

## **A LETTER TO OUR FELLOW PRIESTS FROM THE BISHOPS OF NEW ZEALAND (1981)**

One of the greatest challenges facing the Church today is that of being a leaven in a world that does not rise easily out of sin and apathy. It must be the bearer of good news to many who are content with less. Faithfulness to its Master requires that it reflect the faith of the ages in ways that are ever new.

Every priest has committed himself to this mission, and must feel some disquiet at the number of people leaving the Church, opting out all together, or joining other religious groups. As priests, we ask ourselves why those we have served, sometimes do not recognize the good news in our teaching of the word, or have difficulty discovering the reality of Christ in the sacraments and in the parish Mass.

Since Vatican II, the Church has spoken out constantly on the need for renewal, and we recognize that this has application to many areas of our personal lives and priestly ministry. But the soul of this renewal lies in enlivened personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and this is the work of the Holy Spirit constantly released anew in the Church and permitted to work in the lives of each of us as members of Christ's Body. It is not enough to know His teachings, or even to speak in His name,; knowing Him is something more:

*"Have I been with you all this time Philip", said Jesus to him: "and you still do not know me?" (Jn 14:9). "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). "Not only that, but I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord" (Phil. 13:8)*

It is essential, therefore, for a renewal of faith and life within the Church that individuals come to have a personal knowledge of the Risen Lord. On this there is no option, Throughout its history, the renewal of the Church has emanated from a renewed consciousness of Jesus alive and working in the lives of individuals and in the Church as a body. For us priests, it is a renewed awareness of Jesus Christ working in our lives through the Spirit we received in Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. It is in seeing this power and in sharing it, that we will draw both those inside and those outside the Church to a real and vibrant faith in Our Lord.

*"...when we brought the Good News to you it came to you not only as words, but as power and as the Holy Spirit and as utter conviction...and it was with the joy of the Holy Spirit that you took to the Gospel..." (1 Thess 1:5,6).*

While it is essential to all renewal that it should emanate from each person's relationship with the Risen Lord, it is equally essential that it should reach out through our lives to transform society, to *"make all things new"* (cf *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nn 18, 19)

*“Appointed Lord by his resurrection and given plenary power in heaven and on earth. Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of his Spirit. He arouses not only a desire for the age to come, but, by that very fact, he animates, purifies, and strengthens those noble longings too by which the human family strives to make its life more human and to render the whole earth submissive to this goal”* (Gaudium et Spes, n. 38)

Because it is the work of the Holy Spirit and is for the good of the whole Body, all renewal is, theologically speaking, “charismatic”. One of the renewal movements in the Church today is also called “Charismatic Renewal”. Genuine renewal of any kind bears the fruits listed by Paul in Gal. 5:22:

*“What the Spirit brings us is very different; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control”.*

Experience of genuine Catholic Charismatic Renewal shows that it leads to a deeper personal relationship with Jesus Christ the Lord, and an experience of God’s personal love for us.

- There is an increased awareness of scripture as the living word of God.
- There is a new spirit of prayer, adoration, praise and thanksgiving.
- There is ready sharing of prayer with other Christian peoples.
- The renewal brings a new appreciation for the Church and her sacraments, especially the Eucharist.
- It brings a deep and true conversion of the hearts of the people to Jesus Christ, and through this reconciliation with our Lord there comes a healing and growth in human relationships.
- This renewal also brings a new respect for the authority, through Christ, of the Church.
- Most importantly, these fruits of the Spirit are communicated to the people of God by being manifested in the lives of the Church’s ministers.

We recognize, that there are the fruits of other renewal movements too, but we warmly urge all our brother priests to become familiar with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, not only that they may share more fully in these fruits, but also that they may more adequately pastor the faithful. Nor should they forget, that to be absent from it, must carry some responsibility for the fact that our people can be left to find teaching and leadership, from sources that we may not always consider the most helpful.

Sometimes our people are led to false expectations concerning their participation in Christ’s victory over evil and suffering. The complete fulfillment of God’s promises will be in the resurrection, and consequently His gifts to us in this life can only be possessed in an incomplete and provisional way. To expect more than this can lead to disillusionment, or to exaggerated claims concerning the forces of evil.

Pastoral guidance is often needed in order to ensure that the action of the Holy Spirit is not interpreted in subjective and individualistic ways which only lead to self-deception and divisiveness; charisms are for up-building of the Body of Christ. Furthermore, greater importance is to be attached to those gifts which contribute more directly to the growth and unity of the Body and the greatest of these is love.

The exercise of our pastoral responsibility requires that we be close enough both to encourage what is good and to discourage what is not. And our own personal growth requires that we be open to the Holy Spirit wherever He breathes. It is the Lord who tells us to "*be not afraid*".

*Archbishop of Wellington*

*Bishop of Dunedin*

*Bishop of Christchurch*

*Bishop of Auckland*

*Bishop of Palmerston North*

*Bishop of Hamilton*

*Auxiliary Bishop of Auckland*