

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes November 14, 2007

Ephesians 4:1-6

- 1: I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you
to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
2: with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love,
3: eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
4: There is one body
and one Spirit, just as you were called to
the one hope that belongs to your call,
5: one Lord,
one faith,
one baptism,
6: one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Introduction:

- St. Paul made many deep statements that have layers of meanings, but one particularly deep even brash claim is found in 1 Corinthians 12:3: "... no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." Now at one level, any one can merely recite those words, "Jesus is Lord," without any movement of the Spirit or any personal conviction at all. But as one contemplates what St. Paul truly meant, the layers of meaning become almost unfathomable. And to bring the significance of this difficulty home, Father Cantalamessa wrote, "In today's situation, rarely, or never, do baptized people reach the point of proclaiming "in the Holy Spirit" that "Jesus is Lord!" And because they have not reached that point, everything in their Christian lives remains unfocused and immature." This is what we will discuss today on **Deep In Scripture**.

Discussion: Welcome....website ... Phone numbers ... special: "Sober Intoxication of the Spirit," by Father Raniero Cantalamessa

REVIEW:

- In our study of Ephesians, we have been approaching this epistle from the assumption that it was written by St. Paul while in prison as a homily to be read, by the leaders he converted and appointed in Ephesus, in the Easter liturgy to the newly baptized Gentile believers, whose faith and love St. Paul had heard about from messengers.
- In essence, we believe that the primary underlying context of Ephesians is Christian baptism; or more specifically a call to actualize or live out the graces recently received in baptism. Most biblical commentators point to the Church as the key theme of Ephesians, and we agree wholeheartedly; however, we believe that the context of a sermon to the newly baptized makes the most sense of the "who, what, when, where, why, and how"s of this letter, particularly as we move on into chapters 4-6.
- We find similar instructions, or as it was called mystagogia, in Easter sermons by other Early Church Fathers. For example:
 - St. Augustine (354-430), emphasized this in a Sermon he preached to the newly baptized at Easter: *"The Holy Spirit has come to abide in you; do not make him withdraw; do not exclude him from your heart in any way. He is a good guest; He found you empty and He filled you; He found you hungry and He satisfied you; he found you thirsty and He has intoxicated you. May he truly intoxicate you! The Apostle said, 'Do not get drunk with wine which leads to debauchery.' Then, as if to clarify what we should be intoxicated with, he adds, 'But be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.' (cf Eph 5:18ff)*
 - St. Athanasius (ca. 295-373 AD, Alexandria), also in a sermon to the newly baptized: *"You shall see the Levites bringing loaves and a cup of wine, and placing them on the table. So long as the prayers of supplication and entreaties have not been made, there is only bread and wine. But after the great*

and wonderful prayers have been completed, then the bread is become the Body, and the wine the Blood, of our Lord Jesus Christ."

- In Chapters 1-3, St. Paul explains the three changes that happen in our lives by grace once we have heard, believed, and then been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism.
 - Through baptism believers are changed by grace in three ways: "up, beside, and within"...
 - These changes have already happened, whether they are felt or not, BUT this is only the beginning! Though these changes are given freely by grace, the baptized must now live in them, also by grace.
- In Chapters 4-6, St. Paul gives instructions on how the newly baptized are now to live, and in verses 1-6, he makes the transition.
 - As we discussed two weeks ago, verses 1-3 stand both as a transition as well as a summary of all that will now follow:
 - 1: *I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you*
 - to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,*
 - 2: *with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love,*
 - 3: *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
 - In the rest of Ephesians, St. Paul outlines what he means by "a life worthy of the calling to which [they had] been called."
 - When had they been "called"? When they heard, believed, & were sealed with the Holy Spirit in baptism (1:13).
 - This new life involves / requires new attitudes:
 - **"Lowliness and meekness,"** and many many spiritual writers have emphasized that humility is the premiere essential attitude of the heart, necessary for any growth in the Spirit.
 - Fr. Cantalamessa writes: *"Humility seems to be the best preparation for receiving the Holy Spirit...Humility does not seem to be a question of feelings--of feeling bad about ourselves--but rather a question of concrete action. It is not a matter of words but of actual deeds. Humility is the readiness to abase oneself, to lower oneself and serve the brothers and sisters; it is having a will to serve. This is all done out of love, not out of any other motives" (pg. 24).*
 - And St. Paul confirms this when he continues, **"...with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."**
 - This mention of "unity of the Spirit" lead him to expound on what this unity entails. **Why?**
 - We know from his other epistles to other churches that he was already combating disunity:
 - *"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel -- not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed." Gal 1:6-8*
 - *"For it has been reported to me by Chlo'e's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apol'los," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" 1 Cor 1:11-13*
 - *So, either because St. Paul has heard of threats to their unity or just wants to head them off based on his own experience, he details the essential aspects of their present unity in the Spirit through baptism: **"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."***
- These verses on unity deserve a very careful study, and we will do this next week, but before we do this, today I want us to focus a little more on the necessity of living out one's baptism, for this is the essential foundation to "maintaining the unity of the spirit" to which St. Paul is exhorting them.
- For this discussion, Jim and I are going to focus the rest of today's program on reading and reflecting on a section of the book by Father Cantalamessa that we're featuring today, "Sober Intoxication of the Spirit," subtitled, "Filled With the fullness of God."

- I was reading this book this morning, partially for spiritual reading but also because as the title indicates, this book is an reflection on several key themes from Ephesians: being filled with the fullness of God (3:19) and “do not get drunk / intoxicated with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit” (5:18). As I read a section entitled “Baptism: An ‘Unreleased’ Sacrament” I knew it was no accident that I was reading this on the morning of this program. He gives a very helpful summary of the Catholic understanding of baptism and shows how this matches everything we’ve been discussing in Ephesians.

Beginning on page 41 of his book, Cantalamessa is discussing how everyone of us, who have received the graces of baptism, whether as an adult or a child, needs to have these graces actualized or revived.

- In the opening of this program, I read from the final paragraph from his discussion:
“In today’s situation, rarely, or never, do baptized people reach the point of proclaiming “in the Holy Spirit” that “Jesus is Lord!” And because they have not reached that point, everything in their Christian lives remains unfocused and immature.”
- In other words there are many, maybe a majority of Christians today who claim to be Christians, who confess that “Jesus is Lord,” but are not living out the graces of their baptism, are not experiencing the blessings and joy of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit they received in baptism. This is what he means by “Baptism: An “Unreleased” Sacrament.”

He writes,

“To understand how a sacrament received so many years ago and usually administered in infancy can suddenly come alive and be revived and release such energy as we see on the occasions of outpouring, we must recall some aspects of sacramental theology.

Catholic theology can help us understand how a sacrament can be valid and legal but “unreleased.” A sacrament is called “unreleased” if its fruit remains bound, or unused, because of the absence of certain conditions that further its efficacy. One extreme example would be the sacrament of marriage or of holy orders received while a person is in the state of mortal sin. In those cases, such sacraments cannot confer any grace on a person. If, however, the obstacle of sin is removed by repentance, the sacrament is said to revive (*reviviscit*) due to the faithfulness and irrevocability of the gift of God. God remains faithful even when we are unfaithful, because He cannot deny Himself (see 2 Timothy 2:13)”

There are other cases in which a sacrament, while not being completely ineffective, is nevertheless not entirely released: It is not free to work its effects. In the case of baptism, what is it that causes the fruit of this sacrament to be held back?

Here we need to recall the classical doctrine about sacraments. Sacraments are not magic rites that act mechanically, without people’s knowledge or collaboration. Their efficacy is the result of synergy, or collaboration, between divine omnipotence (that is, the grace of Christ and of the Holy Spirit) and free will. As Saint Augustine said, “He who created you without your consent will not save you without your consent.”

To put it more precisely, the fruit of the sacrament depends wholly on divine grace; however, this divine grace does not act without the “yes”--- the consent and affirmation---of the person. This consent is more of a *conditio sine qua non* (a Latin legal term meaning “without which it could not be”) than a cause in its own right. God acts like the bridegroom, who does not impose his love by force but awaits the free consent of his bride.

God’s Role and Our Role in Baptism

Everything that depends on divine grace and the will of Christ in a sacrament is called *opus operatum*, which can be translated as “the work *already* accomplished the objective and certain fruit of a sacrament when it is administered validly.” On the other hand, everything that depends on the liberty and disposition of the person is called *opus operantis*; this is the work yet to be accomplished by the individual, his or her affirmation.

The *opus operatum* of baptism, the part done by God and grace, is diverse and very rich: remission of sins; the gift of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity (given in seed form); and

divine sonship. All of this is mediated through the efficacious action of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Clement of Alexandria:

Once baptized, we are enlightened; enlightened, we are adopted as sons; adopted, we are made perfect; made perfect, we receive immortality.... The operation of baptism has several names: grace, enlightenment, perfection, bath. It can be called "bath" because through it we are purified of our sins; "grace" because the punishments deserved for our sins are removed, "enlightenment" because through it we can contemplate the beautiful and holy light of salvation, and see into divine reality; "perfection" because nothing is lacking.

Baptism is truly a rich collection of gifts that we received at the moment of our birth in God. But it is a collection that is still sealed up. We are rich because we possess these gifts (and therefore we can accomplish all the actions necessary for Christian life), but we do not know what we possess. Paraphrasing a verse from John, we can say that we have been sons of God until now, but what we shall become has yet to be revealed (see 1 John 3:2). This is why we can say that, for the majority of Christians, baptism is a sacrament that is still unreleased. So much for the *opus operatum*. What does the *opus operantis* consist of in baptism?

It consists of faith! "The one who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). With regard to baptism, then, there is the element of a person's faith. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12).

We can also recall the beautiful text from the Acts of the Apostles that tells about the baptism of Queen Candace's court official. When their journey brought Philip and the official near some water, the official said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" Philip said, "It is permitted if you believe with all your heart" (Acts 8:36-37). (Verse 37 here, an addition from the early Christian community and not usually included in modern translations, testifies to the common conviction of the Church at that time.)

Baptism is like a divine seal stamped on the faith of man: "When you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, [you] were marked with the seal [this refers to baptism] of the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13).

Saint Basil wrote, "Truly, faith and baptism, these two modes of salvation, are bound indivisibly to one another, because if faith receives its perfection from baptism, baptism is founded on faith." This same saint called baptism "the seal of faith."

The individual's part, faith, does not have the same importance and independence as God's action because God plays a part even in someone's act of faith: Even faith works by the grace that stirred it up. Nevertheless, the act of faith includes, as an essential element, the response – the individual's "I believe!"—and in that sense we call it *opus operantis*, the work of the person being baptized.

Now we can understand why baptism was such a powerful and grace-filled event in the early days of the Church ... Baptism was administered to adults who were converting from paganism and who, after suitable instruction, were in a position to make an act of faith, an existential, free and mature choice about their lives. (We can read about baptism in the *Mystagogical Catecheses*, attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, to understand the depth of faith of those who were prepared for baptism.)

They came to baptism by way of a true and genuine conversion. For them baptism was really a font of personal renewal in addition to a rebirth in the Holy Spirit (see Titus 3:5). Saint Basil, responding to someone who had asked him to write a treatise on baptism, said that it could not be explained without first explaining what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, because the Lord commands,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

In order for baptism to operate in all its power, anyone who desires it must also be a disciple or have a serious intention of becoming one. According to Saint Basil:

A disciple is, as the Lord Himself taught us, anyone who draws near to the Lord to follow Him, that is, to hear His Words, to believe and obey Him as one would a master or a king or a doctor or a teacher of truth.... Now, whoever believes in the Lord and presents himself ready to be discipled must first set aside every sin and everything that distracts from the obedience which is owed to the Lord for many reasons.

The favorable circumstance that allowed baptism to operate in such power at the beginning of the Church was this: The action of God and the action of man came together simultaneously, with perfect synchronism. It happened when the two poles, one positive and one negative, touched, making light burst forth.

Today this synchronism is not operative. As the Church adopted infant baptism, little by little the sacrament began to lack the act of faith that was free and personal. The faith was supplied, or uttered, by an intermediate party (parents and godparents) on behalf of the child. In the past, when the environment around the baby was Christian and full of faith, the child's faith could develop, even if it was slowly. But today our situation has become even worse than that of the Middle Ages.

The environments in which many children now grow up do not help faith to blossom. The same must often be said of the family, and more so of the child's school and even more so of our society and culture. This does not mean that in our situation today normal Christian life cannot exist or that there is no holiness or no charisms that accompany holiness. Rather, it means that instead of being the norm, it has become more and more of an exception.

In today's situation, rarely, or never, do baptized people reach the point of proclaiming "in the Holy Spirit" that "Jesus is Lord!" And because they have not reached that point, everything in their Christian lives remains unfocused and immature. Miracles rarely happen. What happened with the people of Nazareth is being repeated: Jesus was not able to do many miracles there because of their unbelief (see Matthew 13:58).

This is precisely what St. Paul was praying for in the end of chapter 3 and what he will describe in detail in chapter 4-6: what you and I need to do to revive the blessings and joy and power of our baptism, aided by grace and beginning with an attitude of humility.