

Gospel Enquiry – Called to be Witnesses

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses.”

Acts 1:8



Commentary:

The context for this Scripture passage is the account of the Ascension of Jesus as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus, knowing that he is visibly and physically going to leave his disciples, tries to give them strength for their mission to spread the Gospel. He suspects they will be anxious, hesitant, even fearful without him, and that they will need encouragement in order to spread the Gospel message. He promises them the power of the Holy Spirit, a future baptism in the Spirit's power. This promise comes to fruition in the events of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13).

The passage for this Gospel Enquiry is being used this year as the motto for World Youth Day in Sydney. To help prepare the young people on pilgrimage to Australia, Pope Benedict XVI has asked them to reflect upon the person of the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit can influence and affect their lives, in particular in being witness to the Christian faith. Pope Benedict states:

“The Holy Spirit enlightens us, revealing Christ crucified and risen, and shows us how to become more like Him so that we can be ‘the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ’ (Deus caritas est, 33). Those who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit understand that placing oneself at the service of the Gospel is not

an optional extra, because they are aware of the urgency of transmitting this Good News to others. Nevertheless, we need to be reminded again that we can be witnesses of Christ only if we allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit who is ‘the principal agent of evangelization’ (cf. Evangelii nuntiandi, 75) and ‘the principal agent of mission’ (cf. Redemptoris missio, 21).”

Just as for the disciples, the same Holy Spirit inspires and encourages us to witness in the name of Jesus within our daily lives. As Impact or YCW members we should be especially conscious of the missionary role of our movement, a movement called to “serve the masses” and “to transform the world”. Joseph Cardijn saw the YCW as the very means to evangelize the youth of the world. In a similar way Pope Benedict sees young people as the principle witnesses to their peers:

“I assure you that the Spirit of Jesus today is inviting you young people to be bearers of the good news of Jesus to your contemporaries. The difficulty that adults undoubtedly find in approaching the sphere of youth in a comprehensible and convincing way could be a sign with which the Spirit is urging you young people to take this task upon yourselves. You know the ideals, the language, and also the wounds, the expectations, and at the same time the desire for goodness felt by your contemporaries. This opens up the vast

world of young people's emotions, work, education, expectations, and suffering ... Each one of you must have the courage to promise the Holy Spirit that you will bring one young person to Jesus Christ in the way you consider best, knowing how to ‘give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but [to] do it with gentleness and reverence’ (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).”

Questions for enquiry:

- Who was Jesus addressing this message to? Why do you think he said this at the particular moment he said it?
- Who or what is the Holy Spirit for you?
- What does it mean to be a “witness”? What does it mean for a Christian?
- What do you think the YCW/Impact witnesses to? What does YCW/Impact stand for?
- How are you a witness to the Christian faith through being a member of YCW/Impact?
- How do you think you could be a better witness?



Accompanier

For adults who accompany YCW & Impact

‘Receive the Holy Spirit’

“In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, ‘Peace be with you,’ and, after saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord, and he said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.’ After saying this he breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone’s sins, they are retained.’”

John 20:19-23 (Gospel for Second Sunday of Easter and Pentecost)

The gift of the Spirit

After our forty days of Lent, preparing not just for Jesus' death and resurrection, but also for our own hoped-for eternal life in God, comes Easter – the glorious celebration of Jesus being raised from the tomb. It is because Jesus, the Christ, has been raised from the dead that we can hope for eternal life. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead has made his home in you, then he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.” (Romans 8:11) St Athanasius tells us that the Christ's own resurrection “was to be the assurance to all that he had himself conquered corruption and that their own bodies also would eventually be incorrupt...” (De Incarnatione, §22). Not only has he risen from the dead, but Jesus has promised to be with us “always; yes, to the end of time” (Matthew 28:20). He is “God with us” (Emmanuel) in the Word and in the Eucharist; and if that were not enough, he has sent us his Spirit. During the weeks between Easter and Pentecost the Lectionary helps us to reflect on that wonderful gift of the Spirit.

We hear John's account of the events of the “the first day of the week” over two Sundays, Easter Sunday (the empty tomb), and the Second Sunday of Easter (the appearance in the Upper Room). The Gospel for the Second Sunday of Easter begins with the wonderful words “In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week...” The



leader of the disciples – terrified, safe behind closed doors – had been arrested and shamefully put to death, denied by one of his closest friends; but now, “on the first day of the week”, Peter and “the other disciple”, seeing “the linen cloths lying on the ground ... [had seen] and believed. Till this moment they had still not understood the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” (John 20:6-9; Gospel for Easter Day) “In the evening of that same day”, suddenly “Jesus came and stood among them”, talking to them, showing his wounds, and then breathing on them, saying “Receive the Holy Spirit...” The NJB reminds us of the symbolism of Jesus' breathing to give the Spirit, as Hebrew uses the same word for “breath” and “s/Spirit”. When God created humanity, he “blew the breath of life into his nostrils” (Genesis 2:7);

Jesus the Christ, now risen from the dead and glorified, offers humanity the opportunity to be re-created, a new creation, by breathing the Spirit over them.

The Spirit at work in the YCW

He breathes his Spirit over the YCW, too; over the young workers; over those who accompany them; over the YCW's supporters; over all those in contact with the YCW. Through the Spirit, Christ offers the opportunity of a new start, a re-creation, in young people's work and their working environment, be it school work or studies, seeking work, or employment of any kind. He offers them the opportunity to re-create their working conditions – improving their physical environment; ensuring they are given the training they need; helping them to ask for a just wage...

BE MY WITNESSES

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and to carry out this transforming work with and alongside their peers.

Throughout the Easter season we hear readings from Acts telling how the Spirit worked in the new-born Church, bringing the nascent community together to live in faith (common prayer; common ownership; care for the weak), helping it to take decisions about how to move forward (Institution of the Seven; Council of Jerusalem), inspiring its members in their words and actions (preaching and teaching the good news; healing in Christ's name; defending the faith against the Sanhedrin; gaining converts; Paul's travels). The Spirit is constantly at work among the earliest Christians. Finally, on the day of Pentecost itself, we come full circle, back to the granting of the Spirit. The Spirit comes rushing into the room where the disciples are and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4), just as Jesus had promised when he breathed the Spirit on to them "in the evening of the first day of the week".

A Guide to Gospel Enquiries

As YCWs we are called to judge a given situation in the light of our faith. As part of a Review of Life, in particular on a specific topic, the Gospel Enquiry is invaluable to helping us judge according to Christ's teaching and those of his Church.

Gospel Enquiries help us:

- 1) By reviewing our own life and attitude.
- 2) By learning more from Christ and his teachings.
- 3) By looking at the relevance of Christ's gospel is to our lives today.

Start at the beginning

The starting point for a Gospel Enquiry will be usually a small part of one of the gospels (a few verses). However, any part of the Scriptures could be used if it would prove to be helpful in guiding and enlightening the situation. Alternatively, it is sometimes helpful to use a section from the Church's Social Teaching (to be found summarised either in the Catechism of the Catholic Church or in the Compendium of Social

The gifts of the Spirit

The Spirit has not stopped working! It is the Spirit which emboldens us to speak to young people, to "speak their language ... about the marvels of God", without being patronising and while keeping the distance we should as adults who accompany young people. It is the Spirit which helps us to guide

Fr Bernard Robert, the French national chaplain, suggests some other readings in which God offers strength through the Spirit:

1 Kings 19:1-18

Ezekiel 37.1-4

Joel 3:1-5

Wisdom 7:15-27

Luke 11:5-13

John 1:19-34

John 7:37-44

John 14:16-26

John 15:18-16:4

John 20:19-23

Acts 2:1-41

Romans 5:1-11

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Galatians 3:1-9

Galatians 5:16-25

Revelation 21:22-22:5

Elijah surprised by God

The valley of bones

The Spirit poured out on humanity

Prayer for wisdom

Pray incessantly

John's witness

The foretelling of the Spirit

The sending of the Comforter

The Comforter

'Receive the Holy Spirit'

Pentecost

God's love poured out

The same Spirit in all

Only faith will save

The fruits of the Spirit

God, the light of the City

them in their actions and the Review of Life; the Spirit which "sends us out", as the Father sent Jesus, to help young people approach him. As we come to Pentecost, let us ask ourselves: are we amazed at the work of the Spirit; or do we put its gifts down to "too much new wine"?

Teaching), although often this has to be nuanced in language for greater comprehension. The passage chosen is read out and then a discussion is led with the use of prepared questions. The Gospel Enquiry should be prepared in advance. The chaplain/adult companion can be useful, in firstly helping the leader of the future meeting to find a suitable passage to enlighten the given topic/reality, and secondly, in helping formulate questions which will help enhance the message of the Gospel/Scripture or Church teaching within the group discussion. A chaplain or adult companion may also have some knowledge of the original context or situation of the Gospel passage, which may help further a fuller understanding of the text.

Begin the reflection by one person reading the gospel passage out loud. After one person has read it aloud wait a moment and then get someone else to read it. Hearing the same passage by two different voices can often help in gaining a deeper insight in to the

passage. After the second reading one should begin to note down what strikes you about the passage and begin to formulate some questions, which will help you and the group to come to a deeper understanding of the message contained in the gospel passage you have chosen.

Ask the following questions in the Gospel enquiry:

- 1) Do we understand what is happening in the passage?
- 2) What comparisons can we make to life situations today?
- 3) Is there any action or change we feel we should make to improve in our mission as Young Christian Workers or Impact members?

The Gospel Enquiry in the RoL

Sometimes the Gospel Enquiry as part of the Review of Life process is sadly neglected. A vital characteristic of our movement is the fact we call ourselves Christian; we identify fully with, and are inspired by the message of Jesus Christ. Putting Christ and his teaching

at the centre of our judging ensures we are guided and enlightened by the Gospel values, and hopefully will act accordingly from those values. How can the Gospel Enquiry help us in this?

One of the worst attitudes which prevails among Christians is the failure to relate faith to life and vice versa. This is not helped when perhaps we look at the Scriptures as more of a history book, or a collection of stories from the past, which are "lovely and nice" but have seemingly no relevance to our lives today. As chaplains/adult companions, we ourselves need to remember the power of the Scriptures, and to enthuse our young people with "the living and active word of God" which speaks to us now, in our reality, and is incredibly relevant if we have "ears to listen".

Light on life

Reading and reflecting on Christ's story can help us look at our own story of life and find new ways to improve our lifestyles. The Gospels become alive when we look at them in the light of our own life. They help us to understand a little more, the significance of Christ's actual presence on earth and the message he gave for us today.

Inspiration

Many of us are constantly searching for truth in a world where we are bombarded by argument and opinion from all sides. Reading the Gospels gives us time on a regular basis to sit down and understand the real truth revealed to us by God through his Son. Taking stock and direction from the Gospels takes time and patience, but can provide true inspiration for what is a very challenging mission as a Christian.

True Christianity

The word "Christian" has often been an abused word in our world. It has been used to cover a multitude of sins as well as being the inspiration to a great deal of good. If we are to proclaim ourselves as members of Impact or Young Christian Workers we should spend time reflecting on what this actually means. The Gospels provides a direct line to Christ and his message.

In brief:

For a Gospel Enquiry to be truly effective, the following pointers will prove to be helpful:

1 Give it Time

Remember, when preparing a Gospel Enquiry, read through the text a few times and reflect on what is happening and how the situation and message is relevant to today.

2 Prepare with someone else

Preparing Gospel Enquiries can sometimes be a daunting experience. In this case the chaplain or adult companion should always try and prepare the Enquiry with the leader. Two heads are better than one.

3 Keep it snappy

Often the best Gospel Enquiries are those that are short, sharp and to the point. Bear in mind that this leaves room for further reflection by the group in their own time; don't exhaust people.

4 Nobody's right

Quite often there is no absolute correct understanding of a Gospel passage. It is not wise to encourage correct answers. Be on the look out for people in the group who feel this way: it may be hampering their contribution to the group. You have the freedom to take from the Gospels what you feel Christ is saying to you.

5 Review Progress

There are many negatives attached to Bible Study today, which we should be aware of and on our guard against. In order to ensure the group (especially new members) feel comfortable with Gospel Enquiries it is a good idea to put some questions to the group now and again to review their usefulness and approach concerns head-on.

6 Choosing a passage

Every passage has a message – though some are more prominent than others. There's no need to choose a passage on a particular theme or issue. Try using the Gospel (or part of it) of the Mass from the previous or forthcoming Sunday.

7 Additional Support

There is a series of pre-prepared Gospel Enquiries for Impact Groups called "Think Again" available from YCW HQ; and detailed guides to the Review of Life process can be found on the website ("Training Material"). Remember to log in as a registered member at www.ycwimpact.com, and look out for pre-prepared Gospel Enquiries in future editions of *The Accompanier*.