

Francis Kohn

Opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above”, Jesus answers Nicodemus, a notable Jew, who comes questioning him in the night. A righteous man, searching for God, he sees Jesus is not like the other Rabis. And when Nicodemus asks Jesus how it is possible to be “reborn”, Jesus answers: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit [...]. The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (Jn. 3:3-8). In these few verses is found a summary of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is akin to a new birth, a new life in the Spirit, which enables us to listen for the breath of the Holy Spirit and then let ourselves be guided by him.

Living as Christians, if we wish to follow Jesus, we must open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit and let ourselves be guided by him. Encountering the Charismatic Renewal was a fundamental step for Pierre Goursat, as for so many others, in entering into a new life; and it is made possible only by welcoming fully the Holy Spirit. This will be my theme for the current teaching. I will develop it in three parts: for the first part I will show you how the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is an experience of Pentecost, something utterly foundational, next, I will go in to defining what life in the Spirit is, and I will finish by presenting the charisms and how to use them.

Outpouring of the Holy Spirit; a fundamental experience

1) THE DESIRE FOR HOLINESS AND BEING AWARE OF OUR INABILITY TO ACHIEVE IT.

It is important to realise that Pierre Goursat was already 57 years old by the time he had an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 1972. And he died aged 77. Which means the many years preceding this experience, including the early days of the Community, made up $\frac{3}{4}$ of his time on Earth.

Pierre desired holiness, and after his conversion at 19 years old, he thought he would get there fast. He endeavoured to reach it between 1933 and 1972; through his studies, the trials of illness, helping his mother in running the hotel she managed, and his diverse professional activities, in a great faithfulness to prayer, but he had the impression he was stagnate, and not making any progress. During these **40 years** he walked alone, the long road of sanctification, trial and purification. This period in Pierre’s life is fundamental to understanding him, and how at 58 years of age, he at last found his way! After it all, he gave a testimony explaining how despite being seemingly powerless to progress spiritually and despite all the setbacks, he kept persevering in his search for holiness; how we must never become discouraged.

I mentioned in my previous teaching, on the subject of humility, that Pierre was very close to St. Therese of Lisieux, who entered Carmel at 15 years old and who died at the age of 24. Pierre tells us:

“I had a conversion at 19 years old... and seeing Theresa of the Child Jesus, I thought to myself: ‘She died at 24, that still leaves me five years to accomplish this with her help’. So, I started a race against time with Theresa of the Child Jesus. Which, as you can see, I didn’t win. I was soon out of breath because I had gone too fast. So, I said to myself: ‘If I don’t succeed with one Theresa, I’ll try another one’.” He was talking about St. Theresa of Avila who had a big conversion after many years at Carmel.

Pierre continues his testimony in this way:

“It’s great because Theresa of Avila took 20 years [to have a conversion]. I was thinking: ‘20 years! It’ll never take me 20 years! Spending 20 years in a convent and not making any progress is not that great really!’. And then I realised that after 40 years I still hadn’t made any progress. And as soon as I said: ‘I’ll never get anywhere, it’ll never be over’, everything started moving again. So, you see you always get a chance. The most important thing is to wait for the Lord to call you”¹.

At this point Pierre spoke about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit he received in February 1972. For many Catholics, the Holy Spirit was “a great unknown”. After finishing his time with the French Catholic Cinema Office, l’Office Catholique Français du Cinéma, Pierre entered into a state of great internal waiting, and asked the Lord what he expected of him. In late 1971 in Paris, he met Fr. Régimbal, a Canadian Priest of the Trinity, who told him about the beginnings of the Charismatic Renewal

¹ Weekend with the first commitments in the Community, at Chevilly-la-Rue, 18-19th June 1977.

in the United States and in Canada. Straightaway, Pierre understood the Renewal was a providential gift, God answering Jean XXIII's prayer he made in 1962, when announcing the 2nd Vatican Council would take place. The Pope wished for a 'new Pentecost' for the Church, calling for the Council which: "Will be like **a new Pentecost** where apostolic energy and Church missionaries will regain vigour, to the full scope of their mandate and youthful ardeur"².

2) THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSONAL 'PENTECOST'

Let us first examine what Pentecost meant for the Apostles, and the promises God made to his people in the Old Testament, which are fulfilled on that day.

In the very first lines of the Bible the spirit of God is invoked, as a wind "which swept over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2). The creation story tells us how when forming man into a living being, God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen 2:7). The same living Spirit manifests itself at regular intervals in the history of salvation, whilst the prophets proclaim he will come down on us all. Ezekiel supplicates the people of Israel to interior purification, which is the necessary condition for being restored and reborn (Ez. 36). In a vision, God shows him a valley of dry bones which represent the House of Israel, proclaiming they will rise again. God asks Ezekiel to speak these words to the bones: "I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live [...]. and you shall know that I am the Lord." (Ez. 37:1-14). Further on, Joel prophesies an 'outpouring of the Spirit' on all the people: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit" (Joel 2:28-29).

Through his death and Resurrection, Christ accomplishes the 'new creation' which reveals itself on the great day of Pentecost. After Easter, the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples in the evening and breathes on them, saying "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:22).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is characterised by two simultaneous movements, one internal, one external. I will explain. As the disciples receive the Holy Spirit, they suddenly understand what Christ had been proclaiming during his earthly life but their spirits had not yet been able to realise (the mystery of salvation) and they enter into a new relationship with the resurrected Christ who transforms their whole existence. This is the **first movement, that of internal renewal.**

At Pentecost, another promise Jesus had made to his disciples before his Ascension, would be fulfilled. He proclaims thus: "And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49). Here, they receive a new strength, and at that very moment they are freed from the fear that has paralysed them since Christ was arrested and put to death on the Cross, and from this point on they are able to announce the Good News with a confidence that surprises those they speak to, and all this in spite of the difficulties and persecutions they encounter. This **second and exterior movement** operates the divine power within them, giving them an audacious and extraordinary capacity to witness to their faith, in season and out of season, and until martyrdom. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit can (and should) be for us, what Pentecost was for the early Church; namely the starting point and the great commission to go out on mission.

3) EXPERIENCING AN OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT SIGNALLED A NEW STEP IN PIERRE'S LIFE

Pierre saw the 40 years preceding his experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as a necessary time of preparation coming before the 'fresh start' which would produce fruit in abundance. In a way, a new and decisive part of his life began. He noticed a **sudden acceleration in the activity of grace in his life.** Pierre said he had the impression of being in a supersonic aeroplane or a 'Formula 1' race car, accelerating to superspeed and all he needed to do was 'hold on' behind the driver... He realised that God was accomplishing in him something Pierre had never been able to do for himself: "We are taken on a fantastic adventure. It's not down to us at all"³, he said. He was proof of a great joy, he was trusting and docile to the Holy Spirit. **Peace and joy are the first fruits of the Spirit**, so St. Paul tells us (Gal. 5:22).

Pierre tried to follow Christ, and up until this point **he had always acted alone. But now the Lord gave him brothers and sisters**, and around him an ecclesial adventure took shape. Pierre was completely overwhelmed by the events of this period; the foundation of the Community, prayer conferences developing in Paris with so many young people converging around him, searching for the Lord.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the founding experience characterising prayer groups and communities born out of the Charismatic Renewal movement. It renews and **actualises baptismal grace in us.** One of the moderators of the 2nd Vatican Council, Cardinal Suenens -whom Paul VI, then later John-Paul II, asked to accompany the Charismatic Renewal- said, it was not a 'movement' but rather a 'current' called to irrigate and renew the life of the Church as a whole. He said the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is an experience all the baptised are brought to have, in being a "normal Christian".

Pierre Goursat insisted on this a lot at Paray-le-Monial in 1975:

"I beg of you my brothers, understand this, the Renewal is a charismatic renewal. We didn't use the word Pentecost because we're so afraid of Pentecostals! But it really is the spirit of Pentecost, you must truly understand that"⁴

² John XXIII, radio message Urbi & Orbi Easter, 21st April 1962; cf. Vatican website.

³ Retreat with the Fraternity of Jesus, 30th December 1977.

⁴ Second session at Paray-le-Monial, 23rd July 1975.

II) Life in the Spirit

1) THE HOLY SPIRIT SANCTIFIES US. A GIFT FROM GOD

In my teaching on humility, I highlighted that Pierre Goursat was acutely conscious of his poverty. Being poor and humble of heart is a necessary condition for receiving an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God needs us to leave him all the place in our heart to work in us and transform us, to fill us with his presence. Pierre explains that in order to receive the Holy Spirit and allow him to achieve in us that which we cannot achieve by ourselves, we must be poor of heart and truly desire it in our soul: "We are sorry individuals ("des pauvres types") and the more we become so, the more marvellous it is. Because it makes us humble, it humiliates us and it's only with humility that we receive the Holy Spirit, as Silouane reminds us"⁵. A Russian monk, who lived in the XIX century on Mount Athos, widely venerated in the Orthodox Church.

We invoke the Holy Spirit often, notably during Mass at the epiclesis, but without really being conscious he is a divine person, intimately united to the Father and the Son in the heart of the Trinity. Pierre gives us his testimony of how much his life changed when he realised the Holy Spirit's mission is to transform us, profoundly renew us and to sanctify us. He said:

"Before, I used to say: 'Oh Jesus, I want to come to you'. And I would fall all the time, and this continued to happen until the day I said: 'Oh, if you could send us the Holy Spirit'. And I finally understood if I wasn't progressing it was because I hadn't asked the other consoler, advocate, adviser, to help me. I had understood he was the Holy Spirit, but I hadn't yet realised he was the **sanctifying Spirit**"⁶. Pierre's discovery was that the Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies and renews us.

In July 1974, during the first meeting at Vézelay, Pierre urged the members of the Renewal which was beginning in France, to welcome this 'new Pentecost': "It really is a new Pentecost, he said. Catholics have prayed for a new Pentecost, and when it comes, they are all so surprised. So it's us who have to change, and it's the Holy Spirit who will change us. He has been waiting for this"⁷.

Pierre Goursat further confirmed: "It's the only prayer sure to be granted. If we ask the Holy Spirit to come, he will come and he will transform us"⁸. Without a doubt he was thinking about Jesus' words: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk. 11:13). Pierre liked to quote St Séraphim de Sarov, for whom the aim of Christian life is the "acquisition of the Holy Spirit". The term "acquire" is to be understood here as "welcome", because the Holy Spirit cannot be obtained by voluntary activity. He is given to those who ardently desire him and who are disposed to receive him, their hearts open wide.

2) THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US TO BECOME CONSCIOUS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ACTIVE PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES AND TEACHES US TO WELCOME HIM AS GUIDE OF OUR SOULS.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love between the Father and the Son, is the eternal and non-created gift exchanged between divine persons in the intimacy of the trinitarian life. St Thomas Aquinas writes that **the characteristic of the Holy Spirit is "to be given and to be Gift"**⁹. He is at the origin of all the other gifts that God gives his creatures. St. Paul underlined this point also: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Rom. 5:5).

Pierre Goursat compared the Holy Spirit to a magnificent present given to us, but that we don't dare to use, for fear of damaging it. He said humorously: "The Holy Spirit is coming now, we must make use of him! We understand the Holy Spirit theoretically but we don't make any practical use of him. It's a beautiful present given to us". He adds: "We say: 'He's so beautiful', but we put him away safely in the cupboard, like a porcelain vase and say to ourselves: 'We'll bring him out for special occasions.' Like the good cutlery, reserved for big occasions. We think if we use him all the time, we'll break him. We must make use of the Holy Spirit all the time! All the time, all the time. And after this you won't be able to live without him"¹⁰.

The Holy Spirit is the "Guest of our souls". He is discrete and does not impose himself on us.

In prayers to the Holy Spirit, he is invoked as "the Counsellor, the gift of God the Most-High". He opens our hearts to Faith and unites us to the Father and the Son. Pierre Goursat wrote: "The Lord makes us participants in divine life, and the Holy Spirit is there to realise this in us"¹¹. **The Holy Spirit is the "Guest of our souls". His desire is to come into us, to renew our life, but he never imposes himself on us.** Pierre reminds us the Holy Spirit always acts discretely and with great delicacy:

"The Holy Spirit is extremely delicate, he insists. He knocks at the door gently, and we are so busy, we don't hear him. So, he leaves again saying: 'I came but nobody opened the door for me'. Again he tries, once, twice, three times; he is so polite, he says: 'Excuse me, I'll come back later'. In the end, he thinks he is not wanted and he goes somewhere else"¹².

⁵ Retreat with the Fraternity of Jesus, 31 December 1979.

⁶ Meeting at Vézelay, July 1974.

⁷ Meeting at Vézelay, July 1974.

⁸ Retreat with the Fraternity of Jesus, summer 1983.

⁹ Summa Theologica, I, q. 38 a. 1.

¹⁰ Speaking during a meeting, 23rd May 1976.

¹¹ Preparatory notes for a teaching, late 1971.

¹² Speaking during a meeting, 23rd May 1976.

3) THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES AND THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our body has organs to make it grow and nurture it, and members to move around and to act. Equally we possess 'spiritual organs' with characteristic ways of functioning and ways of interacting between themselves. These are called the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The virtues, as we are reminded in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, are firm attitudes, stable dispositions to practise the good. The Human Virtues, also called the moral virtues, are acquired by practise, by deliberate and repeated acts. Four of them, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, are called 'cardinal', because they play a pivotal role (CCC n° 1805). The human virtues must be purified and elevated by divine grace: this is the function of the theological virtues.

The theological virtues are faith, hope and love. They relate directly to God and adapt our faculties for participation in the divine nature (cf. CCC n°1810; 1812). They are said to be "infused" in us as they belong in grace: their function is to animate Christian moral activity, giving it its special character, and imparting life to all the moral virtues.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit, we receive through our baptism, **complete and perfect the virtues.** They are not the power of activity but receptive organs, like spiritual antennae enabling us to pick up the signal of divine life. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are permanent dispositions which connect us to God and make us docile in obeying divine inspirations and in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit (cf. CCC n°1830).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit unfolds in us the gifts of the Spirit, received through our baptism, and makes us docile in readily obeying divine inspiration. He enables us to "instinctively" grasp things with profound intuition, something our human reason can only see dimly and with great effort. **The Holy Spirit is the 'internal master', who works in us and sanctifies us;** as such we must stay 'plugged in' to him, using these gifts of the Holy Spirit as 'receptors': wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. (cf. CCC n° 1831, according to Is. 11:1-2 which does not distinguish between **piety and the fear of the Lord**)

4) THE PRIORITY OF LIFE IN THE SPIRIT, TO BE DOCILE TO WHAT GOD INSPIRES IN US

Life in the Spirit is only possible by relying on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As such, the Holy Spirit is a 'Counsellor' who gives us interior knowledge, engaging our life, our will, and emotional force; **He makes us attentive to divine inspirations, docile to his 'motions'.** Only God can direct us, orientate us towards him and give us a share in his divine life. St. Paul compares **'physical' or 'carnal' man** who functions by his own human capacity, to **'spiritual man'** who lets himself be shaped and guided by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14-15). The Holy Spirit transforms our thoughts, allowing us to understand the will of God and submit to it, as St. Paul explains: "be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

Pierre Goursat is truly characterised by his life in the Spirit. He "revealed a happy complicity with the Spirit", says one brother. Being so open to the Holy Spirit, to whom he prayed a lot, together with a great trust in his intervention, Pierre let himself be led during the developing stages of the Community, conscious it was the Lord's work. Pierre was very 'charismatic', in the sense he never stopped listening to the Holy Spirit and allowing himself to be led by him, entirely docile and open to his inspirations. One of the first brothers in the Community, who lived with Pierre aboard La Peniche, said of him: "He was very, deeply 'charismatic'; the Spirit breathed and he would start adjusting his sails".

Living a life in the Spirit gave Pierre Goursat a surprising interior freedom in all situations, of which I have already given a few examples concerning his humility. He always avoided being trapped into structured, predetermined plans, which let him exercise his great inventiveness et audacity in evangelisation. During the hours he spent in adoration before the tabernacle, Pierre opened his heart to the **'motions of the Spirit'** which guided his actions. He listened to objections we voiced when we esteemed his propositions too difficult to carry out. And after having reflected on it and taken a long time of prayer, he never hesitated going back on things if he saw he'd made a mistake.

Someone said: "He let himself be led by the Lord and be filled by grace because he was free to be himself". Pierre received this freedom continually from God and he wanted others to be as equally free, and detached from themselves. A married woman who knew Pierre when she was very young confirms this: "He was free, like a child". Two brothers who were in the Community from the beginning and were close to Pierre, can also confirm this characteristic trait in Pierre. One says: "Pierre was very free and he made us freer". The second says: "He was the freest man I ever met". Pierre's freedom came from his freedom in the life of the Spirit.

III) The role and practise of charisms

The Holy Spirit is the essential principle which breathes life into the body of the Church, ensuring continual communion and reinvigoration. He is the **'soul of the Church'**, the invigorating principle, permanently renewing and rejuvenating. St. Augustin writes: "The Holy Spirit is for the members of Christ, meaning the Body of Christ which is the Church, that which our spirit, meaning our soul, is for our members" (Sermo. 269:2).

After Pentecost, the disciples receive charisms, at times extraordinary ones, to help them accomplish their mission. The Charismatic Renewal restored the use of charisms in the Catholic Church, something which had been neglected for some time. At the initiative of Cardinal Suenens, the 2nd Vatican Council inserted a paragraph specific to the charisms in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, published in 1964, which I now quote here: "The Holy Spirit is not limited to the sanctification of the people of God by the sacraments and the ministers... he distributes special graces among the faithful

of every rank, "[allotting] to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses" (1 Cor. 12:11). By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church. (Lumen Gentium n° 12).

1) THE DEFINITION AND ROLE OF CHARISMS

St. Paul describes the charisms as connected to the Church, which he compares to the human body. He explains: "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith" (Rom. 12:4-6). He uses the Greek term 'charisma' to draw on a number of diverse realities, but each relating to grace as a gift from God. In Chapter 12 of the 1st Letter to the Corinthians St. Paul provides a lengthy development on the subject, and gives a definition, in one verse, which is fundamental to understanding the charisms: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:1-7). Each word he uses in this phrase carries an importance.

-“A charism is given”: the Greek term used here by St. Paul highlights the freeness of gift, not something earned or determined by the personal holiness of the person who receives it. The charisms manifest the profusion of grace by which God wants to make man co-operator in his plan of salvation. They enable us to co-operate in increasing the sanctifying grace that disposes us to be filled with divine life. Charisms are passing motions, and not stable dispositions which we can acquire permanently.

-“to each”: this expression highlights the unique and singular character of the gifts of grace, as well as the supreme liberty with which God accords his gifts to whom he chooses, when he wants, how he wants.

-“the manifestation of the Spirit”: the Greek term used here, 'phanerôsis', shows us that divine life is revealed to us, that grace is communicated to us; it also shows that above all, the action of the Holy Spirit is to give witness to the Son, to glorify him and to manifest that he is Lord.

-“for the common good”: charisms, unlike grace, are not given primarily for our personal sanctification, but rather for the common good, to build up the Church. It is in this way the charisms contribute to the unity of the ecclesial body, as joints and ligaments, 'according to the role of each part' (Eph. 4:16).

The charisms are a manifestation of charity and are in service of charity.

If this is the case, we mustn't put charity as opposing to the charisms by making an over-simplified reading of chapter 13 of the first letter to the Corinthians, in which St. Paul makes charity take precedence over the charisms. **Chapters 12, 13 and 14** are composed as a **tryptic**, and if you read these three chapters in their entirety you will notice how St. Paul underlines the importance of the charisms: At the beginning of chapter 12, he writes: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed." (1 Cor. 12:1), then at the end of the same chapter: "strive for the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31). Chapter 14 also begins with this urgent invitation: "Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts" (1 Cor. 14:1).

2) THE COMPLEMENTARITY AND DIVERSITY OF THE CHARISMS

The charisms come from the one Spirit, but are diverse, and come in a great variety. St. Paul mentions the following: faith, words of wisdom and knowledge, teaching, exhortation, the gift of healing, prophesy, the discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, the gift of interpreting them, service, works of mercy. When he mentions healing and discernment, he uses the plural (1 Cor. 12:8-10), which suggests that each of these charisms can take different forms. The charisms vary according to the people who receive them and the circumstances in which they were given. Their multiple natures show how God adapts to the deeply diverse needs of the Church, needs which evolve according to different periods in history.

The Charisms are connected and interdependent; they are linked to each other and complement each other in mutual affirmation. St. Paul indicates a hierarchy within the charisms and stresses that they remain subject to the ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and doctors (Eph. 4:11, 1 Cor. 12:28).

3) EXERCISING AND DISCERNING THE CHARISMS

So, as we can see, the charisms are still so relevant and of great importance today. We can use them during prayer meetings, in household, at the heart of our community meetings, for different missions entrusted to us, as well as in our daily lives.

As I have already mentioned, the charisms are not directly linked to our 'level' of holiness or our natural capacities: they are gifts given freely by God to each person, for the common good. We need to **want to receive them, with an interior readiness, accepting them with gratitude and exercising them with humility.** Using the charisms means letting yourself be guided by the Spirit, attentive to his interior motions, but also making acts of faith. It may happen that we receive certain intuitions in our prayer which we are too scared to act on, from a lack of inner freedom, or for fear of how others will perceive us. Faith and trust are developed through the use of charisms.

It is by working together that we can make progress in exercising the charisms, supporting each other with mutual encouragement. The charisms we receive from God do not belong to us and we are constantly in need of both the support

and the discernment of our brothers and sisters. Subjecting ourselves to the discernment of our brothers and sisters keeps us humble and guarantees a justice within the use of charisms. As St. Paul writes when speaking on the gift of prophecy: for charisms to bear good fruit, they must be exercised “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:39-40). During a larger prayer meeting, it is good practise to consult with our brothers and sisters before giving a word or text, however, in some circumstances charisms can only be confirmed after the event.

‘Charismatic’ audacity should draw on ecclesial prudence: as such, we are reminded by St. Paul that the charisms should be discerned by the community, then verified by the Church: “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess. 5:19-21).

4) PIERRE GOURSAT AND THE CHARISMS

Pierre Goursat received the charism of ‘speaking in tongues’ in the Metro, going home after the weekend he had prayed for an outpouring of the Spirit. He used it during his times of personal prayer and would often explain that this charism allows us to come before God like little children, in an attitude of simplicity and trust. During conferences with the Renewal, and sessions at Paray-le-Monial, Pierre lead a workshop aimed at unblocking the gift of “speaking in tongues”. He had a particular grace for helping people relax and abandon themselves to the Holy Spirit, using humour.

Pierre Goursat was open to the charisms but wanted them to be well-discerned, confirmed by others, and exercised, in that order. Pierre encouraged the use of charisms during prayer meetings, but would intervene from time-to-time when it seemed to become too chaotic, in order to ‘give structure’ to the prayer again. Or similarly, when prophecies voiced didn’t seem to him to be just.

Pierre had his ‘feet firmly on the ground’, and was wary of extraordinary phenomenon. He had strong discernment, the charism of governance and sharp perception which enabled him to understand situations and people with justice and delicacy. He insisted on the **importance of discerning the spirits** and reminded us that **the first and most important of the charisms is common sense!** As such, Pierre was incredibly realistic and careful to keep a balance between grace and nature. He stressed the importance of using your intelligence to be wary of anything and everything happening under the pretext of it being ‘Charismatic’.

Pierre had great wisdom and the gift of prudence, allowing him to steer the Community through difficulties and oppositions they encountered. This prudence was not at all fearful or faint-hearted. When a project presented itself, but they were not ready to make a decision about it, he would carry it in his prayer for as long as it needed; days or even weeks, but as soon as he received the conviction it was of God’s will, he didn’t hesitate for a second, moving forward audaciously, finding the best way and the people best adapted for it, carrying it out without any delay.

My aim in this talk was to show you how, **Pierre Goursat was extremely charismatic in his attitude, but that the most important thing to him was opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit, listening to him and letting ourselves be guided and shaped by him.** The Holy Spirit sanctifies us, guides us, and freely accords us his gifts for us to exercise in service of the Community and of the whole Church.

Thank God for the outpouring of the Spirit we have received and ask him to renew us, that we may be ever more accepting and docile to the work of his hands. Following Pierre’s example, let us realise it’s the Holy Spirit who makes us alive and who calls us to “put out into the deep”, to enter into the unfathomable depths of the spiritual life.

Trust in this following invitation, St. Paul’s words of wisdom:

“Live by the Spirit, I say, [...]. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16, 25).

Pierre Goursat
and his brothers and sisters