

many confraternities of his time, participating in and sharing in their gifts of grace and charity. He also knew how to welcome into the Christian communion people of every class, condition of life and situation, promoting them and urging them to be apostles according to their own conditions.

Jesus said: "I have come to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already ablaze! (Jn 12:47); this is the Gospel Word that Vincent incarnated and from which he set out to kindle in many hearts the passion that sprang from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to unite in spiritual communion those who were open to the grace and mission of Jesus Christ. In fact, Vincent acted always with the sole intention of obtaining the infinite glory of the Father and the salvation of all.

Vincent always seeks to unite all; encounter, dialogue, communion are indispensable steps to create true Union and lead all peoples to become one flock under one shepherd. Dialogue is the door, unity is the goal of this demanding and fascinating journey. The Gospel of salvation is directed to all; all are sent to collaborate in this "holy and divine work", which Christ will continue in us until the end of time.

Mary is present in the Church and in the work entrusted to St. Vincent as Queen of Apostles, but is also the mother of the Church and of all peoples. Recorded as having spoken few words, yet her dialogue with God and with humankind is enduring, effective and co-redemptive; she invites us, inspired by our distinctive charisms, into this transforming dialogue, through which we are made ever more capable of engaging in that Christ-like dialogue which opens the hearts of people to experience the infinite love and mercy that only the Gospel can give.

*Sr. Lilia Capretti, CSAC.
Rome*

Questions for reflection:

1. "More than something to try to define, the charism is a gift to be followed and to be responded to". How have we experienced the power of the charism of St. Vincent in our personal and community lives? Let us ask the Holy Spirit, giver of all charisms, in insistent prayer, to grant us - members, friends and collaborators of the Union - a deeper and more dynamic spiritual experience of this wonderful gift so that it may be ever-increasingly a real driving force in our personal and community lives.
2. Where have we experienced fruitful dialogue, communion and collaboration with charisms of other religious families? How, as followers of Christ inspired by the charism of St. Vincent, can we help to promote such experiences for the building up of the Body of Christ and to give a more united, effective and fruitful apostolic response to the manifold challenges and needs of our time?



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - July 2017

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHARISMS IN THE CHURCH

The opening of dialogue between various realities in the Church and world is welcome and appreciated, being today not only useful, but urgent, demanding loyalty, transparency and a search for what is true and good by the dialogue partners.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God; Christ, God the Son, sent to human beings, clothed in flesh (Cf. Jn 1) to free us and bring us back to the Father. And Christ, revealer of the Father, gives us his Spirit and enters into dialogue with us.

At Pentecost, Jesus pours out the Spirit, revealing the Most Blessed Trinity as a communion of divine Persons. The mission of Christ and of the Spirit becomes the mission of the Church, sent to proclaim and spread the mystery of the Trinitarian communion. And it is the Spirit who gives the baptised charisms for the many different functions, so that they may live in communion in the Church and in the world and bear the fruits of the Spirit (cf. CCC 144; 148).

It is only the Lord himself who can enable a fruitful dialogue between charisms, these these supernatural realities given for the building up of the mystical body of Christ. He alone can help us harmonise them in a practical way which leads to unity in charity, allowing us to appreciate the richness given by such a multiform variety of gifts. It is Christ himself who desires such unity: that they may be one. The greatest charism is charity which leads to unity.

Today simple human relationships and dialogue can seem very difficult. We need to start afresh from Christ, to look at Jesus in the Eucharist. From the Eucharist springs that spirituality of communion which is so necessary for establishing the dialogue of charity of which the world of today has such great need. Relationships, dialogue, fraternity are fruits of the love received from the Father and shared with our sisters and brothers.

The Christian community urgently seeks to present itself as a sign of an ever-possible dialogue, of a communion of charisms capable of harmonising differences. This involves welcoming the various charismatic realities, bearing witness to the value of Christian fraternity and to the transforming power of the Gospel, recognising ourselves as children of the one Father, and impelling us to a self-sacrificing love towards all, especially towards the least ones.

The gift of the charism always carries within itself a call expressed in various forms or different ways of following Jesus and of serving the Church. Each Church community has the task of making the spirituality of communion grow, firstly within the ecclesial community itself and also beyond its confines, constantly

practicing dialogue in charity, above all where the world of today is torn apart by ethnic hatred and murderous violence.

The charism is also living memory which is open to the future. Keeping the memory alive, we open ourselves to the great challenges of today. Living with these challenges, we feel the dynamism and prophetic force of the charisms, making us sense their providential up-to-dateness and the possibilities to which they open us. More than something to try to define, the charism is a gift to be followed and to be responded to, which no one can claim exclusively as their own because it is a gift for others.

Often, the dimension of charity is expressed through meals. It was often during meals that Jesus gave sublime lessons of forgiveness, of friendship, of welcoming all, He who ultimately made himself into “food” for us in the Eucharist. The meal becomes the place in which a sense of gratuitousness in communion is expressed and, in a certain way, the climate for a free and peaceful dialogue is created. Humankind was not in a position to create true communion until Pentecost when, with the grace of the Spirit, it received gifts and charisms and combined them in order to become the ecclesial Body of Christ which unites His scattered members in one new Person.

What is referred to as consecrated life lived in community is one of the “places” in which it is almost natural that the charisms be united and collaborate. The document *Mutuae Relationes* (MR 11) says that the “very charism of the Founders (*Evangelica Testificatio* 11) appears as an “experience of the Spirit,” transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth”.

The Christian community with the variety of charisms and institutions, working in synergy in the Church and with society, especially with its multinational, multiethnic communities, offers precious experiences of dialogue, communion and collaboration. For a long time, the opening of individual institutions and creating dialogue between them was not always easy. They kept themselves somewhat closed and separate, even though they may have been apostolically active and effective. Vatican II offers repeated invitations to create openness, dialogue and a more conscious communion between the Institutes of Consecrated Life, without however obscuring the originality and identity of each charism. It also called them to organise together in Conferences of Major Superiors at the national, continental and global levels. In this way relationships of dialogue between institutes were progressively opened up with notable results, particularly through joint study, reflection, research and the exchange of experiences.

This dialogue subsequently opened up to also include charisms given to new ecclesial realities: movements, associations, communities, ... which include lay people animated by the fire of the Spirit, eager for sharing, for spiritual communion, for dialogue, gradually leading even to collaboration in organising very worthwhile ecclesial and social works.

These developments, certainly inspired by the Spirit of charity, unity, dialogue and sincere communion, have made visible in the Church and to the world that

“Springtime of the Spirit” so greatly desired by the founders of religious orders and the pastors of the Church, but no less so by the entire people of God, eager to live in a Church and a society in which communion, fraternity, sharing are not a utopia, but a gift from above and also an achievement of people of good will.

The Spirit blows where and as it wills. It is working at all times and involves people who are open to its breath for a renewed and regenerated ecclesiology of communion. We need to work through dialogue which is profoundly open to welcoming and gathering the “seeds of the Word” present in every culture, precious values which are also human and cultural, translating them into true worship of God, giver of every gift and perfecter of all things.

It is the Spirit which unites us in communion and unity. The charism, therefore, as gift of the Spirit, equips the person chosen by God to carry out a particular mission, and to work in communion with others who, by vocation, share the same mission. It is the love of Christ in the Spirit which has gathered us to make us one.

And now with great pleasure I come specifically to the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti.

God gave St. Vincent the gift of a profound experience of his infinite love and mercy. Vincent contemplated this love in action in the creation of the world and particularly in the human being created in God’s image and likeness; as also in the redemption of sinful human beings, brought about by Jesus. Following the impulse of the Spirit, he felt moved to found an institution of universal apostolate in order to revive faith and rekindle charity among Catholics and spread them throughout the world. This in summary is the charism given to St. Vincent by the Spirit, with Christ the Apostle as his model, ideal, guide and the source from which he drew continually, but also the goal towards which he tended, because he wanted to be transformed into Christ and to continue His very apostolic mission.

Vincent was very clear that, in the Church, we all have the anointing of the Spirit with equal dignity, are all incorporated into Christ by baptism, participating in his prophetic and royal priesthood, and so we all are apostles and continuers of his mission. And it is through the Son sent by the Father that we receive the gift of the Spirit who enables all believers to proclaim the gospel of salvation to all creation. Therefore, the Church, with the multiplicity of charisms, is equipped for every work of evangelisation and of charity. The individual charisms allow us represent one of the infinite faces of Christ, his sentiments, operations and missions. The followers of the Founder take on the project which becomes shared with other people and lived together in community, in a religious family.

St. Vincent writes: “I would like to possess that spirit which each Founder had in founding his or her religious institution, but since such a most perfect spirit is found in Jesus Christ Crucified, in this way through divine grace I will learn it from Jesus, in whom is found Love, Humility, Charity, Poverty ... and all the prerogatives of Christ the Apostle” (OCCC X, 126-7). In Christ the Apostle Vincent finds all charisms.

Vincent not only was in dialogue with the charisms of his day, but also joined