

PENTECOST *Today*

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Prayer and Hope!



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Renewing the grace of Pentecost in the life and mission of the church.



Chairman's Corner

by Aggie Neck

Prayer and hope: Telling God what we need

*"Nothing is equal to prayer,
for what is impossible it makes possible.
What is difficult it makes easy"
(St. John Chrysostom).*

*"It is essential to begin the
practice of prayer with a firm resolution
of persevering in it"
(St. Theresa of Avila).*

These two quotations make it very clear that if we believe these words then our efforts at prayer are under girded with a hope that is rooted in faith. This faith is anchored in Scripture and in the teachings of the Church as well as the writings of the saints. This faith is also strengthened in us by the many prayers that are answered. All prayer is answered. It is answered with the wisdom of God. "We need to say to those about to shrug their shoulders and give up the struggle against evil: 'Turn to prayer, and take deep breaths of the Holy Spirit'" (*Come Creator Spirit*).

God himself urges us to ask. St. Augustine tells us "God would not urge us to ask unless he were willing to give." "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks him!" (Matt 7:7, 11) The Amplified Bible says of verse eleven "good and

advantageous things." Our hope, our trust must be in the God who loves us. Prayer is not telling God what to do, but prayer is telling God what we need.

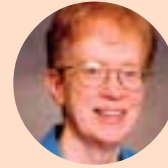
The name of Jesus is at the heart of Christian prayer. It is a prayer just to say his name. (Jesus in Hebrew means: 'God saves'" (CCC #430). When we say his name it draws us into his presence and in his presence we are safe, we have hope, we are loved. Hope is necessary when we pray. Hope is like a firm foundation that we hold on to. Hope is like the anticipation that is within us as we await something that we know is coming. "In hope we were saved. But hope is not hope if its object is seen; how is it possible for one to hope for what he sees? And hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patient endurance" (Rom 8:24-25).

"Prayer ascends and mercy descends. High as are the heavens and low as is the earth, God hears the voice of man" (St. Augustine).

As I come to the end of my term on the National Service Committee, this will be my last column as Chairman. I want to thank all of you who have encouraged me with your words of affirmation. It has been heartwarming to know that in these past seven years my column has brought inspiration and hope to many of you. It is my hope that I will see you again in many different places. May God's peace be with us always. ♦

Aggie Neck is Chairman of the National Service Committee.

Cover photo: Chaplain, Mercy Sister Natalie Rossi, prays with a Catholic inmate in solitary confinement.



Editor's Desk

by Sr. Martha Jean McGarry

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, so that in the power of the Holy Spirit you may be rich in hope (Rom 15:13).

In this issue we continue to glean from the riches found in the letters of St. Paul. It is our desire that our writers will give you a new thirst for **prayer**, the power that is ours through this gift and great reason to **hope**.

The witness of **Robert Galea** on page 3 is filled with awe and enthusiasm for God's love and presence among the youth of the world.

The articles by **Father Larry Carew** attune our hearts to the importance and blessings of prayer in our lives. Through their writings we can see the harvest of prayer to be one of continued hope.

Sister Mary Anne Schaezner's reflections on the National Leaders' Conference, *A Future Full of Hope*, may just challenge you in holiness, sharing the Good News, and living in the plan of Jesus. Don't miss it!

Are you today's Barnabas? **Renée Marazon's** article on the charism of encouragement will give you some answers. Struggling groups may find **Deacon Chuck Matzker's** leadership article helpful. He gives suggestions on dealing with difficulties through **POWER**.

May the hope manifested in this issue's articles and the thoughts of our columnists inspire each of us to make a difference for the kingdom of God. ♦

*In 2006 a handful of Renewal leaders in Australia began to pray about how they could gather during World Youth Day, and to pray for the pilgrims and the success of the event. What emerged was the **Receive Power Live** concert under the leadership of the Renewal. Three original intentions that inspired it were: (1) An opportunity for young people to experience a personal encounter with the love of Jesus. (2) To receive the power of the Holy Spirit. And (3) To be inspired to witness Good News throughout the world.*

Receive the power **live**



by Robert Galea

Robert Galea in concert

My heart was racing as I waited backstage for the *Receive the Power Live* concert to begin. It pounded out of excitement and also due to the fact that I had just run a kilometer or so from the north stage where I had sung the last song at the Friday night Stations of the Cross. On my journey through the crowd there was an obvious atmosphere of excitement amongst the 150,000 plus pilgrims. There was a **great sense** of enthusiasm backstage too as the Catholic and non-Catholic worshippers gathered together, united as the one body of Christ to pray and proclaim God's promises over the cheering and flag-waving youth.

The musicians took to the stage and there came a loud roar from the crowd. Then the music began. Being with the pilgrims over the previous days I knew that the church gathered that night were hungry; hungry for God's Word and ready for worship, even though many present may not have known it themselves. Even more distracted clusters of youth could not help but get caught up in the heart of what was about to happen. From the praise led by Darlene Zschech and Hillsong United, to the moving testimonies (during which I did my best to hold back the tears), to then being led into worship by Matt Maher, you knew God was present. This was then followed by the passionate preaching of Bishop Joe Grech who reminded us that "God does not make rubbish" and that we are "beautifully and wonderfully made." There was no doubt in me that we were witnessing God's Spirit moving among us.

It was then that Jesus was brought before us in the Eucharist. What a moving scene. At this moment I had the privilege of being on stage to witness some of the faces in the crowd. Hands were raised; eyes were closed as many were taking this opportunity to reach out to Jesus. Then Bishop Grech led us in a prayer of commitment to our faith and to walking with Jesus.

No one will ever know for sure the full and visible outcome of the event, but one thing I know is that when hearts cry for Jesus, as they did that night, Jesus cannot help but respond by sending his Spirit! This was a night to remember, one where the young Church of the world gathered in Sydney, Australia to celebrate Jesus and to commit their lives to him. Having witnessed this happening and having myself re-committed my life to know, love and serve Jesus I can say with certainty that the best is yet to come, for those who were present and beyond!!

Never in the history of Australia has there been such a worship concert; and never will I cease to be grateful to Jesus for the opportunity to have taken an active part in this global event. ♦

Maltese born Robert Galea is currently studying for the priesthood in Australia. He is a singer and songwriter who has written a number of songs for various campaigns and international conferences. His passion is to draw others to the heart of God.



Walking in the footsteps of hope

by Father Larry Carew

In November of 2007 I traveled as chaplain with a group of pilgrims as we retraced some of the “footsteps of St. Paul.” It was the second time I’d been given such a privileged opportunity. Over ten years earlier I’d been given a taste of Paul’s wanderings, for just a few days, tacked onto the end of a Holy Land pilgrimage. This time, however, in addition to stops in Ephesus, Corinth and Athens, I was able to visit even more places so dear to the Apostle, like Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi.

During my earlier visit Corinth turned out to be the place of my most memorable blessings. This last time it would be Philippi that would spring the most surprises.

First of all, allow me to briefly recall an episode from my original visit to Corinth. I’d just returned to the hotel after celebrating Mass amidst the an-

cient ruins. I’d preached on First Corinthians thirteen. Everybody appeared to be so blessed.

After we entered the hotel lobby, however, the atmosphere drastically changed. We learned of a mix-up about tips, expected from our pilgrims, for which they’d already paid. Our pious contingent had suddenly become a surly mob.

Ninety minutes later I was able to inform them, at supper, that the confusion had been cleared up. I was pleasant and polite about it on the surface, but underneath I was still so angry with them. As I returned to my room I sensed the Holy Spirit’s conviction: 1 Corinthians 13, “love does not take offense.” It was now undeniable to me that my pilgrims weren’t the only sinners on the block!

Fast forward with me now to November of 2007—to the day before we visited Philippi. We’d just boarded the

bus ready to visit Meteora, a breathtakingly beautiful panorama of mountainous pillars, with monasteries or convents perched atop almost all of them.

I soon learned that Alexandra was not feeling well. She was our tour guide—a walking encyclopedia of Greek history and biblical knowledge. She was also a devout member of the Orthodox Church.

As we ascended a switchback road to visit one of the mountaintop monasteries, I kept sensing that I was getting an inspiration: *offer to pray over Alexandra for healing*. An opportunity soon presented itself and she graciously accepted.

Shortly afterwards, in the monastery Chapel, Alexandra explained to us that most of the lovely frescoes and icons surrounding us were dedicated to the memory of the early Christian martyrs of Greece. She appeared to have completely recovered. But never once, that day, did she ever comment on how she was then feeling.

Until Philippi. The following day, we drove right past the ruins of the ancient city. There, just beyond those ruins was a grove of trees overarching the edge of a river. It couldn’t have looked much different than the way it looked to Paul on the day he first met Lydia there and baptized her in that river, his very first convert to the Faith on European soil.

I decided to lead the pilgrims in prayer, right there at the river’s edge, asking that the flow of the Holy Spirit’s love and power, first given us at Baptism, would now be renewed and deepened for each of us. I then proceeded to sprinkle them with holy water.

Alexandra suddenly surprised us all by breaking the silence, as she blurted out

the following words: "I must now give witness..." She then went on to share how I had prayed over her for healing on the previous morning, concluding with these words: "Only a few minutes after Father laid hands and prayed for me, all the discomfort and weakness left me and I've been fine ever since."

We walk in the footsteps of St. Paul when we follow his counsel to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts and then step out in hope-filled faith to use them.

Our next stop was at the very spot where Paul and Silas had been forced to undergo a mock trial, a public flogging and a sentence of imprisonment. Directly across the street from that place can be found the ruins of the jail where those two saintly servants ended up converting their jailer to Christ (Acts 16).

Since I happen to be a part time prison chaplain, I decided to spend a little extra time there to ask the intercession of Paul and Silas for two men in particular. One, I hadn't seen in over a year, the other for over five years. They'd been moved to other facilities, and once they are transferred elsewhere, chaplains are not allowed any further contact with them.

I'd especially sought the prayers of Paul and Silas who'd been unjustly imprisoned at this very location, because the two men whom I'd commended to them, I'd come to believe, had also been wrongly imprisoned. After having spent many hours with both of them in counsel and healing prayer, I'd become convinced of their innocence. As a result, I'd never felt free of the burden of needing to pray for them regularly.

Two days later I was back in the U.S. Even as I left the plane I had the strangest feeling that my pilgrimage was not over. Back at the parish I found a message waiting for me. One of the men I'd just mentioned was seriously ill.

He'd requested to see me. Regulations had been waived. The local warden had already approved my visit.

Eight days after praying for him in Phillippi, there I was at his bedside. An hour later the other man, whom I'd also prayed for there, spotted me in the corridor of the same prison. He

dropped the books he was carrying, ran towards me and scooped me into a big hug. Much to my amazement I received permission, on the spot, to meet privately with him as well on that unforgettable afternoon.

We walk in the footsteps of St. Paul when we surrender our hearts to Christ, as he did on the highway to Damascus. We walk in his footsteps when we confess that we have failed to love with Christ's love and ask him for another chance. We walk in that saint's footsteps when we follow his counsel to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts and then step out in hope-filled faith to use them. We walk in the Apostle's footsteps when we give public witness to the blessings Jesus has poured into our lives. We walk in his footsteps when we allow the sufferings of others to become our own, as we lift them before God's throne in intercession.

Pope Benedict, in his encyclical letter on Christian hope, draws our attention to yet another saint named Paul, another heavenly beacon of hope—a Vietnamese martyr of the nineteenth century, Paul Li-Bao-Tin. This latter day Paul had also decided to write a letter from his imprisonment: "I, Paul in chains, for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with

Prayer Card

O Lord Jesus Christ, you have given the Church the grace to celebrate a Jubilee Year in honor of your great apostle Paul.

We ask you to pour out your Spirit during this time of grace...

May this be a time of renewal in the Holy Spirit for your Church.

(Msgr. Joseph Malagrecia)



Photo: Tammie Stevens

me in his praises, for his mercy is forever... In the midst of this storm, I cast my anchor towards the throne of God, the anchor that is lively hope in my heart" (*Saved in Hope*, 37).

Casting the anchor of hope... Hope is a boundless supply of energy that heaven supplies. We have to decide to plug into it and then go on to let it carry us forward. ♦

Fr. Larry Carew is the Bishop's liaison to the Charismatic Renewal for the diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Fr. Larry has been working in the healing and prison ministries for some time and has authored materials for use in these areas.

