

THE BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT IN PARISHES

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Testimony on New Life in the Spirit seminar by Gaetano Larizza - Comunità Gesù Risorto (Risen Jesus Community)



Praise and glory to him for the inestimable gift he made to the Church, to history and to our life with the Stream of Grace in which we live and for which we are gathered here under the gaze of our beloved Patron: the Holy Spirit.

First of all, I would like to thank Paolo for the opportunity he gave me to be here to share my experience and that of the Risen Jesus Community that I represent. I still thank all the Team that organized this event that allows us to be together, because I am strongly convinced that communion is the only possible way that all movements in the Church must take so that the Kingdom of God increases more on earth for our present days and the days to come. I also thank the translators who make up for my bad English and who perform a valuable service for all of us.

Finally I want to thank, together with all of you, our beloved Pope Francis for the dazzling intuition he had in giving us CHARIS as a place of communion and dialogue at the service of the worldwide Charismatic Renewal.

My participation will develop in two moments:

- 1) the way in which in the Risen Jesus Community we carry out Seminaries open to all
- 2) the spiritual fruits that we have noticed in the brethren and in the parishes

Baptism in the Holy Spirit open to all is one of the three general objectives defined in the CHARIS Statutes and strongly underlined by the Holy Father, at the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal here in Italy, now 50 years ago, but this was not the case; the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of a journey with a Charismatic Community and could only be accessed after a suitable period of discernment in which, the neophytes, became aware of the Community, of its spirituality, of the use of charisms and, only when they decided in their heart, helped also by the leaders of the group and by the older brothers, to walk definitively in this community could they begin the Seminar of New Life in the Spirit and thus access the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This *modus operandi*, in many Realities, went on until Pope Francis asked the whole Catholic Charismatic Renewal not to be controllers of God's grace but dispensers by sharing with everyone, in the Church, the grace of Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In the Risen Jesus Community, we had long ago begun to experience this new conception in the land of international mission where, by going to open new prayer groups in parishes unknown to us, we held a Seminar of New Life open to all parishioners which ended, after about 10-15 days, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (or Baptism in the Holy Spirit).

Having noticed that in other nations this new formula produced excellent spiritual results, having also been encouraged by Pope Francis with his request to open the Seminaries of New Life in the Spirit to all, even to those who would not have then started a journey of conversion in the Community, we have opened Baptism in the Holy Spirit to all the parishioners of the parishes in which our Community is present and also in those where it is not yet present.

Twelve weekly meetings

Our formative path includes twelve weekly meetings in which we begin with the Holy Mass, the charismatic prayer, the report on the theme of the day and, if the

remaining time permits, the sharing of experiences or questions for further study.

The topics we deal with are the following:

1. God calls us
2. God loves us
3. God saves us
4. God gives us new life
5. The Word of God
6. Prayer
7. The Sacraments
8. The gifts of the Holy Spirit
9. How to welcome the gifts of God
10. Immersed in the Holy Spirit
11. The Growth Community
12. Transformation into Christ

As you can see, these are common topics for all of us, and concentrated in a short parish formative path in which everyone can really participate, even those who have never had a direct experience with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Most of these themes are already dealt with by parish catechists, in preparation for First Communion, Confirmation, in the training course of adults and also, very often, in Sunday homilies by priests, but we really address this invitation to everyone, also and above all to those who do not yet have a sacramental life and do not regularly attend the parish but who nevertheless feel called by the Holy Spirit to this path of formation, therefore we do not want to take anything for granted and take up even the simplest arguments.

There are in fact many people who follow some charismatic realities from the web because in their neighborhood or in their city there is no prayer group, maybe they really want to experience Baptism in the Spirit but they don't have the opportunity. Organizing an event like the Seminar in their area finally gives them the opportunity to experience this charismatic dimension in their presence.

For this reason, in agreement and in close collaboration with the parish priest, in the weeks preceding the Seminar of New Life in the Spirit, we begin to announce it after every Sunday Mass by inviting all those present to participate, we post posters with the dates and themes of the reports. We use both parish and private social networks on the bulletin boards of parishes and neighborhood homes and finally, in areas where this is possible, we happened to announce the Seminar also through local radio stations. The parish priest gathers all the parishioners who show a desire to participate and so when we start, very often, the church is full of many brothers and sisters, some driven by curiosity, others by the esteem they have towards the parish priest, others still because they wish better understand the Current of Grace and experience Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In reality, everyone, some for one reason and some for another, are called by the Lord and even a single evening of prayer and formation certainly produces fruit in their life according to the plan of love that Jesus has for each of us.

We have noticed that in the first meetings the turnout tends to increase from week to week because, within the neighborhood, the news is spread by word of mouth and we all know well that direct testimony is a powerful announcement. But then, already after 5/6 meetings the group begins to downsize and those who remain are those who have really decided in their heart to live this experience to the full.

If the Life in the Spirit Seminar takes place in a parish where the Charismatic Community is not yet present and the parish priest, together with some parishioners, expresses the desire to establish a group permanently, then the missionaries will also take care to form a structure that allows to that group to be able to walk autonomously even after Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Then, where possible, a small group is formed for the animation of the singing and we begin to look around among the participants to identify those who could carry out the service of Community Leaders (for us from 3 to 7 people) and who will then be for the following months followed by one of our missionary teams.

How the Seminar meetings take place

All participants meet for the parish Holy Mass, if the parish priest deems it appropriate and if there is not already an animation offered by the parish, a complete service can be organized: songs, readings, service at the

altar and everything else that can be useful for the celebration of the Mass. If, on the other hand, a service of this type is already present, one can join in the full spirit of communion and collaboration.

This aspect is held in great consideration by us, first of all because it is not possible to live in a truly charismatic way without, at the same time and first of all, also having a sacramental life. Since the announcement is addressed both to those who already attend the parish and to those who do not yet attend it, we believe it is important to clarify immediately that each of our projects has a meaning if lived within the Church and therefore in full acceptance of the Sacraments. Of course I am speaking of a proclamation of a Catholic nature, in the ecumenical sphere this aspect must necessarily be considered in a different way.

Secondly, the occasion of the New Life in the Spirit Seminar offers distant people a precious opportunity to reconnect thanks also to a new falling in love brought about by the Fire of the Holy Spirit, the people who are gathered together around the Altar with greater ease will remain united also in the praise.

Explain what is happening in the prayer moment

After Holy Mass, a moment of charismatic prayer begins in which we let ourselves be carried away by praise. The animators take care to briefly explain what is happening, to allow those approaching for the first time to better understand the dynamics of this way of prayer, perhaps "unusual" for them.

Especially in the very first meetings many doubts arise, many questions, especially about free and spontaneous prayer and about charisms. Many feel touched by the Lord but do not know what is happening because the feelings of emotion and love are perhaps unusual in their experience of faith lived up to that moment. For this reason, at the end of the first meetings there will certainly be many questions from the participants, therefore the speakers must be ready to respond appropriately so that no confusion is generated in the heart and mind of those who participate. Experience teaches us that the first questions are precisely on praise in languages and on the use of Sacred Scripture, topics covered during the Seminar and also included in the integral training course offered by CHARIS which today is a precious opportunity for all neophytes.

It is very important for us to give the right space to the prayer of praise because it is this that conquered us and kept us in the Current of Grace at the beginning of our journey, we believe it is important not to give in to the frenzy of time by taking away space for prayer for give it to other things, albeit as important as the training itself. In our Life in the Spirit seminars, the catechesis does not exceed 35/40 minutes also because keeping so many neophyte brethren attentive for a longer time is really difficult. Therefore we allow the right time to charismatic prayer and leave the Holy Spirit the possibility of working in the hearts and lives of those present so that what was true for us 35/40/50 years ago when we were called, is also true today for who is reached by our announcement. It is in prayer that the Lord prepares our hearts, in listening to the relationship, to model us and illuminate our life.

To support the charismatic prayer of praise it is necessary that in the assembly there are some brothers and sisters who already regularly attend a community, therefore missionary teams are set up from other parishes, the brothers are accompanied in prayer, paper supports are produced to be distributed among the participants (for example the songs, a short presentation of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the calendar of meetings, etc.)

At the end of the prayer, maintaining the atmosphere of listening that has been created, the talk begins on the theme of the evening scheduled on the calendar.

Speakers change from meeting to meeting

The speakers change from meeting to meeting, but it can happen that the same speaker gives even more lessons. We generally ask the parish priest to give reports on the Sacraments and on the Word of God. There are some meetings in which the brothers are also helped with charismatic gestures, for example when we talk about the new life in God we put a large Cross in the center and a basket at the his feet in which everyone physically or spiritually delivers their attachments to worldly life. During a song and with an atmosphere of prayer, the participants offer the Lord what they want to get rid of in order to have this new life, many at this moment stop smoking and leave their cigarettes in this basket, others leave amulets and good luck charms, still others renounce to their sins in a spiritual way and then, immediately afterwards, they do it in a sacramental way by making the right decision to live in a renewed way by

the grace of the Holy Spirit. We have many testimonies of this every time we do a New Life in the Spirit seminar. Let us remember that the invitation is open to everyone, even to those who do not regularly attend the Church or even to those who pass in front of the parish at that moment attracted by songs or praise stop even just out of curiosity and then feel involved, so really this moment can bring about someone's conversion.

In the teaching when we talk about gifts and charisms, those present are helped to exercise them, certainly in an embryonic way as when a child utters his first moans, his first words and many during this teaching, already receive a strong anointing of the Holy Spirit .

Naturally, enthusiasm and spiritual involvement grows in those present, the parish priests tell us that in this period in which the seminar is taking place, many come to Confession even after years of absence and return to Mass and to take sacramental Communion.

At the end of the formative path, after about 12 weeks, a day of retreat is organized in which in the morning we pray, listen to a concluding teaching, renew the baptismal promises with the help of the priest or deacon, have lunch together and in the afternoon we constitute many small groups formed by 3 leaders and 1 brother who will receive the Baptism in the Spirit, the Order of Service coordinates the whole moment so that there is no confusion and thus, all the brothers and sisters who have prepared themselves in the previous weeks receive the prayer for Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The spiritual fruits in the parish

Surely the first spiritual fruit that we notice, and that the parish priests also report to us, is the increase in people who approach the Sacraments, those who were far from Confession return after a few meetings, even after many years of absence, the parishioners instead of were already assiduous they improve the quality and awareness during this Sacrament, for this reason many priests ask us to also organize Eucharistic Adoration in the streets of the neighborhood during which they make themselves available to administer the Mercy of God for passers-by and those who stop, even if only driven by curiosity. In these evenings of Adoration, many people really go to confession.

It has also happened that, if the catechists of the Chrism stage or post-Confirmation for adults are present at the seminary, they bring the entire classes to listen to the

reports and to experience charismatic prayer. However, I must point out that sometimes it has also happened that we did not find full acceptance and that the seminar of New Life in the Spirit did not go very well but these are sporadic cases, while in almost all cases there have been very important fruits.

For example, it has happened to us that cohabiting couples without impediment to marriage have decided to marry regularly, marriages in crisis have recovered because couples have begun to pray together, in seminars organized in prisons, some inmates have asked to be baptized and to receive the Sacraments.

The atmosphere that reigns during this training course in presence is wonderful, there is welcome, there are hugs, looks and smiles, there is proximity and the charismatic praise becomes truly engaging, all the participants have the same smile and the same eyes full of God's love.

Then new servants are born, both for the parish and for the charismatic communities, some feel in their hearts the desire to give themselves more, some as a catechist, some as a minister for the altar, some simply for cleaning and arranging the premises of the parish churches, some for the choir; it also happened to us that some lonely people were helped to fit into the large family of that parish.

After receiving the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, what do the disciples do after all? Acts 2 clearly tells us, they opened the doors of the Upper Room and went out and then as Mc describes us in chapter 16, they were sent by Jesus to announce, to Baptize in turn, to lay hands on the sick and to heal them while He accompanied their preaching with His works.

Here, a parish in which the New Life in the Spirit seminar was significantly participated and whose parishioners received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, experiences a new spring and today more than ever, after the damage that the restrictions caused by the pandemic have caused in the hearts of many, we feel the urgency to bring those far away to the Lord and the Current of Grace of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal offers an important possibility for the whole Church.

Finally, in the parish where the seminar was held, it is natural for a charismatic community to be born precisely with those brothers who have received the Baptism in the Spirit, at times we have organized a seminar open to

all, even in those communities that already exist but which they needed a new breath of the Holy Spirit.

Dear brothers and sisters, this, of course, is my personal experience gained in 34 years of charismatic life. The Lord can also decide to do different and certainly more beautiful things if we confidently accept the indications that come from Him through the Holy Father, exactly like CHARIS is doing.

We are called to sow, and it is then up to the Holy Spirit to make it germinate and blossom at the times and in the ways that He deems appropriate.

I thank you for your attention and invoke the Lord's powerful blessing upon you, your realities of life and your nations.

Alleluia!

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More about the meeting in Rome: <http://isidor.se/ccreurope/documents>
<https://www.charis.international/en/the-continental-services-of-communion-of-charis/>