

“I WANT TO BE A PROPHET FOR GOD!”

FR. RANIERO CANTALAMESSA

On 3rd May 2000, in St. John Lateran, the 750 charismatics participating in the Rome Jubilee 2000 Pilgrimage organised by ICCRS, celebrated a Holy Mass presided by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa. It was a time of praise and worship, but most of all a prophetic time. Fr. Raniero gave a very anointed homily, encouraging all present to be witnesses and prophets for the Lord. Here follows the whole text of the homily by Fr. Raniero.

*“The Lord’s Spirit is upon me,
for he has anointed me
to bring Good News to the afflicted.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives,
sight to the blind,
freedom to the oppressed,
and to proclaim a year of favour
from the Lord. (Lk 4, 18-19)*

With these words, proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth immediately after his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus inaugurated the first Christian Jubilee in history - a year of favour from the Lord.

The Jubilee is rooted in the Holy Spirit. Until 1300, the year Boniface VIII instituted the Jubilee in its present form, Pentecost was considered the annual jubilee of the Church, because it occurred on the fiftieth day, as the jubilee did every fiftieth year (Origen). A medieval hymn for Pentecost says: “Search out the mystery! / And you will see/ that this holy festival / achieves the jubilee” (Adam of St Victor).

All the benefits we associate with the idea of jubilee: remission of sin, ransom from slavery, sight for the blind, healing for broken hearts, reconciliation with God - everything, after Easter, is contained in a single name: The Holy Spirit!

The true jubilee, the spiritual and interior one that interests God, is the work of the Paraclete. Everything else is subordinate to this and must lead to this.

The Jubilee is, first of all, a free gift of God, a “year of favour from the Lord”. I remember an incident that happened at the end of the last war, the day the Germans began to retreat from my town. Word spread that the military storehouses were open and anybody could go and help themselves to whatever they wanted. Imagine the reaction of people who had suffered the bleakest hunger and lacked the most essential things! I can still remember the lines of people making their way from the countryside, encouraging one another to keep going, and then the procession home, some carrying food, others blankets or other supplies.

This Great Jubilee should see the same thing happen! The storehouses of God’s grace and mercy are open! To everyone the Church repeats the invitation we read in Isaiah:

*“Oh come to the water all you who are thirsty,
though you have no money, come!
Buy and eat, come, buy wine and milk
without charge, at no cost!” (Is. 55,1)*

We in the Charismatic Renewal have experienced what Isaiah describes in these words. We know what it means to “have no money”, to be poor, miserable, utterly undeserving, and despite it all, to receive the living water, the new wine, the milk and honey of the Holy Spirit.

The organisers have rightly linked this world gathering of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Rome with the one that took place in 1975 and culminated in the meeting with the Pope in St Peter's.

So now is the time to ask ourselves how far we have come since then - it is a time for discernment. Then, our main aspiration was to be recognised and accepted by the institutional Church. Surprisingly, given the circumstances, that recognition came, though only in an oral and unofficial way. Paul VI defined the Renewal as “a chance for the Church”. In fact he gave it a motto and a programme, in the well-known words I recalled at Rimini: *Laeti bibamus sobriam profusionem Spiritus*, let us joyfully drink from the Spirit's sober abundance.

Now, 25 years later, what do we aspire to? What are we searching for? The Charismatic Renewal, meanwhile, has received more than one recognition, formally but also in practice. More and more frequently, the Renewal is entrusted with tasks, things to organise, offices to fill. It is no secret that we are greatly relied upon.

The time has come to ask ourselves: What is the service we are called to give to the Church, the reason why the Lord raised up the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church? Here I must open my heart to you as a brother. I fear that all this recognition is making us forget the one thing necessary, without our realising it. Our fidelity to the hierarchy is not in question.

All of us love the Church and wish to serve it: on this point there is no discussion. The question is: What service are we called to give to the Church? Is it “the service of tables”, as the Acts of the Apostles puts it, or is it “prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Ac 6, 2-4)?

Many lay people in the beginning embraced the Renewal happy that at last they could contribute to building up the Church by doing more than just helping the parish priest to run parties and the parish lottery and things like that. The service we are called to give to the Church is a prophetic one. Without it, we would have no more reason to exist. There are countless other things that other people do, and do well. Ours is a humble service, but indispensable. Without prophecy, the Church languishes, its message cannot pierce the heart.

What do I mean by prophecy? I mean what Paul meant when he wrote: “But if you were all prophesying when an unbeliever or someone uninitiated came in, he would find himself put to the test by all and judged by all, and the secrets of his heart revealed, and so he would fall down on his face and worship God, declaring that God is indeed among you” (1Cor 14, 24-25).

We all remember the days when, if a charismatic gathering started praying, even the outsiders present - photographers, journalists, TV technicians - even the stones!, were overcome by the sensation of the supernatural. And now? Isn't it true that our meetings are becoming more and more like any ordinary gathering of the faithful?

Just another movement in the Church: is this what we want to be? The hierarchy have every right to insist that we find our place within certain canonically recognisable realities, so that they know who they are dealing with. They have every right to consider us as one among many ecclesial movements. The point is, do we end up thinking of ourselves as just another movement like the rest, a force in the Church, complete in itself, that makes its presence felt in more and more new areas?

Past experience in the Church shows that this is the best way of levelling down all religious Orders and making them lose their particular charism, and thereby also lose their initial vigour. Again, what is in question is not our growing in the communion and collaboration with other

ecclesial movements. This has been recommended by the pope himself and it is in the nature of charisms to recognise and accept each other as coming from the same Spirit.

But we must preserve as long as possible the spirit and novelty of the Renewal, which doesn't consist in being an ecclesial movement, with a founder, a Rule and a spirituality of its own, rather, in being a current of grace for the renewal of the whole Church.

Personally, I am grateful to all those brothers who have worked over the years to establish the relationships of trust and co-operation with the hierarchy whose fruits we see today. This is a precious benefit and no-one disputes it.

The question is: what are we now going to do with all this recognition? What use will we make of it? Will we let success go to our heads, and lose sight of God's purpose in raising up the Renewal? (The danger is there). Or will we use it to become even more a prophetic leaven, a charismatic presence, in the Church? Someone, in the early days, defined the purpose of the Renewal in a single phrase: "To give the power back to God"! It is a definition we need to remember today, more than ever.

In 1992 there was at Monterrey, in Mexico, a retreat for the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America, attended by 1700 priests and 70 bishops from all over Latin America. During a Mass, after Holy Communion, they prayed for a new anointing of the Spirit. It was a true moment of Pentecost. Bishops and priests kneeling down, being prayed over and asking lay people present to pray for them.

In the homily I had stressed the need the Church has for prophets. Now I was sitting alone in the presbytery interceding for the assembly. A young priest came straight over to me, knelt down and said: "Bendigame, Padre: quiero ser profeta de Dios!", "Give me your blessing, Father, I want to be a prophet for God". It gave me a shiver, I could see that he was serious and God really was calling him. I blessed him and he went away in silence.

What a splendid way of concluding this Jubilee pilgrimage to Rome: Go home, brothers and sisters, with this same decision in your heart: I want to be a prophet for God.

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