

PENTECOST *Today*

October/November/December 2008

**Proclaim his
marvelous deeds!**



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Chairman's Corner

by Aggie Neck

Where's the power?

Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men and to the needs of the world. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Par. 799).

In April of this year I attended the International Colloquium on "Charisms and Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church" held in Rome.

Evangelization is powerless without charisms

There were 131 participants from 43 countries (see Newsbriefs last issue, p.11). Some key quotes were: "The purpose of this gathering is to give new life to the charisms." "The importance of charisms is they are a powerful factor for evangelization, a chance for the Church." "The gospel proclamation is inseparable from charisms—signs will accompany." "Charisms are co-essential to the structure of the Church. Our duty is to revive them."

This gathering gave me hope that the Church indeed sees the need for the reviving of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We have been entrusted with these gifts for the New Evangelization. "Evangelization is powerless without charisms" (Rome Colloquium).

"Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well" (CCC Par. 800). We are instructed

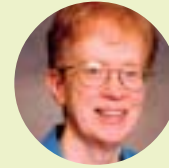
that as "generous distributors of God's manifold grace we are to put our gifts at the service of one another in the measure we have received them (1 Peter 4:10). We are told "The gift we have received we are to give as a gift" (Matt. 10:8). "Charisms are gifts given for the common good and for service to the community" (Rome Colloquium).

It is evident that God intends for us to be equipped for the task at hand, the work of the kingdom. Prayer meetings are one of the places where we learn about charisms and how to use them. However, charisms are meant to be taken and used outside out of the prayer meeting. They are the tools for evangelization, witnessing and the proclamation of the gospel message. These are important times that we live in and God has poured out his Spirit for the task at hand. There is urgency that those who have not heard the message hear it. There is an urgency that those who hear and walk away come to know that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

St. Paul exhorts us as he proclaims: "The old order has passed away; now all is new!" "We implore you in Christ's name: be reconciled to God!" and "Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!" (2 Cor. 5: 17, 20 and 6:2).

In this Year of St. Paul, we can learn much from his writings and equip ourselves with the words of scripture that he left to the Church as instructions for living a life that is alive with the Holy Spirit's power at work in us. There is a task before us. It cannot be done on our own power. "To do God's work we need the Holy Spirit of our God" (Rome Colloquium). ♦

Aggie Neck is Chairman of the National Service Committee.



Editor's Desk

by Sr. Martha Jean McGarry

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor (Luke 4:18).

We celebrate the proclamation of God's Word in this issue. We look at the call, and actually the duty, that each one of us has to spread the gospel. What a blessing that we have been anointed and equipped for such a mission!

What lessons can we learn from St. Paul about proclaiming the Word? **George Martin** in his article "Passing on what we have received" gives us the answer.

Deacon Bill Brennan reminds us that baptism in the Spirit calls and empowers us to tell others the life-saving message of the gospel.

Immersing ourselves in the Word of God prepares and stimulates us to be sharers of the good news. Read about it in **Laurie Manhardt's** article

Our writers show us in a variety of ways how to be evangelistic in our daily living. **Jim Murphy** offers some practical suggestions in how to evangelize. **Therese Boucher** suggests how our prayer meetings and Life in the Spirit Seminars can be evangelistic tools.

We offer the witness (**Chris Kepler**) given on page 3 as encouragement to each of us to dare to bring the love of our Savior wherever the Spirit leads us.

May the encouraging words in this issue work hand in hand with the Spirit of God to awaken in us anew to live and share the love of our life—JESUS! ♦

Out of my comfort zone and into using God's gifts

by Chris Kepler

Franciscan University has a program devoted to the missions. This year I chose to go on the Florida Mission, called Sonlife. The purpose of Sonlife is to bring the gospel to other college kids on Spring break. During the day we go out on the beach to evangelize in pairs. In the evening, we put on retreats, spend time with youth groups, or proclaim the good news on the city streets and in the bars.

One night, we had a healing service for the parishioners of the church where we were staying. One by one, people would come up to our prayer teams and we would pray with them to receive God's healing and grace. I walked up to a guy sitting in the last pew in the back of the church and started to chat with him. He wanted to receive prayer but only spoke Spanish. Since I knew some Spanish, I was able to pray with him. After we started praying, he fell on his knees and began to weep. The Spirit of God stirred within him and for the first time he experienced the real and personal presence of God. As he gave his life to the Lord I could see his heart being softened and a beautiful transformation took place. I didn't do anything extraordinary except use the gifts God gave me to pray with him. It took me out of my comfort zone, but God gave me the strength and the courage I needed. The biggest reason for Christians not evangelizing is *fear*. Doing God's work means we have to step out of ourselves and be willing to lay down our life for him. It may be uncomfortable, but it's worth it.

Before he ascended in heaven, Christ told his followers to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). For many, our first inclination is to brush this commission aside. We say to ourselves: How could Jesus ask such a big thing of me? Surely this message is for somebody else. The task of evangelization seems too overwhelming for the average Christian to be expected to do. I'll just leave evangelization to someone better suited.

It is a common thing for people to think that spreading the gospel is only for a select few whom God specifically chooses and calls. The truth is that Christ was talking to *every* follower of his when he said to "make disciples of all nations."

When we become Christians we receive not only the call, but also the one and only effective tool for evangelization: God's Spirit.

Spreading the gospel isn't just about traveling all over the world in order to baptize the unbaptized and do acts of kindness.

Nor is it just standing in front of a stadium and giving a fiery sermon or healing the sick. Sure, some may be called to these things, but this is not necessarily the definition of evangelization. Even St. Paul says, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing?" (1 Cor. 12:29-30).

Doing God's work means we have to step out of ourselves and be willing to lay down our life for him.

Evangelization is about sharing with others the love and the life you have received from God. Anyone can do it. As a matter of fact, all Christians must do it. God made each of us unique with special gifts and talents. If every Christian would use the gifts God gives us right where we are, all nations would be converted to Christ. St. Paul says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (Romans 12:6). He is saying that each person is unique and can contribute in a special but different way to build up the kingdom of God. We are one body with many parts.

I've been blessed to be studying theology for the past two years at Franciscan University of Steubenville. One phrase I know very well that has been attributed to St. Francis is, "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words." Proclamation of the gospel begins first with our daily actions. Love is the sign of God's Spirit moving in us. If we truly have the Lord living and working in us, we can't help but have his love overflow to those around us.

Christ calls every Christian to evangelize. He reminds us that "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide... this I command you, to love one another" (John 15:16-17). ♦

Chris Kepler is a junior theology major at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio. He has worked with other youth in evangelization ministries and prayer groups.



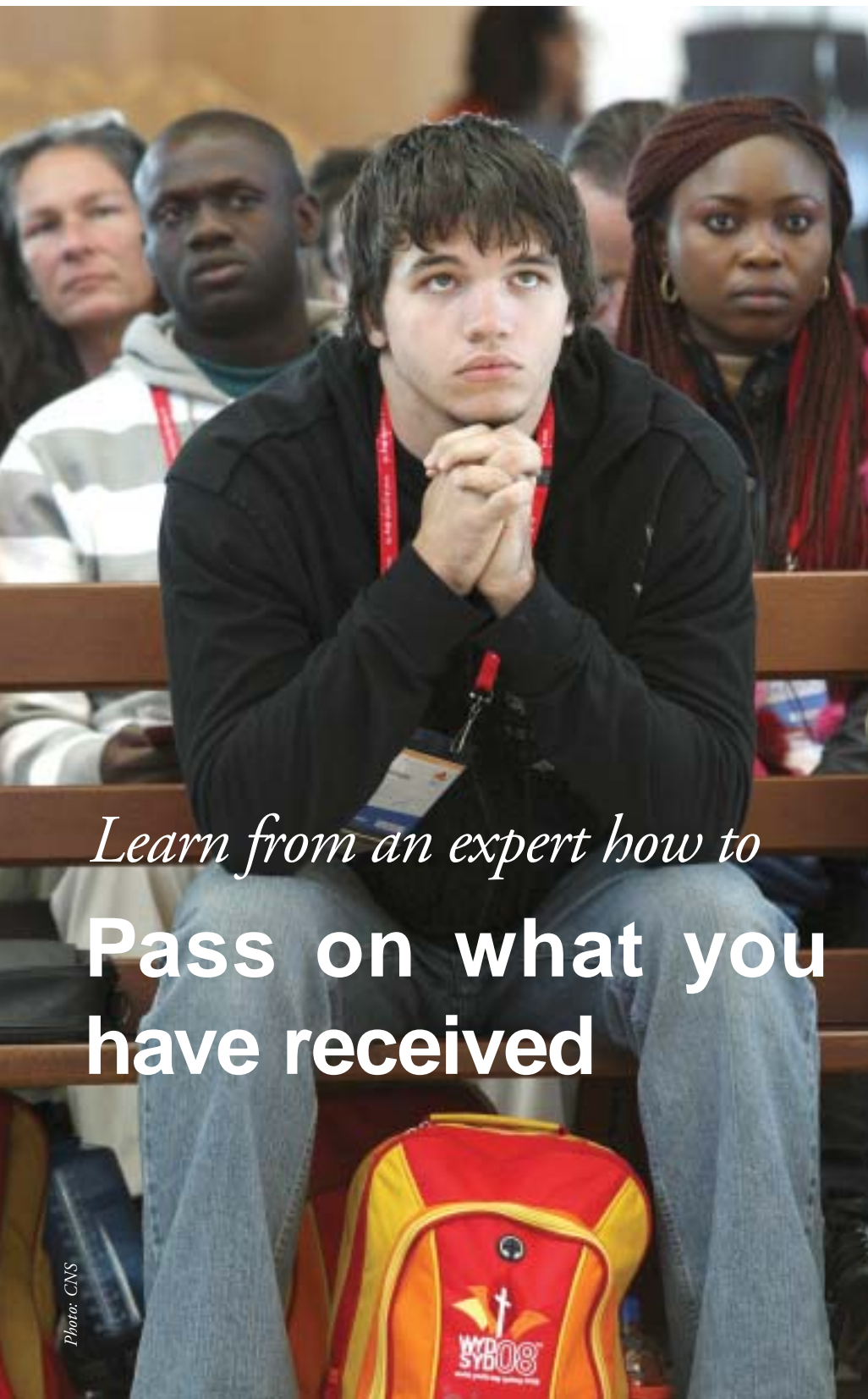
by George Martin

If we want to learn how we can best proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to others, we can look to the foremost proclaimer of all time, St. Paul. Here are some lessons we can learn from him:

Dedication and determination

Paul teaches us by his example. He knew that he was commissioned to preach the gospel: “If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!” (1 Cor. 9:16). Paul dedicated his life to his calling. Whatever else he might have done, he set it aside for the sake of Jesus. Paul was a bright enough fellow that he could have made a better living than as a tentmaker, but this craft supported him while allowing him to make proclaiming Jesus his top priority. Paul let nothing stand in the way of his preaching the gospel—not hardship, not rejection, not failure (see 2 Cor. 11:23-27). One vivid example of his determination occurred during his visit to Lystra, when Paul’s opponents stirred up a crowd against Paul: “They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered around him, he got up and entered the city” again (Acts 14:19-20). I imagine that once back in the city, his first words were, “As I was saying ...”

We do not have Paul’s unique call from God, but we are nonetheless called to proclaim the gospel to those who need to know the wonderful thing God has done for them in Jesus. This takes



Learn from an expert how to
**Pass on what you
have received**

Photo: CNS

Paul's duty was to deliver the message; the power to change lives lay in the message and in the Holy Spirit.

dedication: making a decision to proclaim Jesus to others and setting out to do it. It may mean putting some other things aside—perhaps our pride or our self-concern. And it will require our determination to carry through and be as faithful to our commission as Paul was to his.

Stay on Message

Paul was clear about the distinction between his personal opinions on the one hand, and the good news from and about Jesus on the other. Paul could write, “To the married I give this instruction (not I, but the Lord)...” (1 Cor. 7:10). Paul could also write, “Now to the rest I say (not the Lord)...” (1 Cor. 7:12, indicating that he was giving his personal opinion (see also 1 Cor. 7:25). When Paul preached the gospel, he was not sharing his personal views or giving his opinion; he was handing on to others what he had received as the saving message of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 15:3-5). He was certain that this message was from God and was the word of God. He told the Christians of Thessalonica, “in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13). Because it was the word of God, Paul did not need to embellish it with fancy speaking or “sublimity of words” (1 Cor. 2:1). Paul simply told it as it is.

Following Paul's example, we should do the same. We should hand on to others the saving truth we have received and accepted. We should reject temptations to edit the gospel message to make it more acceptable, touching it up a bit to make it in accord with what we imagine others want to hear. That would shortchange both them and the gospel. Rather, imitating Paul, we should stay on message.

Rely on the Power of the Word and the Spirit

Paul did not regard himself as a superman. He told the Christians of Corinth, “I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:3-4). Paul recognized that he was not an imposing figure or a good public speaker; he allowed that some could say of him, “his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:10). But for Paul these weaknesses were a plus. The power of the gospel message does not lie in the one who proclaims it but in the Holy Spirit who inspires the word of God and those who hear it. Rather than try to sway his listeners with his own persuasiveness, Paul told the Corinthians that he relied on “a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4-5). He told the Christians in Thessalonica, “our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction” (1 Thess. 1:5). Paul's duty was to deliver the message; the power to change lives lay in the message and in the Holy Spirit.

Like Paul, we might think that we are not very good speakers. We might draw the conclusion that we are therefore not suited for sharing the good news of Jesus with others. But Paul would say that that is the wrong conclusion. Paul would even say, Be glad that you are not very eloquent, for then you can find it easier to rely on the power of the word of God and of the Holy Spirit. Your job is not to transform hearts; that is the Spirit's job. Your job is to be the

messenger bringing the word of God to others, so that word and Spirit can manifest their power. Learn to trust in the power of the Spirit.

I learned this lesson while leading pilgrimages to the Holy Land. It was my task to bring people to sites where Jesus walked, say a few words about each site, have someone read a scripture passage pertaining to the site, and allow time for reflection. After doing my part, I needed to stand aside and let God's grace work. God touched many hearts in the course of the pilgrimages, often in ways I did not expect and could not have programmed.

Conclusion

Paul offers us a good many other lessons for proclaiming the word of God. He insists on the necessity of the saving word of God being preached (Rom. 10:13-15). He identified with and adapted himself to his listeners, even while holding fast to the gospel message (1 Cor. 9:22). He urged Timothy to proclaim the word whether it was convenient or inconvenient to do so (2 Tim. 4:2). But I suggest that the most important lessons that Paul teaches about proclaiming the word of God are:

- regard it as a mission we are to carry out with dedication and determination
- bring to others the unadulterated good news of Jesus Christ
- rely on the power of God's word and of the Holy Spirit to touch minds and hearts. ♦

George Martin was the founding editor of God's Word Today magazine. He is now writing an exposition of each Gospel to assist in lectio divina. The first two volumes are Bringing the Gospel of Matthew to Life and Bringing the Gospel of Mark to Life, published by The Word Among Us Press.



And then
God did a
radical
intervention
in his life.



St. Paul, baptism in the Holy Spirit and us

by Deacon Bill Brennan

In the very early days of the church, when Christianity was still a Jewish experience, God chose a most unlikely man to be the missionary to the gentile world. What happened to him would affect not only his life but also the entire future course of the history of Christianity itself. It continues to affect us to this day. That man, of course, was St. Paul, and his story is one we are encouraged to reflect upon by the church during this Year of St. Paul. His encounter with God is the key to everything he preached and wrote.

Consider its implications. This was a man who hated Christianity and in particular hated the name of Jesus. He hated them so strongly that he was on a mission to destroy both. He had the authority to imprison and even kill the followers of this man they claimed was the Messiah and the Savior of the world. And then God did a radical intervention in his life, and the rest is history. St. Paul's encounter with the risen Christ and the fire and power of the Holy Spirit while on the road to carry out his mission of destruction was so powerful and impacted on his life

so strongly that he never forgot it. From that day forward, whenever he engaged in what we would call "giving his testimony," he always brought his audience back to where it all began, there on the road to Damascus. His whole life became a great proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus. And in the end, he gave up his life rather than deny the One he served and proclaimed. What is more, scripture presents his experience of God as a classic example of God working in the life of one who has been called and chosen for a true mission of life-giving power.



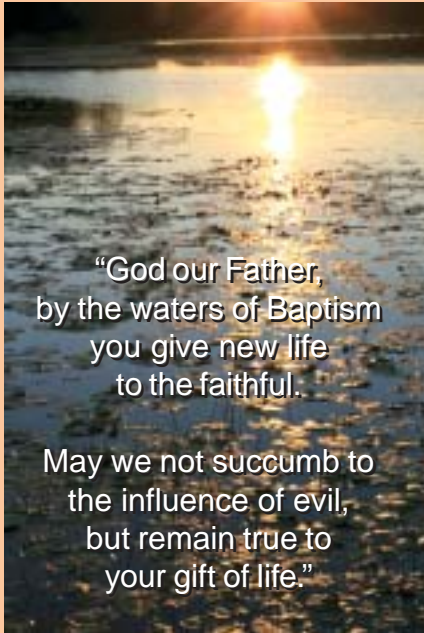
We too are invited by God and by the church to spend our lives sharing the good news of the One who has intervened in our own lives and changed everything.

Today this generation of the church has been graced in an extraordinary manner with the gift we call baptism in the Holy Spirit. It comes in different ways, some of them very strong and powerful, others of them very gentle and quiet. But no matter how it occurs, it produces in us several affects that put us in touch with St. Paul. For example, Jesus comes to life within us in ways we never knew were possible—what I like to call “a moving, breathing, living and active presence,” and like St. Paul, we are impelled to share the good news. Prayer comes alive, scripture comes alive, the sacraments come alive and the church comes alive as never before, and like St. Paul, we draw our nourishment and life from them. Also, like St. Paul, we too can claim that this encounter with the risen Christ and the fire and power of the Holy Spirit has changed our lives and even the direction of our lives. We too discover that the charisms of the Holy Spirit are very real, and that they have empowered us to speak and minister in power. Not only that but our encounter has taken away the fear and self-doubt in matters of faith and practice that kept so many of us so quiet before a world demanding to know what we believed and knew. It is certainly a common experience of those who have been touched by this grace that they are driven to talk about Jesus and how he has affected their lives.

Is it not interesting that this grace has been given to us for the church at precisely the moment in the history of the church when the Spirit has called the whole church to a reawakening of who

and what we are called to be as the Body of Christ in this age? In the words of Pope John Paul II, the agenda of the church moving into the third millennium of Christianity was set at the Second Vatican Council. The teaching of the Council makes it clear, among other things, that every baptized believer is “obligated” to be an evangelist, that is, a proclaimer of the good news of Jesus, who is the Word made flesh, the good news of the Father’s kingdom, the Messiah and Savior of the world. The teaching goes on to describe how every believer is to engage in his or her mission: by what we say (always the easier part) and by how we live. Thus through our words and our lives, we are to bring Jesus into every situation of life we encounter and wherever we find ourselves in both the religious side and the secular side of our everyday lives.

So what can we, who have been so blessed by this extraordinary gift of God’s love— baptism in the Holy Spirit—conclude from reflecting on St. Paul’s experience of the same grace? The answer is clear: what every baptized believer should conclude. We too have been chosen for a mission for God; we too have been called to follow Jesus wherever he leads; we too have been raised to proclaim everywhere “Jesus is Lord;” and we too are invited by God and by the church to spend our lives sharing the good news of the One who has intervened in our own lives and changed everything. We are called to be living evidence that the great adventure of building the king-



Prayer Card

“God our Father,
by the waters of Baptism
you give new life
to the faithful.

May we not succumb to
the influence of evil,
but remain true to
your gift of life.”

(Prayer for Saturday in
the 3rd week of Easter)

Photo: Sr. Mary Anne Schaezner

dom continues to this very day. Baptism in the Holy Spirit has empowered us to live the life of Jesus and to do what he was doing, which is what he called his own disciples to do in his name. And this, surely, is what we were baptized to do in the first place—sharing in the work and ministry of Jesus as King, Prophet and Priest. ♦

Deacon Bill Brennan is a former member of the National Service Committee and serves as a diocesan liaison in the Diocese of Stockton. He is the current chairman of the Northern California Coalition of Catholic Charismatic Diocesan Liaisons.

