

## Spirit, come!

**Since the beginning of the church Christians have proclaimed their faith in the Holy Spirit.**

**Today, on the eve of the Great Jubilee of 2000, the church feels called to intensify that proclamation. The Holy Spirit is at the centre of Christian life and is the source and dynamic power of the church's renewal. Each of us has an indispensable role to play in this renewal.**

**In 1986 Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical about the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the world. Entitled 'Lord and Giver of Life' (*Dominum et Vivificantem* in the Latin), this document urges Christians to rediscover the Holy Spirit's compelling presence in their lives.**

**Some key ideas from that document follow.**

### I. The Holy Spirit: gift to the Church

Just before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus shared a final meal with his disciples. John's Gospel (Ch.14) tells us that during that 'last supper' Jesus promised his friends that they would never be left alone. He spoke of 'another Counsellor' or 'Comforter' who would be with them after he had gone. The Comforter would be with them forever and would guide them in all that lay ahead.

Later, in the events of Pentecost and the beginnings of the church, the disciples came to understand that the 'Comforter' in their midst was the Holy Spirit. In an intense experience of God's liberating love in which the Spirit filled their hearts and sent them forth with the Good News, the departing words of Jesus took on a new clarity. Jesus had said:

#### ***The Spirit 'will teach you...'***

The Holy Spirit will help you to understand the truth about Christ and the constancy of that truth amidst changing circumstances. (n.4)

#### ***The Spirit will 'bring to remembrance all that I have said to you.'***

The life and teaching of Jesus will be not just a memory of past events, but a present day experience in faith. (n.4)

#### ***The Spirit 'will bear witness to me...'***

As direct eyewitnesses the Apostles will be linked in a special way with the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, their human testimony will become a guiding light to the mission of succeeding generations of Christians. (n.5)

#### ***The Spirit will 'guide you into all truth'***

While all that has been revealed in Christ cannot be fully comprehended now, it will become clear with time. This illumination—of the scandal of the cross and all that Christ said and did—involves a call to faith. (n.6)

Down through the centuries, the Holy Spirit has continued to dwell in the hearts of believers. The Spirit guides the church through good times and bad, through mistakes and sinfulness, towards unity and the fullness of truth.

In modern times the Second Vatican Council stands as a particular expression of the Spirit's presence in the church. This council took momentous steps towards renewing the church in the face of many difficult questions. Today, as we stand on the eve a new millennium, Pope John Paul II highlights the important work of discerning and implementing the Spirit-led initiatives set in motion by the Council. (nos.25-26)

#### ***Spirit of Life***

*My 'Pentecost' experience occurred on a youth retreat when I was 18. There I experienced the power of the risen Lord and the love of his church. My faith became alive and active... stretching me, affirming me and giving me a purpose. I found myself reaching out: sharing sandwiches with street kids, organising Christian programs, approaching people I once would have avoided, even speaking about Jesus in public to hundreds of people! Can you believe it? Me! A timid kid who had never organized anything... not even a classroom raffle! (CM)*

# Light of hearts

## II. The Spirit dwells within

If I still my mind and attune my heart, deep within my being I begin to hear the echoes of God's voice. The 'voice' might be reassuring, or perhaps unsettling, but it is always loving. This voice is the probings of the Holy Spirit, God's gift of divine love. One's capacity to listen and respond to this movement of grace—God's heart guiding the human heart in its innermost depths—is what we refer to as human conscience.

As the light of consciences, the Spirit awakens us to the gift of God's love. What joy! The Spirit also sensitizes us to the ways we have rejected that gift. What sorrow; but a sorrow that paves the way to new life if we allow the Lord's forgiveness to enter our hearts. (nos.42-43)

*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us. (Rom. 5:5)*

The conversion of the human heart involves both free gift and hard work. God's love is always unconditional and freely given. We don't have to earn it; it is ours. At the same time, receiving this gift means opening our eyes to the presence of sin in our lives. That demands honesty and effort. We would prefer to think of sin as something

'out there' or in other people. Instead the Spirit of truth leads us to the roots of sin within our own hearts. The capacity to 'own' our sins, through inner contrition and a firm effort to change our ways, is part of the grace of God's forgiveness.

To become aware of the seriousness of sin does not imply a sense of fatalism. Despite our struggles we are never hopelessly ensnared by sin. The Lord came to free and strengthen us and never tires of reminding us of the possibility of victory. As we prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee we are reminded that the same Spirit who hovered over the waters of creation has the power to heal us from the entrapment of original sin and transform us into a 'new creation' in Christ, with a 'new freedom' and a new life. (nos.42-45)

### In a nutshell

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would:

- Teach us
- Bring to mind all that Jesus said and did
- Bear witness to the truth
- Guide us into the truth
- Awaken the world to the seriousness of sin

## The Spirit probes the depths of the human heart

### Spirit of forgiveness

*I hadn't visited my grandmother for months, and boy was I feeling guilty. I was busy. I was slack. I was failing.*

*Well, one day I fronted up to her door, resentful and bracing myself for a well-deserved look of disapproval. But instead she welcomed me with open arms. "Why hello! Lovely to see you!" In that one gesture of loving forgiveness I felt an enormous peace flood my being and deep gratitude for her understanding. Suddenly I wanted to visit her.*

*I reflected on this incident later. Forgiveness—what a powerful way to set each other free. (Joseph)*

### Prayer of forgiveness

*I have learnt a secret to inner peace. It is a prayer of forgiveness. At the end of each day I try to spend 15 minutes recalling the events of the day, handing over any hurts or painful moments to Jesus and praying that the Spirit of forgiveness might fill my being... forgiveness for my own sins and for those who have hurt me. It's a small habit but I believe the cumulative effect over the years has been life-changing.' (Maureen)*

## The Spirit : Third Person of the Trinity

**God is love. God is relationship.**

**This is the starting point for all that we might say about the Holy Spirit; for the Spirit is not simply a force or an idea or an attribute of God. The Holy Spirit is a Person, part of the Community of Love that is God.**

**The love between God the Father and God the Son finds expression in the Person-Gift, Person-Love whom we call God the Holy Spirit. (nos. 8-10)**

# Giver of Life

## III. Great Jubilee: a celebration of the Spirit who gives life

The Great Jubilee has a specific 'Christ' dimension: it is a celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Word made flesh. At the same time it has a 'Spirit' dimension, since the mystery of Christ's coming into the world was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, says the Pope, the church cannot prepare for the Great Jubilee in any other way than in the Holy Spirit. What was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit two thousand years ago '*can only through the Spirit's power now emerge from the memory of the church*' and be made present in the third millennium. (nos. 49-51)

### The Spirit in the 'big picture'

The Great Jubilee is not just about commemorating the events of Jesus' birth. We must go beyond the historical dimension and look with eyes of faith at the action of the Spirit over the last 2000 years.

Nor can we limit ourselves to 2000 years of history. We need to go even further back and recognize that the Spirit has been at work from the very beginning of the world, and especially

in the lives of our Jewish ancestors in faith who gifted us with the scriptures.

But the Great Jubilee leads us to look even further afield and to recognize that the Spirit is active outside the visible body of the church in all people of goodwill whose hearts are opened to grace; for Christ's death and resurrection is a free gift offered to all.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is unceasingly at work bringing about God's eternal plan of salvation. This is 'the big picture' to be celebrated at the Great Jubilee. The year 2000 offers an important occasion for reflecting on the presence of God's grace in our lives; for God who transcends the world is also not only close to this world, but present in it, penetrating it and giving it life from within. This is especially true in relation to the human mind, conscience and heart.

As St Augustine put it: *God is 'closer than my inmost being.'*

Likewise, in our faith tradition the Spirit is spoken of as the 'hidden God' (Isaiah 45:15) who, as love and gift, 'fills the entire universe' (Wisdom 1:7) and gives life. (nos.53-54)

### Lord and Giver of Life

To really grasp the significance of sin in our world, it is not enough to search the conscience, the mystery of the human person. We must go further and search the 'depths of God' (n.32). Only through the Holy Spirit can we do this.

**The Spirit, said Jesus, 'will convince the world concerning sin' (Jn 16:7). The sin referred to here is disbelief.**

**The Spirit awakens us to the seriousness of sin by opening us to God's unconditional love poured out in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus the Spirit 'convinces' us not by accusation or condemnation but liberation. (nos. 27-32)**

### Jubilee discussion starter

*How can I listen better to the Spirit's presence in my life? For instance:*

**Space.** Resist the habit of filling every silence with the radio, TV or aimless chatter.

**People.** Listen to the wisdom of faithfilled people. Be attentive to the everyday presence of a loved one. Learn from a young confirmation candidate.

**Prayer.** Pray a mantra ('Come, Lord Jesus') during your busy day. Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

**Attitude.** Raise your enthusiasm levels. ('Enthusiasm' comes from the Greek en theos meaning 'with God'.) Turn a negative situation into a hopefilled opportunity.

### Scripture speaks of the 'unforgivable' sin against the Holy Spirit. (Lk 12:10)

This refers not to a specific word or action, but the fundamental orientation of the heart toward refusal to accept God's gift of love.

This 'hardness of heart' is a state of spiritual ruin because, in closing oneself to the divine source of freedom and forgiveness, it does not allow any escape from one's self-imposed prison. In our own day, this kind of closedness is reflected in the loss of 'a sense of sin' and 'a sense of God'.

May we never become so 'hardened' in our hearts and 'deaf' in our consciences that the Spirit is left with no room to move. (nos.46-47)

# Gift of **peace**

## **Humanity's struggle**

Sadly, the history of salvation shows that God's self-giving to humanity meets with opposition. St Paul described this resistance as an inner tension within the human heart, a rebelliousness leading to a tendency to place material concerns over and above the need for God's grace. This resistance creates a dead-end, a 'deathly' path. It is what St Paul was referring to when he said, '*The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.*' In all our Jubilee preparations we are urged to align our desires with those of the Spirit, the giver of life.

On the eve of a new millennium civilization shows many symptoms of death—such as poverty, euthanasia, terrorism and war. Even so, Christians dare to believe in the Holy Spirit's continuing presence. Like a breath of fresh air entering a stale room, the Spirit fills us with the life of God and strengthens our 'innermost being'. We are buoyed up by the realization that, whatever evils we suffer today,

the church proclaims *life*. Life in the risen Christ is stronger than death and manifests itself beyond the limits of death.

The message of the Great Jubilee is one of liberation. In the gift of the Holy Spirit we find the gift of God's self; transforming the human world from within, from inside hearts and minds. As 2000 draws near we must call greater numbers of people to experience this gift of freedom through discovering themselves as belonging to the Lord. In Christ we find our true dignity as persons made in God's image. In Christ we discover who we really are. (nos.55-57)

### **Come!**

The final pages of the Pope's encyclical include a reflection on the words from the book of Revelation: *The Spirit and the bride say to the Lord Jesus Christ: Come!* The Church's prayer is this unceasing invocation, inspired by the Spirit and based on our hope in the eternal kingdom to come. It is

an ancient prayer prayed with ever-new fervour; a prayer not limited to any time and place, but which at the same time is directed toward a precise moment in history: the year 2000. Today the church prepares for the Great Jubilee in the Holy Spirit, just as long ago a young Jewish girl in whom the Word was made flesh was prepared by the Spirit. (nos. 65-66)

The way of the church passes through the heart of the human person. The heart is the hidden place of the salvific encounter with the Holy Spirit, with the 'hidden God'. The church implores from the Holy Spirit the gifts of peace and love and joy in every human heart—gifts which only the Spirit can bring and which no one can take away. (n.67)

In the ancient phrase of our Christian ancestors we pray: *Maranatha!* Our Lord has come. Come, Lord Jesus. Keep coming. •

## **Breath of the Spirit**

**It is a beautiful thought that, wherever people are praying in the world, there is the Holy Spirit, the living breath of prayer. Prayer reveals 'the abyss which is the heart' of a person, 'a depth which comes from God and which only God can fill with the Holy Spirit.'** (n.65)

**Through the centuries faithfilled people have borne witness to the importance of prayer. From the monasteries of old to the prayer movements of today, the revival of prayer among the faithful has been a constant sign of the Spirit's presence in the world. Our troubled age has a special need of prayer.**