul II said: “In our time that is so hungry for hope, make the Holy Spirit known and loved. Help bring to life that “culture of Pentecost”, that alone can make fruitful the civilization of love and friendly coexistence among peoples. With fervent insistence, never tire of praying “Come Holy Spirit! Come! Come!”

Since then a lot has been written and said about the culture of Pentecost. The articles I read all make very good and interesting reading. While I do not claim to be original, since I am sure I did not read them all, I thought of tackling the subject from a different perspective. I hope that this will be a valid addition to the vast array of ideas and a good contribution towards the ongoing discussion.

Culture and Christianity

Defining culture is never an easy task. The term is used in many different contexts and disciplines. Its definition varies from one context to another, sometimes it is too wide or else too restricted. In Catholic documents we encounter three important definitions: The global sense, which includes all humanity; the elitist and reductionist view of culture, like poets, artists and intellectuals, and lastly; an anthropological description, the way people live, organise themselves and celebrate life. I understand that the anthropological concept is more fitting to the term “Culture of Pentecost”.

For my purpose I would define Culture as a complex combination of realities that make and animate a people. It is the sum total of knowledge, behaviour, actions and reactions, morals and customs, arts and ideas, history and vision, of a group of people. This is my amateurish attempt at bringing together both the physical realities and the underlying values of culture. Pope John Paul II wrote that “culture must be held as the common good of every people, the expression of its dignity, liberty and creativity, and the testimony of its course through history.” (Christifidelis Laici, 44)

Evangelisation of Cultures

It is evident to me that when Pope John Paul II speaks about the culture of Pentecost, he is not speaking of a homogeneous and rigid representation of Pentecost. In the two quotes above, he speaks of ‘friendly coexistence amongst peoples’ and refers to ‘every people’ while defining culture. Pope Paul VI writes “Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full Evangelisation of culture, or more correctly of cultures” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 20). I believe that this is a very important notion that we must all understand. Christianity has a language and a mission! To top it all, the various Christian denominations have their own language by which to dialogue with the world, and if that was not enough, the various realities and ecclesial movements in the Catholic Church, have their own language and behaviours with which to communicate, dialogue and live out their faith. This makes me wonder whether we are truly contributing to the expression of the dignity, liberty and creativity of every human culture. Maybe we are ignoring these diverse cultural realities and simply projecting ourselves unto them, reducing Christianity, or the Charismatic Renewal, as it were, into a number of ethical codes and behavioural attitudes, creating our own kind of culture without being

instrumental in enriching other cultures with the Truth. Maybe we simply want people to join our culture!

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI writes: “The split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times” (20). Pope Paul VI defines the problem in clear words, while Blessed John Paul II urges the laity to bring these two back together again, because “only from within and through culture does the Christian faith become a part of history and the creator of history” (Christifidelis Laici, 44).

We can choose to be the wheat dancing in the wind of the Spirit, while next to us is the weed dancing to another tune. This, I think, would be a wrong interpretation of the parable in Matthew 13. Maybe we need to listen to the weed and learn the rhythm of its music. Jesus walked all along the road with the disciples towards Emmaus (Lk 24:13-34), he listened to them carefully; he listened to their version of things, their story, their fears, their misconceptions, their disillusion, he listened and danced to their tune, while breathing Truth that captivates and transforms the heart.

Culture and Pentecost

Looking from this side of things, the notion ‘culture of Pentecost’ makes a lot of sense to me. The newness and freshness of things as proposed by the gospel of John especially in the first four Chapters speak not only of the new things but of the power that is given to all to become children of God through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:12-13). The rigidity and norms of the established religion need to be given a new light, a new power, a new freedom which transforms the heart and makes it the dwelling place of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Jn 14:23). In the dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus encounters religion as a normative web of do’s and don’ts, a religion of discourse and established ways of behaviour, Jesus encounters a culture and breathes life into it: “You must be born from above” (Jn 3:7). Pentecost brings life into religion. Pentecost builds Church and communities; Pentecost brings people into the embrace of God. Thus it brings a certain flexibility to religion, not in the sense of making it relative or subjective to cultures or individuals, but rather as a source of richness. The Holy Spirit transforms the core and brings out the beauty in all cultures. The culture of Pentecost transforms the culture of death to a culture of life, the culture of egoism to a culture of solidarity, the culture of work and power to the culture of life.

A mission, not a dream..

Proclaiming the gospel to all cultures is, in my opinion, the very heart of New Evangelisation. This is only possible if the Church yields to the culture of Pentecost. There can never exist a New Evangelisation if not a Pentecostal one, since it enables us to participate in Christ’s threefold office as Prophet, Priest and King. It is only through Pentecost that faith comes alive. Faith does not work in a vacuum, but it is a gift given to all, it is a gift working in the hearts of all peoples, of all cultures. Faith is born and nurtured by the Holy Spirit and manifests itself in the lives of people around the globe. For this reason, the culture of Pentecost starts from the individual extends to the community that builds up peoples and cultures, brought to life and bound together by the culture of Pentecost, as people of God. 🏠



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

What should a newly charismatic person do if their spouse has not been baptized in the Holy Spirit?

Let me begin with my personal anecdote. At first, my amazing encounter with Jesus and his outpouring of the Spirit brought a great blessing into our marriage. For the two prior years, my wife had been deeply saddened by my insistence upon using contraception. When that era of our life was suddenly ended, it brought her real joy. But many new developments—my all-day fascination with God, reading Scripture long into the night, preoccupation with prayer that often left chores undone, and absorption with prayer meetings—upset the balance in our way of life. At one point, my wife backed me up against the refrigerator and cried, “I don’t even know you anymore!”

Clearly, our marriage had lost its priority in my mind and in our home... and nobody was happy about it. In my dismay, I complained to God, “You started this, Lord; you’ve got to bring us through it.” And because He is faithful, He did.

Since baptism in the Holy Spirit often comes abruptly, it can bring great stress into a marriage. One person is euphoric for beginning to know “spiritual realities in spiritual terms” (1 Cor 2:13), while the other may feel only the dismay of a new kind of estrangement. The charismatic spouse can feel that a whole new journey has opened up, but the other cannot see it or join in it.

The vows of marriage are solemn and call for a deep sense of its “indissoluble unity” (CCC 1641). In regard to wedding promises that were made “for better or for worse,” baptism in the Holy Spirit ranks among the very best of all the “better” things that could ever have happened. Let there be no ambiguity as to whether one spouse’s baptism in the Holy Spirit is intrinsically good. It absolutely is! And yet there is potential for “division” such as Jesus prophesied in Luke 12:51, which will only be reconciled through great grace and docility.

St. Francis de Sales taught in his Introduction to the Devout Life that one’s pattern of personal devotion must always accord with one’s “station and calling” in life. In fact, he warns that if a form of devotion “ever works against or is inimical to anyone’s legitimate station and calling, then it is very definitely false devotion.” Charismatic devotion must avoid forms of falsity that could harm a marriage by being unwise, out of proportion, or ill-timed in relation to the progress of grace in the other spouse. Here are some considerations for

the charismatic spouse:

- Let there be reverence for the awesome gift of having been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Through only one spouse, God has accessed the home in a premium way. The hope of glory for the marriage and the family has gained stunning new potential!
- At the same time, this gift calls for great kindness toward the other spouse who may sincerely believe that something has gone wrong rather than right. (Recall that some of the bystanders on Pentecost thought that the apostles were drunk.) There must be deep spousal empathy, since a powerful new layer of mystery has come upon the home.
- When the Holy Spirit begins to expose areas of marital and family sin, the charismatic spouse should seek the counsel of a wise confessor or spiritual director. St. Peter addresses one dimension of this issue, teaching that wives can win over their husbands by their conduct, without a word, “when they observe your reverent and chaste behavior” (1 Pet 3:1). The most winning behavior comes as the natural fruit of one’s own growth in holiness. But sometimes the “reverent and chaste behavior” requires a change in the mutual life of the spouses (contraception is a perfect example). The resolution of such a matter calls for prayer, love, courage, faith and counsel. A great drama may arise, exposing our ultimate dependence upon the action of the Holy Spirit who must be the agent of our transformation. It calls for bedrock faith that “He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thes 5:24).
- We should not act as if our happiness is held hostage until the other spouse “comes around.” Instead, rejoice! With boundless love, Jesus delights in being inside the marriage. Notice the sweetness of Jesus’s self-invitation: “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house” (Lk 19:5). Jesus is the Emmanuel-master at being with us as we are, always proceeding from this earthly day toward a glorious future.
- Finally, the lone charismatic spouse is called to have great confidence in St. Paul’s principle: “love never fails” (1 Cor 13:8). The love of God that has been lavishly poured out by the Spirit into one spouse’s heart (Rom 5:5) is purposeful—it is a rising tide that will lift all boats in the home. Throughout this drama, faith, hope and love are essential; but especially since we are talking about marriage, “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13). 🍷

Answered by Deacon Bob Ervin, Michigan, USA