



# ICCRS LEADERSHIP BULLETIN

Formation for current and new leaders in CCR

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Guided by the Spirit:

## With Mary in the Upper Room

Michelle Moran



In the Acts of the Apostles we meet the Christian community gathered in obedience to the command of the Lord who had said; 'wait for what the Father has promised' (Acts 1:4). Mary accompanied them in their waiting prayerfully and in imploring the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, she did this from a very different perspective because we know that at the annunciation she had already been 'overshadowed' and had received a new out-pouring or infilling of the Holy Spirit.

When we reflect upon the account of the annunciation (Lk1: 26-38), we see that Mary enters into a journey. Firstly, she was deeply disturbed by the word but attentive to it (Lk1:30). Mary initially engages with the word at the cerebral level with her mind. She ponders 'How can this come about since I am a virgin?' (Lk1:34). Then, she allows the word to go deeper and touch her spirit, so eventually, she is able to see that it is the Holy Spirit who makes all things possible (Lk1:37). It is only after all this that she can she make that great assent of faith, her fiat: 'I am the handmaid of the Lord let what you have said be done to me' (Lk1:38).

We too can enter into her journey and ask ourselves some important questions. We know that 'the word of God is something alive and active' (Heb 4:12). However, when was the last time you allowed yourself to be chal-



lenged by the word of God? In one sense, it is easy to read the word but James reminds us that we are called 'to be doers of the word and not only listeners' (James 1:22). So like at the annunciation the word calls for engagement. When was the last time you were disturbed by the word? How are you engaging with the word of God in your life? Following in the footsteps of Mary; is the unfolding of the word in your life drawing you more deeply into the life of faith?

To be 'born of the Spirit' means to see things in a new way, to gain a new perspective. Then in faith, like Mary, to say yes and to surrender to God. This demands a conversion and from the new place, a response both at a rational or intellectual level and a response of the heart. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to do this.

In John chapter 3, we meet Nicodemus was a leading Jew, an intellectual, who was trying to work things out in his mind. He comes to Jesus 'by night' this in John's gospel is symbolic of blindness or unbelief. He needs the light of the Holy Spirit to understand what it means to be 'born from above' (Jn 3:3). We do not hear about the full outworking

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of his conversion but we see the fruit, his life was changed. Therefore, in a debate among the Pharisees, he defended Jesus was personally ridiculed (Jn 7:50). Also, he assisted Joseph of Arimathea with Jesus' burial (Jn 19:39).

When we, in the light of the Holy Spirit, do as Mary did and say our unconditional yes to God, new things can be birthed in our lives and we can be fruitful. At the annunciation, Mary said yes to the promise of the Holy Spirit and this led to the birth of Jesus into the world. In the Upper Room at Pentecost the assembly yielded to the Holy Spirit and this led to the birth of the Church. This is highlighted by St John Paul II in the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, when he comments that; 'Mary is the discrete yet subtle presence that indicates the path of birth from the Holy Spirit, first at the annunciation and now at the birth of the Church'.

Pope Francis reminds us in EG 284; 'With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present in the midst of people. She joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit and thus made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost. She is the Mother of the Church which evangelises and without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelisation'.

Mary joined the disciples in the Upper Room praying and waiting for what the Father had promised. She interceded so that they could receive the power from on high. She was desirous that they should receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit because one of the fruits of this is that people begin to move in missionary power. That is why Pentecost marks the birth of the Church.

On Pentecost day, in the Upper Room, there were three moves of the Holy Spirit. Firstly, the wind or breath of the Spirit filled the entire house and there was a communal Pentecost. Then they saw 'what seemed like tongues of fire resting on the heads of each of them' (Acts 2:3). This was a personal Pentecost as they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Once this had happened, they were no

longer able to stay in the confines of that room. They had received the power of the Holy Spirit and become witnesses who were now commissioned and empowered to go 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).



Are we like Mary desirous that many more people should receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit so that the Church can more perfectly fulfil her missionary mandate? Do we intercede for this? Are we active in bringing it about?

Pope Francis said to the CCR in Rome on June 1st 2014; 'I expect from you that you share with all in the Church the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit'. We have a responsibility, like those first Christians in the Upper Room, we cannot keep this incredible treasure to ourselves. We are called to spread the fire of Pentecost. This is the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit, Pope Paul VI reminded us; 'The Church needs her eternal Pentecost, she needs fire in her heart, words on her lips and a glance that is prophetic'. 🕯

*This article is based on a talk; 'With Mary in the Upper Room' given by Michelle Moran at the ICCRS Great Gathering in Uganda in July 2014.*

## ICCRS

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The *ICCRS Leadership Bulletin* is published along with the *ICCRS Newsletter*. Its purpose is to publicise formation on decisive topics in CCR.

The Spirit blows where he wills:

## Jesus Lived at the Margins of Society – He Reached Out to the Poor and Marginalized

■ Julienne Mesedem

Living at the margin of society and reaching out to the poor, Jesus puts his words in practice, words that are always the truth, and always accomplish their purpose.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out of my mouth; it shall not return empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:10-11).

In Is 49:15, he says also: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” In Is 54:10, we read: “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you.” Mt 9:12 “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

Jesus’ mission is to heal the sick and help sinners that they may convert. This does not mean that He does not like the healthy and the righteous, but He does not want to lose any of His sheep. “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep, and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it (Lk 15:4). And there is much joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Lk 15:7).

Jesus desires mercy from us and not sacrifice (Mt 12:7). As Pope Francis tells us “The kindness of God has no limits, and He does not discriminate against anyone. We have no reason to feel privileged.”

God created man that he may be eternally happy. In spite of the intervention of Satan who wants to destroy God’s plan, God takes every opportunity to save men, in order to give them their dignity of God’s children and to make them happy.

Jesus is all the more concerned with the marginalized, the abandoned or rejected, as He was himself victim of rejection soon after birth; He had to flee to Egypt with his parents, and the holy family had to remain some years in exile in order to be spared from the hands of King Herod (Mt 2:13). They only returned when Herod died (Mt 2: 19-23).

In Lc 2:6-7), we read: “While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her first born child and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Yes, Jesus came to His people and they did not receive Him.

Is 57:15 tells us: “For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble of spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

If we take the time to reflect, to meditate, we realize that it is our lack of charity, of love and humility which leads us to reject people. We do not welcome people or share with them, and we find a thousand excuses to protect the belongings that God gives us, forgetting that we are only the temporary stewards. We tend to hold others responsible

for all our ills. Our oceans have become tombs, and human bodies become food for the fish. People say that the presence of the foreigner will make unemployment worse and life more expensive.

We forget that when we give with our heart, God blesses us and always takes care of our needs, as was the case with the widow of Zarephath who gave her last handful of meal and a little oil to the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:7-16).

Lack of humility, the fear to lose some of our comfort, pushes us to think that we own something, when it is written in Rm 11:34-36: “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him to receive a gift in return? For from him and through him are all things. To him be the glory forever.”

The Holy Father Francis invites us to open our hearts, and break the barriers of security, clan and religion, and never to forget that even the rejected and despised by society are receiving God’s blessings.

The mercy that God expects of us applies first to our neighbor, for as St John tells us in 1Jn 4:20, “Those who say ‘I love God’, and hate their brother or sister, are liars: for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.”

On the last day, we shall not be judged on the number of cars, houses or bank accounts, nor at the number of times we went to Mass or to a prayer group, but on the love we had for our neighbor (Mt 25:31-46). Lord you were hungry, and I did not give you food, you were thirsty, and I did not give you something to drink, you were naked and I did not give you clothing, you were in prison and I did not visit you. (cf Mt 25:35-38)

Open my eyes Lord, to the greatness of your love, which is a man or woman, sacred persons, created in your image and likeness. I am the blind on the way, heal me and teach me to share. Open my hands, Lord, which are closed to keep everything. The poor is hungry in front of my house; teach me to share. Transform my heart Lord, may it be gentle and humble like yours. Teach me to love, as hard as the way may be. I want to follow you to the cross, take me by the hand to lead me.

I shall conclude with this story: A person had an appointment with Jesus at her home. She cleaned everything, put a most beautiful table cloth, lovely bouquets of flowers, dressed up in her best clothes, and prepared a great feast for him. While waiting for him, she was reading the Bible. A little child knocked at the door to ask her something to drink, but she refused as it would disturb her meditation. A beggar knocked also at her door, but she did not give him anything, as everything was prepared for Jesus and no one else. Then came a man with leprosy, whom she received roughly, as no one was to soil her house. Sometime later, her sick neighbor came to ask her to take him to the hospital, but she refused, as Jesus could have come while she was away. Tired of waiting for Jesus, she fell asleep. She woke up the next day, very upset with Jesus who had not honored the appointment. And Jesus told her: “I came to visit you several times and each time you refused to welcome me “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me (Mt 25:45). 📖



## 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](mailto:newsletter@iccrs.org)

# Can the Laying on of Hands Be Done by Lay People?

The laying on of hands is a very significant gesture in biblical tradition, with a wide variety of purposes.

In the Old Testament, the laying on of hands is first used as a way of blessing children. Jacob, for instance, blesses his two grandsons by laying his hands on their heads (Gen 48:14). To this day, the blessing of children by their parents is an important Jewish custom, especially at the beginning of the Sabbath.

The laying on of hands is also used to ordain or consecrate someone for ministry. In Numbers, the people of Israel lay hands on the Levites to dedicate them to the Lord's service (Num 8:9-10). Moses lays hands on Joshua to authorize and empower him as his successor in leadership (Num 27:18-23; Deut 34:9). Later in Israel's history, the prophet Elisha lays hands on a dead child to raise him from the dead (2 Kg 4:34).

In the Gospels Jesus lays hands on children as a gesture of blessing (Mark 10:16). But he most often uses the laying on of hands as a means of healing. For instance, it is the way he healed the blind man (Mark 8:23-25), the woman who was bent over (Luke 13:11-13), and the sick people in Nazareth (Mark 6:5). He also lays hands for deliverance from demonic affliction (Luke 4:40-41) and for raising the dead (Matt 9:18, 25). At the end of the Gospel of Mark the risen Lord promises that those who believe in him will heal the sick in the same way: "These signs will accompany those who believe: ... they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:18).

In Acts, the laying on of hands becomes a means of imparting the fullness of the Holy Spirit, especially to new believers. This is done by the apostles in Acts 8:17-19 (cf. 19:6), which Catholic tradition regards as the biblical basis for the sacrament of Confirmation. We also see Ananias, an ordinary believer, being led by the Spirit to lay hands on Saul that he may recover from blindness and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).

The laying on of hands is a way of commissioning people for a new task or mission. In Acts 13:3, a group of prophets and teachers (or perhaps the whole Christian community at Antioch) lays hands on Barnabas and Saul for divine

empowerment for the mission to which the Holy Spirit has called them.

Finally, the laying on of hands is the way the apostles ordain those called to an office of leadership in the church, including that of deacon (cf. Acts 6:6) and presbyter (cf. 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6-7).

Based on this biblical foundation, the laying on of hands has an important place in two sacraments of the Church: confirmation and ordination. In these sacraments, which are celebrated only by a bishop (or in the case of confir-

mation, sometimes a priest delegated by the bishop), the laying on of hands confers the Holy Spirit in a unique way. In confirmation, the laying on of hands imparts the gift of the Spirit that completes the grace of baptism. In ordination, through the laying on of hands the gift of the Spirit first received by the apostles is passed down by apostolic succession to the bishops and priests of our own day.

In recent times the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has brought a revival of the ancient practice of ordinary

believers laying on hands, especially for healing, for an infilling with the Holy Spirit, or for divine empowerment for a new mission or service a person is called to. To lay hands is a way of recognizing that we are bodily persons, and that Christ makes his graces flow through all the members of his Body.

It is important that this practice be pastored well, so there is no confusion between sacramental and simple (informal) laying on of hands. The laying on of hands for baptism in the Spirit is not a sacrament, but a prayer for the Holy Spirit to bring alive the gift already received through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

This gesture should be done with respect and sensitivity for the person receiving prayer. In some cases one should gently ask the person's permission before laying hands: "Is it okay if I put my hand on your shoulder as I pray?" There should not be any sense of imparting one's own authority or power, but simply of being a conduit for the grace of the Holy Spirit. 🕯

