



WORKSHOPS – A1.1	SPEAKER : DOMINIQUE FERRY
TITLE : A NEW PENTECOST FOR A NEW EVANGELIZATION	
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I will speak in the context of western European countries like France or Great Britain where I lived and exercised my pastoral activities, conducting retreats, program of discipleship for families, couples or single people; we worked also as University Chaplains with my wife. For the last four years, we have served in a large parish just on the outskirts of Paris.

If we want to Evangelize we have to open our eyes to the world we live in.

THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE

Because most our fellow humans now live in large urban areas and very often far from their close relatives (parents, brothers and sisters, uncle and aunts) there is a sense of loneliness, of being lost in an anonymous environment and when the life becomes hard because of unemployment, divorce, difficulties arising in the work place or serious illness, there are very few people to support them. In our modern societies, Faith tends to be more and more personal and private, so one can live and work next to other Christians and not know it, which makes mutual support more difficult. For the generation of the young adults (people in their 30s), those who have been brought up in the Catholic faith by their parents, very often, when they left home for their studies, they gradually left the Church and see it as part of their family culture and inheritance, but not really meaningful for their present life, and most of them never had a chance to develop a personal relationship with Jesus-Christ. Nevertheless the Parish remains the visible presence of the Church in the midst of the people, and the place where they can go to light a candle when they face difficulties in their life, ask for the baptism of their child, express the desire to see God as part of their life as a couple through the religious celebration of their wedding or come for the funeral of a parent.

TRYING TO MEET THE NEEDS

Confronted to these needs, many parishes are still more or less living as they did fifty years ago: celebrating the sacraments, organising the catechism for the children, offering various spiritual or charitable activities for the parishioners ... Most of them also accompany adults that come to them asking for baptism or confirmation toward these sacraments, but they have not yet switched their interest toward the non-churchgoers and their needs. Jesus *“came to bring fire on the earth”* and was filled with the desire that *“it were already kindled”* (Lk 12,49). In order to meet the needs of the people of our time, we have to be burnt with the same desire Jesus had, as nowadays, we are back to a situation where most of the people we live with don't know Jesus. Maybe for a century or two, people living in our countries might have the feeling that there were no one left without some knowledge of Christ, but now it is too obvious that there is an urgent need to see our



countries as a mission field where to sow the Good News of Jesus-Christ and where to proclaim the Gospel.

An interesting experience is how the Alpha Courses started. In the Anglican parish of Holy Trinity Brompton in central London, the Vicar, Sandy Millar, and a team of his parishioners had started a discipleship course to revisit the core of the Christian Faith and help parishioners deepening their relationship with Jesus. Then came a new curate in the parish, Nicky Gumbel, who had not been brought up as a Christian and had embraced the Christian Faith when he was studying at Cambridge, so his heart and mind since then was turned toward those who didn't know Jesus, burning with the desire to bring them the joy of the Christian faith; because of that, the team redesigned the program targeting the people outside of the Church, with at the heart of it the encounter with the Holy Spirit, the great evangelizer. And this became the shared vision of the parish team. Now we know that thousands of parishes belonging to various churches are successfully running Alpha courses all over the world.

Today, in the Chemin Neuf Community, those in charge of the youth and young adults ministry had this Pentecostal experience for themselves; they can seek for the Lord's guidance in praying together, and we see that there is an efficiency, a creativity for new ways of announcing the Gospel and for reaching out to young people outside of the churchgoers. Last year in the week before the World Youth Day in Poland, there was a big gathering in Lodz, and one night, after having been led through a time of Reconciliation where thousands asked for the sacrament of reconciliation and made different steps of peace and forgiveness, the call was made for those who wanted to surrender their life to the Lord and to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and more than 1000 came forward to be prayed for.

The fruits come from the fact that the whole team has a common vision brought by the Holy Spirit, and they rely on him to find the way forward: to bring the Gospel to new people so that they may encounter the risen Lord; and they all experience the joy of announcing the Gospel and the fellowship that it creates in the team and with those they are sent to evangelize.

These examples among many others taking place in different places and Churches throughout the world (Rick Warren and the Saddleback Church, Bethel Church in California and many other non-denominational charismatic churches, Fr James Mellon Catholic parish in Canada, several Catholic parishes in France ...) invite us to look for a new Pentecost where groups and parishes turn together to the Lord to experience a new coming of the Holy Spirit in order to make a breakthrough for the Gospel in this post-modern world. In the Acts 4,23 when the young community is facing new challenges and opposition from the authorities, they gathered together in prayer and said "*Lord look at their threats and grant to your servants to speak with all boldness, while you stretch your hand to heal... through the name of your servant Jesus. When they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 4,29-31). Although it was not long after the day of Pentecost, the Lord sent them another Pentecostal experience in response to their prayer so that they could face their challenge.



A CALL FROM THE CHURCH

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, reminded us that the purpose of the whole Church is to Evangelize, which means to bring the Gospel alive within the Church and proclaim it outside of the walls of our church buildings. This should result in rekindling the fire of the Spirit in the heart of the faithful, in bringing back to a lively relationship with Jesus those who were baptised but slipped away, and in proclaiming the Gospel to those, in greater number, even in countries of Christian tradition, who don't know Jesus Christ. Before him, John-Paul II invited us to "*remain straining towards the proclamation*" of the Gospel to those who are far from Christ, "*as it is the primary task of the Church*" (Redemptoris Missio 34).

Paul VI already, in 1964, expressed the need for a renewal, that would not concern only individual people, but the Church as a whole, in an attempt to enter in an ecclesial conversion: conversion which the second Vatican Council presented as an eagerness to live a process of permanent reform to be more faithful to Jesus-Christ.

This state of permanent reform calls the Church today to move from a mindset of "maintenance" to a heart burning for those who are absent from our church communities.

HOW TO RESPOND TO THE CALL

Jesus' mission was overflowing from his loving heart for the lost and the sinners. As his envoys, we must individually remain grafted on Jesus' heart to share in his love for the lost sheep; this personal conversion is to foster a common vision in the community: to "*be of one heart and soul*" as the first Christian community. It is a community in prayer, as in the upper room, surrendering its plans to the Lord that will give him an unconditional yes to his will. The Father is always willing to send the Holy Spirit on those who ask him and that joy of being so loved by the Father and Jesus that the Spirit pours in our hearts is something we can't keep for ourselves. At the end of the day, it is "*what we have seen and heard that we declare to [others] so that [they] may also have fellowship with us*" (1Jn 1,3).

Some parishes have already begun to enter in that experience of Pentecostal renewing of mind. At the start is adoration, prayer, and a heart for the lost shared within the pastoral team. In the parish of Fr James Mellon of New Brunswick, and others following his example, they have moved their pastoral priority to those outside of the church and it has brought the vision that people have to become missionary disciples. There is a for the parishioners first, a personal journey in faith, as Jesus did with his apostles and disciples. Studying the Gospels, they realised that Jesus trained his disciples in five directions: to develop in prayer a personal relationship to God (Teach us how to pray), to learn to switch from competition to fellowship and forgiveness and mutual support, to be sent as missionaries to prepare the coming of Jesus, to serve one another as Jesus did for them when he was in their midst of them as the one who served ("*I have set you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you*" Jn 13,15), and to keep on being trained (opening their mind to the understanding of the Scriptures Lk 24,27.45, Acts1,3,). If Jesus trained his disciples in these



five directions, it means that all five elements are equally needed for an harmonious Christian life. The first stage in the training process is the Alpha course and the experience of the Holy Spirit, which sows the five elements in the life of the people.

In our parish, the people involved in running Alpha have all experienced the warmth of the personal welcome and a deep fellowship through the 12 weeks of the course; they have been baptised in the Holy Spirit, so they can share the testimony of their own journey with the Lord and the joy they discovered with those attending the course. As they are led through the kerygma many of them are drawn to surrender their life to Christ during the weekend on the Holy Spirit. For them, it is definitely a new beginning (or a beginning) in their faith with an eagerness to continue the journey, a desire for discovering the word of God, for prayer and for serving, and a readiness to share with others what they have begun to discover. There is also a great hunger for a fraternal life with other Christians that enables them to grow in their faith. The Gospel offers what people need the most: fellowship with Jesus and fraternal love.

THE NEED FOR A NEW PENTECOST

The Holy Spirit is the source of the dynamic for Evangelizing and his creativity is limitless; so, we need a new Pentecost in each one of our parishes, to be able to feed the thousands of people hungry for human relationship, justice and tenderness in the specific context of our different human communities. We also know that the scandal of our divisions among Christians is an obstacle to Evangelization; we already experience that in groups of different church background where there is the common experience of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit it is easy to pray together, to share fellowship together, to support one another, to proclaim the Gospel together and rejoice about the success in the missionary work of other denominations. A new Pentecost will also deepen in the hearts of the people of God the desire to be able to share in one bread and one cup around the same Eucharistic table: this will enable us to receive from the Lord the way toward full communion between our different traditions. We already use in our different churches evangelistic tools coming from other tradition than ours.

The Holy Spirit is always able to work miracles, if we are prepared to bring our five loaves and two fish, and ready ourselves to feed the great multitude. As we turn to Jesus to ask the Father to make his kingdom come, we have to *“believe in Him, to believe that he truly loves us, that he is alive, that he is able to act mysteriously, that he never fails us, that he can draw good things from evil situations by his infinite power and limitless creativity”* (*Evangelii Gaudium* 278). Now get prepared to see in the near future the wheat growing among the weed, the little mustard seed becoming a huge tree, and the water turned into excellent wine.