

To Covenant Charismatic Communities of United States

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I am glad to meet you all, the leaders of Covenant Communities from the United States. Allow me to just say a few words of gratitude and some words of encouragement.

We have all heard the flourishing history of the Charismatic Renewal in the United States. We must always remember these origins with deep gratitude.

Just over 40 years have passed since the time of that experience of spiritual searching, on the part of teachers and students at the Catholic University of Duquesne. They were already involved in social works and apostolic activities, but they decided to take a closer look at the way they accepted living out their Christian faith. They felt it was low in Christian drive and energy and they felt that there was a certain amount of disillusionment and apathy. This worried them a great deal. And you all know the story better than I do.

The witnessing and the spiritual fruit of that amazing weekend of the 18th of February, 1967, and even 40 years later, we can still learn very much from that event. We can thank God for all of the good it has brought to the life and mission of the Catholic Church in the United States and throughout the world.

On the 29th of September 1972, Pope Paul VI delivered that extremely important address that spoke of the expectation of a New Pentecost that Pope John XXIII has spoke of when he convened the 2nd Vatican Council; Pope Paul VI was given that opportunity (to say:).

“What do we feel is the first and last need of the blessed and beloved Church of ours? We must say it, almost trembling and praying, because as you know well, this is the Church’s mystery and life: the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the animator and sanctifier of the Church, her divine breath, the wind in her sails, the principle of her unity, the inner source of her light and strength, her support and consoler, her source of charisms and songs, her peace and her joy, her pledge and prelude to blessed and eternal life (*cfr. Lumen Gentium*, 5). The Church needs her perennial Pentecost; she needs fire in her heart, words on her lips, prophecy in her outlook. The Church needs to be a temple of the Holy Spirit (*cfr. 1 Cor 3, 16-17; 6, 19; 2 Cor 6, 16*) (...). She needs to feel rising from the depths of her inmost personality, almost a weeping, a poem, a prayer, a hymn, the praying voice of the Spirit (...). The Church needs to rediscover the eagerness, the taste and the certainty of the truth that is hers (*cfr. Jn 16, 13*) (...). And the Church needs to be flowing through all her human faculties a wave of love, of that love which is called forth and poured into our hearts by the the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us (*Rom 5, 5*). The Church needs (...) the expression of this charity in works (*cfr. Gal 5, 6*), as witness and apostolate”.

This impressive message was delivered by the great and holy Pope (Paul VI) in his *sentire cum ecclesiae* as he guided the fragile boat of the Church through a stormy sea. It was

precisely this need, this call, this expectation, this suppliant request, this spiritual search, this prayer...that prepared the hearts of those gathered together that weekend to receive the powerful and awesome outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

How can we fail to remember that it was precisely at that time, that there was going on an enthusiastic renewal in the whole Catholic Church at the wake of the Vatican Council; and also it was a time of critical turbulence, fierce controversies, serious doctrinally and ideological confusion, and a crisis of identity, which mostly affected the Clergy and some religious communities. It was a time of crisis and testing.

As for the Church in the United States, you will remember better than I do the bewilderment that was felt here at that time. You were also undergoing the impact of the great crisis of national awareness, of the Vietnam War, student confrontation, sexual revolution, feminism undergoing a critical ideological phase and the emergence of various intellectual elites who were radically secularized.

The Church was in danger of being penetrated everywhere and run over by the agencies of secularism. In that situation, the most appropriate approach and the most reliable was that of the beseeching and imploring and invoking the presence of the Holy Spirit, the One who testifies to the Glory of Jesus Christ, who leads us to the fullness of truth, who fills our heart with life-giving and unifying love, who is the soul and guide of the communion in the Church and constantly renews our lives.

Every great current or a movement of authentic renewal in the history of the Church has always had an attitude of returning to the sources. It is not by chance that the genesis that took place back in 1967 was marked by the ongoing recitation of the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, nor that the team of that well-known weekend was the reading of the first 4 chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The purpose was to ask for the grace to realize the experience of the early Christians – the first Christian Community. The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost had transformed the Apostles and disciples into becoming brave and wise witnesses to the presence of their Risen Lord. They preached, worked miracles, and called people to the conversion and the sharing of this new life that reverted back to the event that had made it possible. The participants at that (Duquesne) weekend had the same experience as the Apostles in the Cenacle, the feeling of peace and an uncontrollable joy, the power of the witnesses, fervor and the urge to share their experience everywhere, even to the ends of the earth.

And so it was to be, because from 1967 until 1975 there was an intense expansion of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States. It did not stem from pre-established plans or from magical skills and projects, but through a process of contagion, from person to person, from community to community, from university to university, from city to city. Already in the outcome of 1967, you will remember the emergence of the first community in Ann Arbor. This led Paul VI, in giving another very important address in 1975, in which he spoke, especially about the Charismatic Renewal as being “a chance” for the Catholic Church and the world.

The church in the United States should be very grateful to you for having helped make its part of the renewal more serene, more centered on its Catholic identity and the proclamation of the Glory of God. And this, ascribed by the grace of the Holy Spirit, was more demanding of the faithful in their communion to be more aware of the mission of the Church at the service of this nation. Even if the residual repercussion from those storms, continued to be “paid for” dearly.

However, it is the whole Church, the universal Church, that was enriched with a new current of Christian life that spread from your country beyond all borders, to all continents and all the local Churches. A sign of this was the establishment in 1976 of the International Communications Office of the Renewal in Belgium, headed by Cardinal Suenens; and later, in 1981, transferred to Rome. Another important sign of the maturity was the constitution of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant communities and Fellowship in 1990. And it is thanks in great part to the untiring work of our friend Matteo Calisi that the Fraternity could find and appreciate and welcome Catholic Covenant Communities in so many countries, Latin America, Africa and the Far East.

However, it is not simply the case of Catholics who experience this that is seen in the universal spread of the Catholic Renewal. The Catholic mindset was there from the very beginning. It was not easy (for the early leaders) to avoid being taken over culturally, assimilated as communities and confused theologically by the powerful waves of Charismatic Renewal coming from the extensive Pentecostal revival and Evangelism in America during the 20th Century. We must recognize (that) the work of the Spirit was providentially coming in from other Christian communities from the beginning. But here it was seen in the light of the fullness of grace, of which the Catholic Church is a sacrament. To accept, incorporate, inculturate, reformulate and realize the charismatic renewal, in the background of Catholic tradition, inside the Body of Christ that is the Catholic Church, according to its doctrine and discipline, was a task that was certainly guided by the Holy Spirit. And it allowed you to also bring to Catholicity an ecumenical sensibility, and an experience that enriches the self-awareness of the whole Catholic Church. Fervent prayers for Christian unity and fellowship carries with it a sense of anguish, especially because of the incomplete Communion that is due to doctrinal and disciplinary disagreement that prevent us from celebrating the Eucharist together.

There is no doubt that the experience of movements and communities are a gift for the ecumenical efforts of the Catholic Church and also for other Christian communities. If you will permit me to say so: You have known how to overcome two risks that must be avoided.

The first is that the various Christian components of a community can be closer to each other (in the broader charismatic renewal) than with the Churches or communities to which they belong, to the point of forming a kind of trans-confessional (or non-denominational) Christian Community, where belonging and ecclesial identity are confused.

The second risk is to consider that which separates us and distinguishes us between Christians, inside your Communities, as something “extra” to your shared Christian identity. The unity of the Church of Christ, that subsists in the Catholic Church (cfr. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Responsa ad questionis de aliquibus sententiis ad doctrinam de Ecclesia pertinentibus*, 29.VI.2007) stems from the unity of the episcopate and its head, the successor of Peter. And in finding the Eucharist as its source and summit of its unity. It is striking to read that in that weekend in Duquesne the joyful and thankfulness of the power of the Spirit led some of them almost immediately to Eucharistic Adoration.

When we review our own story, we may have no trouble finding our own self-giving thanks to God. This was for us a chance to catch a glimpse of the mysterious way of God's loving plan of salvation for each one of us. What, in fact, are the movements and the new

communities, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote, if not the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit, concentrated at the right time, at certain crossroads in history, when Christian traditions seem to be totally submitted to questions. Numerous different Charisms renew tradition by springing forth from that tradition's own sources, presented with new precision with an evangelical emphasis, by new movements for the sanctification of people, for the reform of the Church at the light of its Communion, for the new evangelization emerging cultures. This is the current newness of the "new era of group endeavours". As John Paul II says in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation entitled "*Christifideles Laici*" that "this is the work and the sign of the richness and the universality of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community." John Paul II said on 18th November 1984: "It is significant in this regard how the Spirit, in order to continue the dialogue with humankind that began from God in Christ and continues throughout Christian history, has brought forth so many ecclesial movements and new communities in the Church today." On another occasion, the 29th of September, 1985, he repeated: "The Church, born by the means of the Passion and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and empowering of the Spirit, spread throughout the world and through all times with its foundation on the Apostles has been enriched over the centuries by the grace of even new gifts. They have been allowed in different eras, to be present in new ways, to satisfy the thirst of beauty and justice that Christ has inspired in the hearts of humankind and from Him alone is the only satisfaction and complete response."

What are the charisms, if not gifts (*gratia gratis data*), from the Spirit to a person, to some persons, specifically in some historic context, so that they can set out on an experience of faith that can be used for the Church in some way." The Apostle Paul already said this when he pointed out that all the Charisms came from the same Spirit (cfr. *1 Cor 12, 4-11*), they proclaim that "JESUS IS LORD" (cfr. *1 Cor 12, 3*), they share in the growth of the Body of Christ (cfr. *1 Cor 12, 7; 22-27*), they value all the gifts of charity (cfr. *1 Cor 13; 2 Cor 6, 6; Gal 5, 22*) and are submitted to the discernment of the those who are instituted by Him and assisted by the same Holy Spirit to discern each Charism, to put it to the test, to cooperate it as a connected link in the flow in the great Catholic tradition and to guide it so it will render the Spiritual approach for the common good. The charisms open the intelligence and move the will towards new ways of encountering and dolowing the Lord. By means of a charism, through a human encounter, the presence of Christ reaches out to a person, touches that person's eyes, ears, mouth, heart, intelligence and freedom, and something is experienced, that is, a presence filled with reality and newness, with a great capacity of affection and persuasion, just as the person of Jesus was for the apostles and the first disciples two thousand years ago. For this reason, movements and new communities are the way through which the Christ event and his mystery in history, the Church, can reach the lives of people in a way that it is moving. Instructive, reasonable and convincing. Then it can be observed in the movements that they serenely confess, full of joy and hope, and without reticence or inhibiting complications, the fact that Jesus is Lord.

It has been rightly said about the 2nd Vatican Counsel, that it was a paramount event laid out by the Spirit for the life and the mission of the Church in our times; and that its teachings are a step in restoring the Holy Spirit back to the center of His life and mission. He has put Pneumatology back more fully within the Doctrine and practices of the Church. We are all familiar with the basic teachings of "*Lumen Gentium*," specially those of number twelve, and of *Presbiterorum ordinis*, number nine! But still in the life of the Church during the decades following Vatican II, many continued to speak of Charisms only in relationship to Institutes of Consecrated Life. Today on the other hand, the Church is becoming more and more aware of its mystery in which the sacramental gifts, the

hierarchical gifts and the Charismatic gifts are considered to be equally essential to the life and mission (of the Church).

It is not in vain, that the current astonishment with ecclesial movements and communities, certainly not designed or programed or managed from offices or pastoral plans, has become a great sign of the work of the Spirit in our times. And providential, as both John Paul and Benedict insisted, they are a providential resource and reason for hope for the Church and all of human mankind. You know well the great number of gestures and words, teachings and encouragements, that were received by all your communities during this time from both Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI. It was at the apostolic palace with Matteo and many of you when Benedict delivered that magnificent message (summarized in above paragraph) on the 31st of October, 2008. And I emphasize: You are the bearers and not the protagonist and the actual leaders of this magnificent story of the Catholic Charismatic renewal, which found its origins among you and the initial Charismatic leaders. Know this, that there are few currents and movements of grace that were born in America and have become a providential resource and the patrimony for the universal Church. The Church in America and the whole Catholic Church should be grateful for the gift received from that story that comes down to you.”

Now, after these words of gratitude, allow me to now add some words of reminding you now and of encouragement.

What have we done with all those gifts that we have received? Could it be that no one has noticed, at least from the 1990's until now, a certain weakening of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States?

Are your communities still as much of an authentic expression of the Renewal; are your communities in any way still responsible for this Renewal? Are there new Communities that match your expression of that current of grace. Have you perhaps passed from this shower of extraordinary spiritual power and exuberance and its Apostolic thrust in the 1960's, 70's, 80's to some ordinary administration of the inheritances and gifts received?

Forgive me, if I seem to be making a caricature of this situation. I know that the reality is nothing like this, it is clear that you don't lack witness of holiness among you and within your communities and prayer groups. However, in light of the current situation, you might declare from a sociological point of view that the drives that moved hearts, that regenerated people and communities, that embraced the whole church in a dynamic prayer, might seem to have fizzled out. Perhaps it would be good for you to adopt the same attitude of searching, demanding, and questioning that distinguished the first group of people in Duquesne and that led them to experience that week-end as an intense grace-filled plea of supplication.

Pope John Paul II in his last great document, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, left us a very clear instruction that Pope Benedict takes up and pronounced for himself. “We must always “start afresh with Christ” and we can only start afresh with Christ with the grace of the Holy Spirit. We need to live our Christian faith as a new beginning, and to live with an overpowering of the Holy Spirit, who causes the presence of Jesus Christ, to touch our lives and to be seen in our lives.”

The most important question for action in the Community life is prayer, and it is in addition to your vocation. Supplication should be made to the Holy Spirit, in order that His presence may become an event that fills our lives with amazement, gratitude and joy,

in prayer embraced by the mercy of God and always ready to start a fresh within the realm of the mystery. The most important action for personal and community life is prayer, that is, petition, entreaty, invocation, supplication of the Holy Spirit in order that this Presence may become an event that fills our lives with amazement, gratitude and joy, embraced by the mercy of God, and always ready to start afresh within the realm of the Mystery.

The Charismatic Renewal spread throughout your country and then through the rest of the world by a chain of witnesses. They demonstrated a newness of life that the event in all its truth and charity had made possible, attractive and advantages. It is up to you, as it is up to us all, to start a fresh with Christ, as a new beginning, commencing with an ardent petition of an outpouring power of the Spirit, one that has this same force and fruitfulness and that finds the same faithful elation in giving one's life, as happened in the event that happened over 40 years ago in Duquesne, in Ann Arbor, and so many other parts of the United States, in the universities and groups that followed.

I finish.

Your country is now at the center of a global crisis of unpredictable magnitude and duration. It needed a great hope that will not disappoint. It bears a great living Christian tradition that has not been swept by waves of secularization, but it needs a new revival of Catholic Christian experience. John Paul II and Benedict XVI have asked the Church in the United States, and that includes you!, to lead a mission of crucial importance, not only nationally but also universally; you are to face up to – using realism, intelligence and courage, and starting from Christ and therefore for the good of people –, all the great challenges of history that are emerging at the start of this new century an millennium. These include challenges in human governance, ethics, and the new frontiers of scientific and technological progress, as well as in building new ways for human coexistence, in managing power that carries a great deal of responsibility, in guaranteeing true freedom and respecting everyone's natural rights, in combatting poverty and in trying to bring about a new international order that embraces the human family. Let I not be the idolatries of knowledge, power, money and pleasure that guide personal and collective life, but the awareness of the one “corner stone” that is a sure foundation.

You had so many challenges to face in those years at the beginning and the protection and the promotion of those natural rights of your founding fathers, which were the guiding principles of the true greatness of the nation, beginning with the right to life.

I read somewhere that the Catholic Church in the United States is like a global micro-cosmos in this country; it reflects the great origins of the population that were gotten from various ways through immigration; and here, with certainty and promise and an occasion for Communion with the energy of Catholic Spirit, the motto of the very foundation of the United States, “*Et Pluribus Unum.*” It must be found in your communities, as well as in each ecclesial real community and the witness of the Catholic Church, forms of new life, signs and ways of a new society, signs that the world has become more human, more fraternal, living the reflection of the mystery of communion to which people are called, but can never built with their own strength alone.

Two final recommendations: (You know me) First: In dealing with this great responsibility, it is advisable to avoid falling into the temptation of insulating yourself, of enclosing yourself within your community with a certain self-sufficiency. The resurgence of Christian life in every valid community is confirmed and will be confirmed if the community has been moved 360 degrees in its communication with the local Churches, the

Church of the United States, not to speak of your participation and collaboration within the Catholic Fraternity.

Second: You will find wonderful guidance and enlightenment and help, if you carefully follow the powerful Magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI, and you will rediscover the dignity, the truth and the beauty of being Christian. To recognize a sense of belonging to the mystery of communion in the Church and that it shines out most clearly in the Liturgy. To adhere to the faith, not through sentiments, but through a sense of recognition and awareness and of knowing how to join in faith and reason in our Christian witness.

May the guidance of his Magisterium, especially what he said to you and stressed it to you in his Apostolic visit to your country, but especially what he said about seeing the world today, which was an important catechesis of the Holy Spirit for our times. But also what he told you in the recent audience of the Fraternity that this be for you a welcome support and a wake up call to request once again, to beseech, on your knees an outpouring of the Spirit that took place for our Duquesne friends.

God bless you!