

EVANGELIZATION IN CURSILLO: EMPOWERED MESSENGERS

– by John Oetter

Ephesians 3:16-19

Being empty (humble) to be filled with love
The Holy Spirit bringing Jesus' power to the layperson
Dying and rising with Jesus
Personal story

Ephesians 3

16

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

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so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

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may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

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and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Good Morning!

I am John Oetter and from the Diocese of Victoria Cursillo Community. My Rollo today is on Evangelization in Cursillo – Empowered Messengers.

When we came off of our Cursillo weekend and onto our fourth day, we were given a gift. A gift that we were happy to take out with us into the world. That gift was our understanding how much God loved us no matter what we may do, how often we turn away, or when we forget that love. As with most gifts, this one to has a price. Not measured in dollars and cents but a promise. A promise to take that gift and share it with others. To multiply it much like Jesus did with the loaves and fishes. To share the good news with the world.

But to be able to share this gift some things have to happen to us. We have to be open to the message and the gift. We have to be willing to listen. Not with just our ears, but with our heart and with our soul. To let the Holy Spirit fill us and nourish us. To create a space within us that allows God's love to show through. We find this through prayer, meditation or finding places where we can help through works of love.

Speaking of prayer, I read an inspiring explanation of the purpose of prayer. It was written by Theophan the Recluse, a monk who lived in Russia in the 1800's and is regarded as one of the leading mystics in the eastern Orthodox religion. He said:

"Why hurry in prayer? We spend hours in other pursuits without noticing the passage of time, yet we no sooner stand up to pray than we wonder how long we have been standing. Then we drive ourselves to finish quickly, so it is all-profitless.

What is the best way to deal with this? Some people pledge themselves to a quarter of an hour of prayer, or half an hour, or an hour as it suits them, then they go on standing at prayer until their time is up by the clock...it is no use hurrying the reading of prayers.

Prayer is a spiritual barometer for self-observation. Just as a barometer shows how heavy or light the air is, so prayer shows us how high or low our spirit has gone in its relationship to God.

A truly spiritual life is not possible without prayer – which is spiritual life in action. Prayer is the raising of our mind and heart to God. One may say that to pray means bringing right feelings and attitudes into actions."

Through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit we are called to those right feelings and attitudes that give us the power to spread the message of God's love – the actions that Theophan talked about. I believe that Cursillo has also given us the tools to make those actions work in the environments we encounter every day. Piety, Study, Action – the three legs of the tripod we all learned about on our weekends. The challenge that I face is to let the Holy Spirit speak through me to those who need to hear the good news. We are afraid of saying the wrong things, afraid that we are going to offend someone, afraid that we don't know the answers. If we trust that our faith comes from the Holy Spirit, we should not have those fears. But to trust, we must first be willing to die to ourselves and rise with Jesus. We have to be willing to put behind us the thought that we are in control, that we are the only ones who can make changes in our lives and those around us. To die and rise with Jesus also means to empty ourselves of our preconceived human notions, prejudices and thoughts and to replace them with the love that is God. We have been reminded again through this Easter season of that lesson, the lesson of love that Jesus showed us when he was willing to empty himself of all that he loved here on earth and to submit to his Father's will, and in doing so give life to everyone.

How do we take what we have learned and put it to use in everyday life? How do we make ourselves open to the opportunities that present themselves each and every day? I have mentioned one way, prayer. Time alone with God is time well spent. We must also be prepared to listen. I try to avoid one-way conversations with God. It is important to listen to what is being said as well. God speaks to us every day. Take a look around you, the trees, the water, your friends and family. These are some of the things that God has given us and is one of the ways that he speaks to us. Listen in your heart, your soul. When we are quiet and willing to listen God is speaking to us.

Meditation also allows us to get closer to God. Time spent in silent reflection on those areas that can escape us during our busy lives rewards us with insights that we would not ordinarily have. Meditation comes in many forms. One of the ways I meditate is to reflect on the words of those who have lived their lives for God. I recently came across this beautiful meditation that speaks to me about not only of the majesty and gifts of God, but a vision of the Holy Spirit that inspires the heart. Hildegard of Bingen, who lived approximately 900 years ago in what is now Germany, wrote it. During her lifetime she was a poetess, abbess, artist, healer, theologian and prophet.

*"I am the one whose praise
echoes on high.*

I adorn all the earth.

*I am the breeze
that nurtures all things
green.*

I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits.

*I am led by the spirit to feed
the purest streams.*

*I am the rain
coming from the dew
that causes the grasses to laugh
with the joy of life.*

*I call forth tears,
the aroma of holy work.*

I am the yearning for good.

*Who is the Holy Spirit?
The Holy Spirit is the Burning Spirit.
it kindles*

the hearts of humankind.

*Like tympanum and lyre is plays them,
gathering volumes in the temple of the soul.*

*Holy Spirit is
Life-giving-life,
all movement.*

Root of all being.

Purifier of all impurity.

Balm of all wounds.

*Radiant life, worthy of all praise,
The Holy Spirit resurrects and awakens
everything that is."*

Take time for meditation. Take time with prayer. These are two of the tools that we need if we are to be empowered messengers of God's word.

When we have the tools that God has given us we have to be ready to use them. The key to when to use them comes from the wonderful gift of Grace. The story I am about to tell you taught me that Grace not only plays a role in using these gifts, but that Grace is in the acceptance of the idea that no matter what we have planned for our lives, God's plan for us comes first. This might be a difficult idea to accept at first as it speaks of our lack of control in our lives, but there is a growth that comes with understanding that acceptance and that it is God's plan for us and is tangible evidence of the gift of Grace.

I recently had an experience that I hope will illustrate the concept that we can take God's message out into the world to those who are in need of his message. The last men's Cursillo weekend in Victoria was scheduled for the second weekend in February. The weekend had already been postponed once, and the date in February was chosen so that I could take part. I was really looking forward to it and we had a great team and a group of enthusiastic candidates. We normally start the weekend with a team Mass and then follow up with pizza before the candidates arrive. The pizza was my undoing. Later in the evening, after the nightly team meeting we all went off to our various little nooks that we had staked out to sleep in. I was sleeping in the kitchen off the main body of the church. I then became aware of pain in my upper stomach and no matter what I tried to do it would not go away. I wrestled with the pain for two or three hours and then decided that it was not going away and that I should perhaps go to the hospital and have it checked out. I went to the area behind the sacristy where

our Cha Cha, Fred, was sleeping. I found out later that when I called out to him in the dark and waking him from a sound sleep he was not quite sure who was calling him – God or me.

They took me off to emergency where I was seen right away. I have a history of kidney stones that led them to believe that they were acting up again. I was not sure what it was, but the pain was not consistent with kidney stones so they were going to run some tests. It turns out it was not kidney stones, even though they operated on them, but my gall bladder. They were going to take it out on Monday or Tuesday. I was moved onto a ward about sixteen hours later. It was on that ward that I learned a couple of important lessons. God always has a plan, and I should always be willing to listen to that plan. That plan, I soon learned, did not include my prepaid trip to Mexico the following Friday.

There were four of us in the room. Clarke was directly across from me and was in to have his second eye removed after being blind for fifty years. He would talk about his guide dog and ask us questions like what does the moon look like. Next to him was Paul, he was in having his prostate removed and loved to talk and tell jokes. Next to me was Ken, who looked sixty but turned out to be ninety. It was obvious that Ken was not doing so well, but he said hello and hoped that all was going to be well with me. We had great conversations in that room as we waited for various procedures and the nurses used to argue about who would get our room as we all seemed to be making the best of a not very great situation. It soon became apparent that Ken was not getting any better. He was waiting for his kidneys to start operating better so they could do a procedure to clear a blockage. His pain was getting worse by the hour and he did not seem very happy. His family would visit him often and comment on how well he looked and how much better he would be after the operation. The truth was that Ken was dying.

Hospitals are quite places at two in the morning. The second night I was there I was awake when I heard Ken groaning. I asked if he would like me to call the nurse for him. He answered with a question. "Why don't they just let me die?" Now here was a question that I was not prepared for. How do you answer one like that? Not many of us are comfortable with talking about death, especially with someone we have just met. I have had some experience with the dying process. I worked as a volunteer respite care home for five years for those living with HIV/AIDS. During that time, two people chose to die in my home rather than the hospital. I also had one client, Benoit, who became a good friend decide that he was going to stop eating as he was tired of battling the disease. He was a devout Catholic, and he had a parish priest who would visit him daily in Hospice during the 63 days it took him to die. I feel very strongly about the sanctity of life and had some problems with his decision. The understanding came when the priest explained that Benoit had a long conversation with his God and both were at peace with his decision. I should also mention that Benoit died only one week before my Cursillo. Talk about God's plans for us!

But back to the hospital. As we lay there in the dark I prayed for guidance. I then said "I am so sorry you are in such pain, have you talked to your family about what it is you want?" Ken said that he had tried, but that he felt he would be letting his family down by not trying to get better. It was obvious that he was tired from the fight and I suggested that he let his family and doctor know what it is he wanted as he was obviously at peace with that decision. I said that I would say a prayer for him and his family. He soon went back to sleep. We had another similar conversation the next night. On Monday he had the procedure done to clear the artery to his kidneys. His family was very happy it went well but I could see that Ken was not getting any better. On Wednesday, just before dinner, he finally told the doctor that he did not want any more intervention. Within an hour or two he was in a coma, his daughter and her husband by his bed. I do not know where the idea came from, but I felt the need to do something to comfort them in this trying time. I asked if it would be Ok to give Ken a blessing. They nodded and I went over and made the sign of the cross on his forehead and asked God to look after him. There were tears all over the room, but there was also a feeling of peace. He died about two hours later.

I left the hospital on Friday; about the time my traveling companions were leaving for Mexico. It was snowing heavily – something it has been known to do in Victoria. I had the next week to reflect, meditate and pray about the previous week. Understanding and acceptance of God's will does not happen like a bolt of lightning from above. It is a process, much like the healing of the scars from the surgery. What were the lessons I had learned in that week? Humility was one. The realization that there was a force at work that was greater than me. Humility in the fact that no matter how unhappy I was in my present situation, there were others who had greater trials and had learned to rise above them, much like Jesus on the cross. The other lesson I learned was that as important as I thought the Cursillo weekend was going to be, the preparation and planning the team and I had put into it, there were other places that God wanted me to be. This plan touched others as well. You have all been on weekends, either as candidates or team. Some of you have had the experience of having to replace others on team at the last minute. This was during a weekend, this meant that the Rector was not only going to have to rearrange the tables he was going to have to recreate the Rollo I was going to give from scratch. The person I was training in the Sacristans role was suddenly put in the position of having to do by himself. Not to mention the two team members who took me to hospital and arrived back at 4:00 am only to get up at 5:30 am to face a long day. I also learned about empowerment. I learned that it is all right to reach out in a situation that I normally would have felt uncomfortable with because I was unsure of what their reaction would be. I learned to trust that God's plan has a purpose.

Will I remember these lessons? Probably as time goes by they may not seem as important to me as they do now. I do know that there will be other times in my life

when I will be reminded and my hope is that I will have the vision to recognize these moments as Grace.

Remember that we have been empowered. Tomorrow is the Pentecost Sunday when the Lord breathed upon his disciples with the power of the Holy Spirit. Take that most precious of gifts and use it to take the message of God's love into the world. We are called through Cursillo to reach for those who are far away and be a symbol of that love.

I would like to close this Rollo with a prayer and a meditation. Cardinal Mercier wrote it.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

I am going to reveal to you the secret of sanctity and happiness. Every day for five minutes control your imagination and close your eyes to the things of sense and your ears to all the noises of the world, in order to enter into yourself. Then, in the sanctity of your baptized soul (which is the temple of the Holy Spirit) speak to that Divine Spirit, saying to Him:

Oh, Holy Spirit, beloved of my soul...I adore you. Enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me, console me. Tell me what I should do...give me Your orders. I promise to submit myself to all that You desire of me and to accept all that You permit to happen to me. Let me only know Your will.

If you do this, your life will flow along happily, serenely and full of consolation, even in the midst of trials. Grace will be proportioned to the trial, giving you the strength to carry it and you will arrive at the gate of Paradise, laden with merit. This submission to the Holy Spirit is the secret of sanctity.

Cardinal Mercier

De Colores!