



CHARIS' MESSAGE IN PREPARATION for PENTECOST 2020

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The Acts of the Apostles recounts this episode in Paul's life:

“The crowd joined in the attack on them, and the magistrates had them stripped and ordered them to be beaten with rods. 23 After inflicting many blows on them, they threw them into prison and instructed the jailer to guard them securely. 24 When he received these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and secured their feet to a stake. Deliverance from Prison. 25 About midnight, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as the prisoners listened, 26 there was suddenly such a severe earthquake that the foundations of the jail shook; all the doors flew open, and the chains of all were pulled loose.” (Act 16: 22-26).

With their clothes torn, covered in blows, and shackles on their feet, Paul and Silas did not pray to God to help them, but instead sang the praises of God. What a message for us members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal at this time! The example of Paul and Silas invites us to leave aside, at least until Pentecost, all the discussion about coronavirus, or at least not to make it the center of everything. Let's not sadden the Holy Spirit by considering it as less important (or less powerful) than the virus.

Moreover, the example of Paul and Silas invites us to sing hymns to God. This may seem absurd and difficult to accept, especially for those who experience in their own flesh the devastating effects of this scourge, but in faith we can understand that it is possible. Saint Paul proclaims that "all things work for the good of him who loves God" (Rom 8:28). Everything without excluding anything; therefore also the present pandemic! St. Augustine explains the profound reason for this: "Being supremely good, God would never allow any evil to exist in His works unless He was powerful and good enough to bring good out of evil itself" (Enchir., 11:3).

We do not praise God for the evil that brings the whole of humanity to its knees; we praise Him because we are sure that He will be able to draw good out of that very evil, for us and for the world. We praise Him precisely because we are convinced that everything works for the good of those who love God, and above



all, of those whom God loves! I say this trembling because I don't know if I myself would be able to do it, but God's grace can do this and more. In the Good Friday preaching at St. Peter's Basilica, I tried to identify some of the "goods" that God is already drawing from this evil: the awakening of the illusion of being able to save ourselves, the sense of solidarity that this evil arouses and which has pushed some of our brothers and sisters to the point of heroism. I would add today: the awakening of religious feeling and the need for prayer. The extraordinary attention to the gestures and words of Pope Francis, even outside the Catholic world, is a sign of this.

The same Saint Paul recommended to the Thessalonians: "In all things give thanks" (1 Thess 5:18). Praise and thanksgiving, doxology and the thanksgiving are man's first two duties towards God. The fundamental sin of humanity, which, according to the Apostle, is the source of every other sin, is the rejection of these two attitudes: "As a result, they (men) have no excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory (doxazein) as God or give him thanks (eucharistein)." (Rom 1:20-21).

Consequently, the exact opposite of sin is not virtue, but praise! The praise of God, made in the present dramatic circumstances, is faith pushed to its highest degree. Jesus, after having calmed the storm, did not reproach His apostles for not having woken Him earlier; He reproached them for not having had enough faith.

This is an opportunity for us in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal to return to the purest origins of the stream of grace: from its birth, it appeared before the rest of Christendom as the people of praise, the people of hallelujah.

We were not alone. Our Pentecostal brothers had had the same experience. One of the most widely read books in the Renewal, after "The Cross and the Switchblade" by David Wilkerson, was Merlin Carothers' book "Prison to Praise". The author not only recommended the importance of praise, but demonstrated - with Scripture and experience in hand - its miraculous power.

The greatest miracles of the Holy Spirit are not obtained in response to our supplications, but in response to our praise. In the same way, about the three young Hebrews thrown into the burning furnace, we read that with one voice they began to sing, glorifying and blessing God by singing a hymn with which the prayer of Lauds begins every Sunday and every feast day: "Blessed are you, Lord, God of our fathers..." (Dan 3:51 ff.). The greatest miracle of praise is the one that



happens to the one who practices it, especially in trial, because it shows that grace has been stronger than nature.

The miracle of Paul and Silas in the prison - and of the three young men in the furnace - is repeated in multiple circumstances and in endless ways: release from disease, from drug addiction, from a wrongful conviction, from the burden of one's own past... "Try to believe", was the advice Carothers gave to its readers.

So let us drown the virus in a sea of praise, or at least try to do so. Let us unite ourselves to the whole Church which, in the Gloria of the Mass, proclaims: "We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your immense glory". There is no supplication in this prayer, only praise!

While waiting for Pentecost, let us begin again to sing with the same enthusiasm as at that time the songs that brought tears to so many of us at our first encounter with the current of grace of the Charismatic Renewal: "Alabaré, Alabaré", "Come and Worship, Royal Priesthood" and so many others.

There is one song that I would like to mention in particular because of its topicality. It was composed in 1992 by Don Moen. Its refrain, says this:

Oh, God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me.

Not just for me or for us, but for all mankind.