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Holy Father

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"The Soul of the Church"
Regina Caeli on the Solemnity of Pentecost
Pope Benedict XVI

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Today the Church throughout the world is reliving the Solemnity of Pentecost, the mystery of her birth, her own "Baptism" in the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:5) which occurred in Jerusalem 50 days after Easter, precisely on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. The Risen Jesus had told his disciples: "Stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:49). This actually happened in the Upper Room, while they were all gathered in prayer with Mary, the Virgin Mother.

As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that place was suddenly filled with the rush of a mighty wind and tongues as of fire settled on each one of those present. The Apostles then went out and began to proclaim in different languages that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, dead and risen (cf. Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son, created the universe, who guided the People of Israel through history and spoke through the Prophets, who in the fullness of time cooperated in our redemption, came down at Pentecost upon the nascent Church and made her missionary, sending her out to proclaim to all peoples the victory of divine love over sin and death.

The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church. Without him what would she be reduced to? She would certainly be an important movement in history, a complex and solid social institution, perhaps a sort of humanitarian agency. And to tell the truth she is considered such by those who do not see her from a perspective of faith. Yet, the reality is that in her true nature and also in her authentic presence in history, the Church is ceaselessly formed and guided by the Spirit of her Lord. She is a living body, whose vitality is, precisely, the fruit of the invisible divine Spirit.

Q & A

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"Christ is Waiting For You and Loves You"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

Thank you very much for the time and thought you put into answering the questions on this website. I want to start going to confession regularly since I read that it is a requirement when trying to discern one's

vocation. I have a bit of a problem though. I know it sounds ridiculous but I get extremely nervous from the moment I tell myself that I am going to go to confession. Sometimes I get so anxious that I am unable to eat for an entire day or, when it is my turn to go, an inexplicable panic builds up inside me and I leave shaking. What can I do to make this stop? It is really embarrassing sometimes. Do you have any suggestions? Thank you in advance.

-Katie

A. Dear Katie,

I really admire you, because despite the difficulty you are still going to Confession. That means a lot.

Let me tell you what Confession is like from the priest's side of the screen (by the way, often using the screen option rather than face-to-face makes it easier to go to the sacrament, so you may want to try that option if you don't already use it.) The power to forgive sins is an awesome experience and responsibility. The priest meditates long and deeply on God's mercy (the Good Shepherd, the Father of the Prodigal Son, Christ on the Cross, Jesus with Mary Magdalene and the woman caught in adultery we read about in John 8) and he goes to the confessional trying to be that same Jesus for every person who comes to Confession.

Sometimes it's a sinner coming back from being long and far away from God; sometimes it's someone who comes regularly and is still struggling with major issues; sometimes it's someone who comes regularly and the faults are much smaller. Sometimes the person is open to God's truth, other times he is not, or has a huge struggle with it. With each one the priest tries to listen carefully, to hear how the Holy Spirit is guiding that soul and to help the person listen to the Holy Spirit, believe in God's pardon and take the next step. At the same time, the priest is conscious that his role is to draw each person closer to God, closer to living the truth in their life, trying "not to stamp out the smoking reed".

So when you go to Confession, try to concentrate on Christ who is waiting for you there in the person of the priest. Remember that it is Christ who wants to draw you closer to Himself, who has died for you on the Cross, and who loves you for the effort you are making to come closer to Him and is moved by it.

God bless,

-Fr Anthony

Q & A

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"Sacrificing the Unconscious Self-Centeredness"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

I have been thinking about priesthood for four years now and seeing a vocations director, but I am in a relationship. I ended the meetings with the vocations director, but we still keep in touch, however, I still feel I am called to better discern the call to priesthood and want to tell my girlfriend. How can I best do this?

-Steve

A. Dear Steve,

Congratulations on being honest with yourself and wanting to open your life to God.

I think it is a good thing to have realized that in order to discern the priesthood you need to let your girlfriend know. However, I don't think its enough simply to let her know, since I presume that by relationship you mean that the two of you get on well together and you both feel the relationship is heading somewhere. The fact of your needing to discern about the priesthood is going to affect everything between you both.

Therefore, before you decide how you are going to tell her, you need to work out in your own mind what you will tell her.

This is the first and fundamental hurdle to cross, and to do so you are going to have to give serious thought to what it means to discern, and what it means to respect her and her freedom. I don't think it is right or good for you to ask her to put her life on hold for a year or two while you dabble a little in the thought of the priesthood without really letting go of her, wanting to feel that she will always be there for you, never burning your bridges, and for this reason I don't believe it is enough, or fair, simply to say, I want you to know I am thinking of the priesthood and leave it like that, completely up in the air.

Perhaps what has affected your discernment up to now is that it has been unconsciously somewhat self-centered. You like to think about the priesthood and at the same time you like her as a friend, and you have held onto both your likes. It may have been all about you up to now. This is the first thing to work on.

To make any progress you will have to sacrifice this unconscious self-centeredness and begin to think about the priesthood in the context of Christ and the needs of souls, and about your girlfriend as a person to whom you owe honesty, and who does not exist only to make you feel good and wait on you hand and foot.

If you are going to discern the priesthood you need first of all to make up your mind that you are going to throw yourself 100% into the discernment, leaving aside all and every potential distraction, closing all the backdoors. Once you take this decision tell her so and let her know that for that reason and because you love and respect her you are breaking off the relationship. Sound radical? Maybe, but the alternative I think is below you. You don't want to leave her in an emotional limbo telling her you may be back, not letting her get on with her life, putting her even in a spiritual conflict (should she pray for your vocation to the priesthood, which might break her heart right now? Would it be wrong to hope it doesn't work out for you?). I don't think you can tell her that thoughts of the priesthood still come to you and you can't quite make up your mind but you would like her to stick around anyway so as not to loose her in case you don't really have a vocation or don't quite ever get around to testing it. That doesn't sound like love to me.

I would go farther and say, if the above seems like too much and you are not ready for it, you still have two alternatives: either you are honest with her and tell her you have some unresolved personal decisions that may jeopardize the relationship down the road and so you think it healthier to sever it for the time being, or you can give all your energies to making the relationship work because you honestly think you are not ready for either of the other alternatives.

I hope these reflections help, Steve, and I will pray that God will enlighten you and give you strength to make the decisions you need to.

God bless.

-Fr Anthony

On that day, as evening drew on, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us cross to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

Introductory Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, to save the weak your Son took our flesh and all our human weakness except sin. I trust in you and I want to give myself to you to repay your great love. I want to love and give myself for others as you gave yourself for me.

Petition: Father, by the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection protect me from the storms of my passions and the world, let me never forget that you are in the boat with me, let me never forget to turn to you.

1. Waves Were Breaking Over the Boat. Several things come to mind as we see Jesus in the boat and the storm raging about. The first is that he and his disciples were in real danger. Just because Jesus is in the boat with them does not mean that the waves will not buffet their vessel and there will be no danger. We easily slip into a false understanding of our faith that it ought to be a carefree, difficulty-free, "walk in the park". We remember "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" and forget "though I walk through valleys of darkness..." And when that darkness, the storms and the trials come we instinctively think something is wrong. However, Jesus told us that if we are to follow him we must take up our cross daily, and that we will suffer trials.

Secondly, we see Jesus' absolute trust in his disciples. He lets them do their job, while he himself takes a needed break, falling asleep. He, his life, is totally in their hands. But even that does not save them from having to face the storms. And now they are not only responsible for their own lives but for his also.

2. Teacher, Do You Not Care That We Are Perishing? The storm must have been extreme for these experienced fishermen to be afraid. Anyone that has ever felt the waves of temptation, suffering, depression, injustice or confusion flood their life understands exactly the reaction of the disciples, and has cried out the same words many times himself. The disciples still have much to learn, us too. Jesus always cares; we should never doubt that he is watching over us.

Sometimes the difficulties we face seem extreme, and we feel hopeless, it seems nothing in our life has prepared us for this moment. Then, especially, we should remember that Jesus is with us, that he is present through grace in our souls, and we can find him personally present in the Blessed Eucharist. When we go to him, let our prayer not be one of despair but of trust. "I know you care, I know you don't want me to be drawn under by this difficulty. Lord, give me your strength. I bless you and thank you for this cross."

3. "Why Are You Terrified? Do You Not Yet Have Faith?" St. Paul received many favors from God, even visions of heaven. He also faced many trials in his service to Christ, for one list of them, read 2 Cor 11, 23-27. Further on in the same letter, after telling about his visions, he tells us that he was given a "thorn in the flesh, and angel of Satan sent to buffet" him, so that he would not be proud. And Paul asked God three times to take it away, and three times he got the same answer, "my grace is enough for you." So, there is something more to our faith than running to Jesus to take away our problems. Real faith it seems has to do with realizing he is with us, and in that confidence facing our problems, be they problems of faith, of patience, of discernment... Once we have freely placed our lives in Christ's hands (or invited him into our boats) he will always expect us to believe, trust and love him. The path he will mark out for us will stretch our faith, hope and love with the goal of making them grow and mature. To correspond to this expectation, he grants us his grace. It is one of his many ways of saying, "I am in the boat with you and that is always

enough."

Conversation: Converse with Christ about whatever particular difficulties you are going through now and finish with a prayer. Lord, you know my weaknesses and shortcomings. Despite them, I truly believe that with you I can do everything you ask of me. In your goodness grant me the grace to keep my eyes on you even when the winds and the waves of life seem to threatening. Mother Most Pure, make my heart only for Jesus.

Questionnaire:

1. What is my attitude toward the difficulties I face in trying to live a good life according to Christ?
2. Is there anything in which I feel my efforts are hopeless? What do I need to do?
3. What is the lesson Jesus wants me to take away from this time of prayer?

Spirituality

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"Moods"

Educating our moods takes patience, honesty and perseverance. We have to have the will to do it and work systematically at it, but we can be sure from the outset that in the long run you will see tangible fruits. This stability this gives will provide a very good foundation on which to build the edifice of our personal growth and our work to serve our neighbor and the Kingdom of Christ.

Whenever problems come up, we have to teach ourselves to view them against the broad backdrop of Christ's Kingdom. We have to say to ourselves, "For the good of my own progress and my service to Christos Kingdom, I absolutely need to gain full control over my mood-swings; otherwise, not only will I be inconstant and much less fruitful in my work for Christ's Kingdom, I will also put myself in danger of not persevering in the authentic living of my Christian vocation."

Special

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"Benedict XVI's Q-and-A With Children Missionaries" *Pope Benedict XVI*

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VATICAN CITY, JUNE 5, 2009 (Zenit.org).- Here is a Vatican translation of the question-and-answer session Benedict XVI gave during an audience May 30 with children of the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood.

* * *

Q: My name is Anna Filippone, I am 12 years old, I am an altar girl and come from Calabria, Diocese of Oppido Mamertina-Palmi. Pope Benedict, my friend Giovanni has an Italian father and an Ecuadorian mother and is very happy. Do you think that one day the different cultures will be able to live together without quarrelling in Jesus' name?

Benedict XVI: I have gathered that you all would like to know how we, from the time we were children, have managed to help one another. I must say that I spent my elementary school years in a small town of 400 inhabitants, very far from the big city centres.

Therefore we were a bit ingenuous, and in this small town there were, on the one hand, very rich farmers and also others who were less rich but still well-off, and on the other, poor workers, artisans. Our family had moved from another town to this one just a little before I began going to elementary school, thus we were in a way foreigners to them, as even our dialect was different. So, there was a wide range of social situations present in this school, but a beautiful communion prevailed among us. They taught me their dialect, which was new to me. We worked well together. Although, naturally enough, we would argue sometimes, but afterwards we would make up and forget what had happened.

I think this is significant. Sometimes in life it seems inevitable to argue; but the art of reconciling with each other remains important forgiving, beginning anew and not letting bitterness linger in the soul. With gratitude I remember how everyone co-operated: each one helped the other and we moved ahead together on our path. We were all Catholic, and this was naturally a great help. In this way we learned together to understand the Bible, beginning with the Creation and continuing to the sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross, and then also of the beginnings of the Church. We learned the Catechism together, we learned how to pray together, we prepared together for our First Reconciliation, for First Communion: that was a splendid day. We understood that Jesus himself came among us and that he is not a distant God: he enters into my own life, my own soul. And if the same Jesus enters into each one of us, then we are brothers, sisters and friends and therefore we must behave as such.

For us, both this preparation for First Reconciliation as the purification of our consciences, of our lives, as well as that for First Communion as a real meeting with Jesus who comes to me, who comes to each one of us, were factors that contributed to the formation of our community. They helped us to move ahead together, to learn together to forgive each other when necessary. We also put on little plays: it is important to collaborate, to pay attention to each other. Then when I was about eight or nine years old I became an altar boy. At that time there were not yet altar girls, but the girls read much better than we did. Therefore they read the readings during the liturgy while we filled the role of altar servers. During that period there were still many Latin texts to learn, and so each one had to make a special effort. As I said, we were not saints. We had our arguments, but there was still a beautiful communion, in which the distinctions between rich and poor, between the more and the less intelligent did not matter. It was communion with Jesus in the journey of common faith and common responsibility, in our games, in our shared work. We found the way to live together, to be friends, although I have not been in that town since 1937, that is, more than 70 years ago, we have remained friends. Thus we have learned to accept one another, to carry one another's burdens.

I find this significant: despite our weaknesses we accept each other and with Jesus Christ, with the Church, we find a path of peace together and learn to live in the best way.

Q: My name is Letizia and I wanted to ask you a question. Dear Pope Benedict XVI, what did the motto: "Children help children" mean for you when you were a boy? Did you ever imagine you would become Pope?

Benedict XVI: To tell the truth, I would never have thought of becoming Pope, because, as I have already said, I was a fairly ingenuous boy in a small town far from the city centres, in a forgotten province. We were glad to be in this area and we did not think of other things. Naturally we came to know, venerate and love the Pope -- Pius XI at the time -- but for us he was a very august figure, almost in another world: our spiritual Father, but nevertheless a reality much superior to all of us. And I must say that still today I have difficulty understanding how the Lord could have thought of me, destined me for this ministry. But I accept it from his hands, even if it is something surprising and that seems to me to be far beyond my strength. But the Lord helps me.

Q: Dear Pope Benedict, my name is Alessandro. I wanted to ask you: you are the principal missionary; how can we children help you to proclaim the Gospel?

Benedict XVI: I would say that the first way is this: to collaborate with the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood. That way you are part of a large family, which takes the Gospel to the world. That way you belong to a large network. In it we see how the family of diverse peoples is represented. You are all in this big family: each one has his part and together you are missionaries, bearers of the missionary work of the Church. You have a beautiful plan, laid out by your spokesperson: to listen, pray, understand, share, sympathize. These are the essential elements that combined are truly a way to be missionaries, to encourage the growth of the Church into the future and the presence of the Gospel in the world. I would like to emphasize some of these points.

First of all, pray. Prayer is a reality: God listens to us and, when we pray, God enters into our lives, he becomes present among us, works among us. Praying is a very important thing that can change the world, because it makes the power of God present. And it is important to help each other by praying: to pray together in the liturgy, to pray together in the family. And here I would say that it is important to begin the day with a small prayer and also to end the day with a small prayer: to remember our parents in prayer. Pray before lunch, before dinner and during Sunday's shared Celebration. A Sunday without Mass, the great communal prayer of the Church, is not truly a Sunday: it lacks the very heart of Sunday and so also the light for the week. And you can also help others especially those who do not pray at home or do not know about prayer by teaching others to pray: praying with them and in this way introducing others to communion with God.

Next, listen that is, learn what Jesus really says. In addition, get to know the Sacred Scriptures, the Bible. In the story of Jesus we learn as the Cardinal said the Face of God, we learn what God is like. It is important to know Jesus deeply, personally. That way he enters into our life and, through our life, enters into the world.

Also, share, do not want things only for yourselves, but rather for everyone; divide things with others. And if we see that another is perhaps in need, that he or she is less gifted, we must help that person and so make God's love present without too many words, in our own personal world, which is part of the bigger world. And in this way we become a family together, in which each one has respect for the other: tolerating the other's differences, accepting also those who are disagreeable, not allowing anyone to be marginalized, but instead helping others to integrate into the community. All of this simply means living in this big family of the Church, in this big missionary family. To live out essential points such as sharing, knowledge of Jesus, prayer, reciprocal listening and solidarity is missionary work, because it helps to make the Gospel a reality in our world.

[Translation by the Vatican]

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Upcoming Events & Retreats

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- Retreats for Men
- Retreats for Women

LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST

Mark Your Calendars! Test Your Call Weekends for the 2009

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seminarians. For more information, please call Br. Francois at (800) 420-5409 or email vocation@legionaries.org. Dates in 2009: June 19-21, July 3-5, July 24-26, August 14-16, September 4-6, October 23-25, November 25-29, December 19-23, and December 26-30.

REGNUM CHRISTI consecrated women

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ShoreLines welcomes your questions and comments at questions@shorelines.org. If you do not specify otherwise, your question may be posted in the Vocations Q&A section.

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