



CHARIS

Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service

2. RETURNING POWER TO GOD!

On our spiritual journey of preparation for Pentecost in 2019, we reflected on the importance of prayer to receive the Holy Spirit. In this second reflection, we meditate on the importance of conversion.

In the Gospel, the word 'conversion' returns in two different contexts and is addressed to two different categories of listeners. The first is addressed to everyone, the second to those who had already accepted Jesus' invitation and had been with him for some time. Let us mention the first one only to better understand the second one, which is most interesting to us, in this transition moment in the life of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Jesus' preaching begins with the programmatic words:

'This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.' (Mk 1, 15).

Before Jesus, conversion always meant a 'turning back' (the Hebrew word *shub* means 'reversing course, retracing one's steps'). It indicated the act of someone who, at a certain point in life, realizes that he is 'out of the way'. Then he stops, he has an afterthought; decides to return to the observance of the law and to re-enter into the covenant with God. It makes a real 'reversal of direction'. Conversion, in this case, has a fundamentally moral meaning and suggests the idea of something painful to accomplish: changing customs.

This is the usual meaning of conversion on the lips of the prophets, up to and including John the Baptist. However, on Jesus' lips, this meaning changes. Not because he enjoys changing the meanings of words, but because, with his coming, things have changed. 'The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come!' Converting does not mean going back to the old covenant and observance of the law, but rather means taking a leap forward and entering the kingdom, grasping the salvation that has come to men for free, through God's free and sovereign initiative.

Conversion and salvation exchanged places. Not conversion first and then, as its consequence, salvation; but on the contrary: first salvation, then, as its requirement, conversion. Not: convert and the Kingdom will come among you, the Messiah will come, as the last prophets were saying, but rather, repent because the kingdom has come, is among you. To convert is to take the decision that saves, the 'decision of the hour,' as the parables of the kingdom describe it.

'Repent and believe' do not mean two different and successive things, but the same fundamental action: convert, that is, believe! Get converted by believing! All this requires a true 'conversion,' a profound change in the way we conceive our relationships with God. It requires passing from the idea of a God that asks, that orders, that threatens, to the idea of a God that comes with full hands to give us everything. It is the conversion from the 'law' to the 'grace' that was so dear to St. Paul.



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Let us now listen to the second context in which, in the Gospel, we speak of conversion:

'At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.'" (Mt 18, 1-4).

This time, yes, that converting means going back, even to when you were a child! The verb used, *strefo*, indicates reversal. This is the conversion of those who have already entered the Kingdom, believed in the Gospel, have long been at the service of Christ. It is our conversion, of us who have been for years, perhaps ever since the beginning, in the Charismatic Renewal!

What happened to the apostles? What does the discussion about who is the greatest, suppose? That the greatest concern is no longer the kingdom, but its place in it, its self. Each of them had some title to aspire to be the greatest: Peter had been promised primacy, Judas was the cashier, Matthew could say that he had left more than the others, Andrew that he had been the first to follow him, James and John that had been with him on Tabor... The fruits of this situation are obvious: rivalry, suspicion, confrontation, frustration.

Returning children, for the apostles, meant returning to what they were at the time of the call on the shores of the lake or at the tax booth: unpretentious, without titles, without comparisons among them, without envy, without rivalry. Rich only in a promise ('I will make you fishermen of men') and of a presence, Jesus's own. Return to the time when they were still companions of adventure, not competitors for the first place. For us too, going back to being children means returning to the moment when we first made a personal experience of the Holy Spirit and discovered what it means to live in the lordship of Christ. When we said: 'Jesus is enough!' And we believed it.

I am struck by the example of the apostle Paul described in Philippians 3. Discovering Jesus as his Lord, he had considered all his glorious past a loss, mere garbage, in order to gain Christ and put on justice derived from faith in him. But a little later he comes up with this statement *'Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead.'* (Fil 3, 13). What past? No longer that of a Pharisee, but that of an apostle. He sensed the danger of finding himself with a new 'gain', a new 'justice' of his own, deriving from what he had done in the service of Christ. He resets everything with that decision: 'I forget about the past, I lean towards the future.'

How can we not see in all this a precious lesson for us of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? One of the many slogans that circulated in the early years of the Renewal - a kind of battle cry - was: *'Returning power to God!'* Perhaps it was inspired by the verse of *Psalm 68, 35 "Confess the power of God"* which in the Vulgate was translated as *Date gloriam Deo super Israel 'Render (reddite) to God his power.'* For a long time I considered those words as the best way to describe the novelty of the Charismatic Renewal. The difference is that once I thought that the cry was addressed to the rest of the Church and



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we were those who were in charge of making it resound; now I think it is addressed to us who, perhaps without realizing it, have partially appropriated ourselves of the power that belongs to God.

In view of a new restart of the current of grace of the Charismatic Renewal, it is necessary to 'empty one's pockets,' to reset ourselves, to repeat with deep conviction the words suggested by Jesus himself *'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'* (Lc 17,10). Make the Apostle's purpose our own: 'I forget about the past, I lean towards the future.' We imitate the 'twenty-four elders' of the Apocalypse who 'cast their crowns before the throne' and proclaim *'Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power'* (Rev 4,10-11). The word of God addressed to Isaiah is always relevant: *'See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?'* (Is 43, 19). Blessed are we if we allow God to do the new thing he has in mind right now for us and for the Church.

My suggestion for the chain of prayer: to repeat several times during the day one of the invocations addressed to the Holy Spirit in the Sequence of Pentecost, the one that everyone feels more responsive to his need:

Wash what is stained.
Water what is dry.
Heal what is wounded.

Bend what is rigid.
Strengthen what is weak
Govern what is wandering.

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