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HOLY SPIRIT, Life in the Spirit
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“Libermann and the Holy Spirit”

Discovering the Holy Spirit in the Life of Libermann

Introduction

We are going to follow this Novena entitled “Libermann and the Holy Spirit” within the ambit of the Year of Consecrated Life. The first letter from the Roman Congregation for Religious, addressed to all those living the Consecrated Life, which has for its theme “Rejoice”¹ draws to a great extent on the words of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel”. In that document, the Pope invites us to go back to the source of our own vocation, namely, our encounter with Jesus Christ.

This Novena invites us to go back to **the source of Libermann’s vocation**: the outpouring of the Spirit of Truth at his conversion, and of the Spirit of Love at his Baptism. If we wish to understand the teaching of Libermann on consecration and docility to the Holy Spirit, we must first of all try to know his **spiritual experience as a beginner in the Faith**. This is what we propose to examine during this (first) Novena.

In this Novena, “Libermann: his Experience of the Holy Spirit”, we are invited to live the same return to the **sources of our own Spiritan missionary vocation**.

The present Novena is a re-reading of the life of Libermann, especially of the first part of his life up to the foundation of the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary.

- This Novena takes a close look at the **testimonies** of his friends (Gamon, Vernet, Delucheux), in which we find confidences expressed by Libermann. Libermann, in his humility, certainly spoke very little about himself, or about the exceptional graces which the Holy Spirit gave him. His revelations to certain friends are therefore of primary importance for us Spiritans.
- For some of the days, there is a **Reading** which allows us to look again at what Libermann experienced, and to find there the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.
- The final days draw their inspiration from the **Commentary on St. John** written in Rome during a period of profound spirituality. Libermann there speaks of what he had experienced, and was even then experiencing. This Commentary allows us also to enter more deeply into his experience of the Holy Spirit, with reference to the Holy Heart of Mary.

¹ “Rejoice – the Words of the Magisterium of Pope Francis”: Letter of the Roman Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. 2 February 2014.

Sources used in this Novena

Father Gamon was Rector of the Senior Seminary of Clermont Ferrand. He had known Libermann during his year at “The Solitude”, in Issy les Moulineaux (1836 – 1837). In 1850, he asked Libermann to describe the process of his conversion to Christianity. Libermann went to the foot of the courtyard in the Holy Spirit Seminary to meet him and welcome him. Father Gamon took great pains to faithfully write down the exceptional testimony of Libermann.

Libermann had an overwhelming experience at his Baptism. He told nobody about it for a long time. He had felt that he was immersed in a fiery globe. He confided this event to **Father Vernhet** seven years later in 1833. Father Vernhet was the Parish Priest of Vensac (Aveyron) and got to know Libermann in 1833. We can read his testimony in *ND² 1.90*, given in 1879. We can also read Alphonse Gilbert pp.10 – 11.

Father Delucheux, a priest of the diocese of Amiens, shared with us one of the most beautiful fruits of the Spirit in Libermann’s heart – love for the Virgin Mary. *ND 1.99*, Letter of 18 February 1879, and Alphonse Gilbert p.10.

All of these testimonies begin more or less with the same phrase, “*When the water flowed down over my forehead....*”

References

- *Most often quoted Documents concerning Libermann: **LS³, ND**
- *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint John 1988; **CSJ**
- *Spiritan Anthology: **Anth.**
- * Alphonse Gilbert CSSp, “*You have placed your hand on me*” : **AG**
- * Letter from the Roman Congregation for Religious Life 2014: **LRV**

Day	Theme	Source
1	Libermann’s conversion: Illumination by the Spirit of Truth	Fr. Gamon
2	His Baptism: - “plunged in a globe of fire” – the Fire of Love of the Holy Spirit	Fr. Vernhet
3	His Baptism – love for the Virgin Mary	Fr. Delucheux – Memorandum of Tisserant
4	The power of the Paraclete in suffering and the cross	Letter to his brother Samson
5	Grace of the Presence of God lasting five years	Letter to Jerome Schwindenhammer
6	His charism of being a spiritual director	Letter to Jerome Schwindenhammer
7	Led by the Spirit – “ <i>the wind blows where it will</i> ”	CSJ
8	Jesus to Nicodemus – “ <i>born again by water and the Spirit</i> ”	CSJ
9	If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink – <i>he spoke of the Spirit</i> – which those who believed in him were to receive	CSJ

² *Notes et Documents*

³ *Spiritual Letters*

Day 1: Libermann's Conversion: - Illumination by the Spirit of Truth

Context: The Darkness of a Critical Mind

Jacob Libermann was the son of the Rabbi of Saverne. His father wanted him to succeed him in his post. Jacob's Talmudic studies at Metz, far from making his Jewish beliefs stronger, actually caused a faith crisis. He fell "into a kind of religious indifference, which after a few months, developed into a total loss of belief" (**Anthology** p,57). He learned that his brother Samson had become a Catholic, and wrote to him about his own scepticism regarding everything to be found in the Bible. He read the Gospel in Hebrew, but was put off by the description of so many miracles in it. He began reading *Emile* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and was troubled by the words of the Savoyard priest: "*I have no idea how an Amsterdam rabbi would answer my questions*". The son of the Rabbi of Saverne felt himself to be unable too. On the advice of a friend, he decided to go to Paris to speak with Mr. Drach, a friend of his father, who had also converted to Catholicism. In Paris, he visited two of his brothers who had become Catholics, and their obvious happiness made a deep impression on him. Mr. Drach managed to arrange for a place to stay in the College Stanislaus in Paris, and showed Jacob his room on Monday 13 November. Jacob felt very troubled and in great spiritual pain. All alone in the room, he felt oppressed by the greatest sadness. "*It was then that remembering the God of my ancestors, I knelt and begged him to enlighten me as to the true religion. I asked Him to tell me if the beliefs of the Christians were true and to help me know them, but if they were false, to keep me far from them. The Lord, who is close to all who call on him from the bottom of their hearts, heard my prayer and answered it. All at once I was enlightened. I saw the truth and faith penetrated my mind and heart. Reading Lhomond, I had no trouble accepting everything he said about the life and death of Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Eucharist, perhaps imprudently put before me, I accepted fully. I believed everything without any trouble. From that moment, my one desire was to be baptised.*" (Word of Fr. Gamon: **Anthol.** P66; reproduced by Cabon **N.D.** 1. 65 (1850); **AG**).

Vatican II speaks of "*the interior helps from the Holy Spirit*", "*which touch the heart, turn it towards God, open the eyes of the mind and give to everyone the sweetness of consenting to and believing in the truth*" (DV 5). Libermann felt from that moment a profound infusion of the Spirit of Truth, who penetrated:

- his mind: *I was enlightened: I saw the truth*
- his heart: *I believed everything without trouble*
- his will: *I accepted easily and firmly all that was said of the life and death of Jesus Christ*

The Spirit led Libermann into the complete truth of the mystery of Christ and of the Trinity.

Scripture Reading:

Jn. 14:16-17; *I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth, whom the world can never receive, since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you.....*

Jn. 14:26; *... but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all I have said to you.....*

Jn. 16:13-14; *But when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself, but will say only what he has learnt; and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he tells you will be taken from what is mine."*

Spiritual Rule of Life (SRL):

SRL 16.3 : *We try in dialogue to co-operate honestly with the leaders and the faithful of other religions as well as with those who do not believe in God. We put our trust in the Holy Spirit, leading both us and them “to the complete truth”. (Jn.16:13).*

SRL 86: *In prayer, we are purified and changed by the Holy Spirit. It is his gifts and the fruits of his indwelling (Gal. 5: 22-23) that become in us a source of both human and spiritual maturity and that make our life fruitful in every way.*

The Year of Consecrated Life

“It is not you who have chosen me, but I who have chosen you (Jn. 15:16)..... A vocation always comes as a result of God’s initiative. “It is Christ who has called you to follow the Consecrated Life”⁴ Pope Francis.... calls us to pause at the joy of the moment when Jesus looked at me....; our vocation “ is the response to a calling, a calling of love”. To live with Christ means to share his life, his choices, the obedience of faith, the beatitude of the poor, the radical demands of love.

The questions of Pope Francis

“We can ask ourselves, am I concerned about God, to announce him, to make him known? Or do I allow myself to be seduced by the type of worldly spirit which encourages us to do everything out of self-love? Do we, although in the Consecrated Life, think only of our personal interests, of the success of our works, of careerism..... have I allowed myself to become “settled” in my Christian life, in my priesthood, in my Religious Life, in my community life also, or rather have I managed to maintain the power of concern for God and for his Word? ⁵

Prayer of Fr. Lucien Deiss CSSp

Holy Spirit of Truth,
whom the Father sent in the name of his Son,
we beg of you,
re-instate the words of Jesus in our memory,
and preserve them in our heart.
Amen.

⁴ Pope Francis: *Discourse to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General* Rome, 8 May 2013

⁵ Pope Francis: *Homily for the Opening of the General Chapter of the Augustinians* Rome 30 August 2013

Day 2: Libermann's Baptism: "Enveloped in a Globe of Fire"

After following an intensive catechesis, Libermann received Baptism on Christmas Eve 1826, in the chapel of College Stanislaus. He took the names of Francis Mary and Paul. He underwent an overwhelming experience, which he did not divulge for a long time, only speaking of it seven years later in 1833, to Father Vernhet, Parish Priest of Vensac (Aveyron).

*"When the water flowed down my forehead, it seemed to me that I was immersed in a **great fiery globe**: I was no longer living my natural life: I could see nothing, nor in addition hear nothing of what was happening around me; things impossible to describe were taking place in me. It happened for a few minutes during the baptismal ceremony". (ND 1 90 – Testimony of Father Vernhet 1879: AG pp10 – 11)*

Sacred Scripture allows us better to understand what Libermann experienced. He was going through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, whom Jesus had announced to his apostles at his Ascension. *"Not many days from now you will be baptised in the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 1:4). John the Baptist had already prophesied, : *"He will baptise you in the Holy Spirit and fire"*(Lk. 3:16). Libermann, while being baptised, was plunged into an immense globe of fire, the fire of the Love of the Holy Spirit, which reminds us of the burning bush (Exod. 3; Deut. 4:24), and of Pentecost. This immersion in the ocean of the love of God had the character of plenitude, and of superabundance. Libermann could see nothing, and heard nothing of what was happening around him. Inexpressible things were taking place in his heart, things which enraptured his attention. *"the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us"* (Rom. 5:5). This fire of love remained in Libermann's heart until his final breath. *"Be fervent, fervent, always fervent, and above all, charity, charity above all. Charity in Jesus Christ, charity through Jesus Christ, charity in the name of Jesus Christ. Fervour. Charity."* (AG p. 134).

Scripture Reading

"John also declared, 'I saw the Spirit coming down on him from heaven like a dove and resting on him. I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is going to baptise with the Holy Spirit". Yes, I have seen and I am the witness that he is the Chosen One of God". (Jn. 1: 32 – 34).

Spiritual Rule of Life (SRL)

SRL 9: *The Spirit pours the Father's love into our hearts (cf. Rom. 5:5). It is this love that produces apostolic zeal in us, shown by a powerful desire to see the same love established in the hearts of all people.*

SRL 39: *This charity, the Spirit's greatest gift, is the sign that it is the Lord who brings us together and sends us out. "It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognise you as my disciples" (Jn. 13:35).*

The Year of Consecrated Life

"The consolation of God, his tenderness towards us, cannot be carried by us to others unless we ourselves experience first of all the joy of being consoled by Him, of being loved by Him [...]. I have met some times consecrated persons who fear the consolation of God..... they are tormented in themselves, because they are afraid of this tenderness of God. But do not be anxious, for the Lord is the Lord of consolation, the Lord of tenderness. The Lord is father and

He Himself has said that he will treat us like a mother with her child, with tenderness. Have no fear of the consolation of the Lord.”⁶

Numerous testimonies, especially in the Charismatic Renewal, show the reality. Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a vast outpouring of the Spirit, who profoundly renews the graces and charisms of Baptism and Confirmation. Each of us Spiritans are called to desire and ask once again for Baptism in the Spirit of Love, following Libermann. Are we not?

Prayer for the Bagamoyo Chapter: “Be Fervent in the Spirit”

Heavenly Father,
you have sent once before the Spirit of your Son
on our Founder Ancestors, Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann.
Thanks to them, and to generations of Spiritans,
our Congregation has not ceased to devote itself to the service of evangelization for the poor.
Now that we celebrated our XXth General Chapter at Bagamoyo,
we beg of you to pour out your Spirit once again on the whole Congregation.
May He bring us together in one united family,
so that we can better hear the appeals of our day!
May he give us a new fervour, to deepen, in your Church,
our consecration and our missionary witness!
Following the example of Mary, by the power of the Spirit,
may we continue to give birth to your Son
for your glory and the life of this world
which you have created and liberated! Amen!

⁶ Pope Francis: *Homily of the Mass for Seminarians, and male and female Novices* – Rome 7 July 2013

Day 3: Love for the Virgin Mary

Father Delucheux, a priest of the diocese of Amiens, also testifies regarding one of the most beautiful fruits of Libermann's Baptism.

"When the water ran down my Jewish head, at that very moment I loved Mary, whom I had previously detested" (ND 1 99)

The young Jacob, who was Jewish and the son of a rabbi, had hated Mary because of her Son who pretended to be the Son of God. At the very moment of his Baptism, Libermann loved Mary. The Spirit poured into his heart the love of predilection which the Father had for Mary, the "Beloved" of God (Lk. 1:28). Libermann became mature in this filial love for Mary, with a particular attraction, namely, the Holy Heart of Mary. The memorandum of Father Tisserant allows us to follow Libermann's Marian journey.

At Rennes, Libermann shared the spirituality of the Eudists, priests of the Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Leaving for Rome, Libermann stopped at Lyons, and on 8th December 1839, we find him at Fourvières on that day, *"when this city shows its devotion to the privileges and prerogatives of the Conception of Mary. By special favour of the Holy See, this town had publicly honoured Mary for seven centuries as Immaculate". (Anth. p.90)* For the future missionary society, Fr. Le Vavasseur wished the title of Priests of the Cross (*Anth. p.94*). At Rome, while Libermann was of the same opinion, he found great difficulty in writing his provisional Rule. *"I made visits to the seven churches, and I was going to visit in addition some churches of devotion to the most Holy Virgin. All of a sudden, without knowing why, I found myself deciding to consecrate the work to the Most Holy Heart of Mary. I went back home and I saw most clearly in a flash that I could envisage the whole matter in all its extent and in all its development in every detail. It was for me an inexpressible joy and consolation". (Letter to Father Desgenettes, Parish Priest of Our Lady of Victories church in Paris, 9 February 1844).* The reply from Propaganda Fide was slow in coming. Libermann made a pilgrimage to Loreto, in order to pray in the "holy house", the dwelling of Mary at Nazareth. On his return to Rome, he found a letter from Propaganda Fide, approving the project on the condition that he first was ordained a priest. He was ordained the 18th September 1841 at Amiens. On the 25th September 1841, Father Libermann, accompanied by Frédéric le Vavasseur and Eugène Tisserant, in the presence of Father Desgenettes, celebrated Mass in the church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris, and this occasion is considered to inaugurate the foundation of the *"Society of the Holy Heart of Mary"*.

Scripture Reading

Jn. 19: 25 – 27; *"Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son'. Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother'. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.*

Spiritual Rule of Life

SRL 89. *"In every facet of our lives, but particularly in our prayer, Mary is our model of willing obedience and of faithfulness. We offer her veneration and prayer so that we may, as she did, welcome within us the Holy Spirit who dwelt in her Immaculate Heart, and that he may be for us also the abundant source of our apostolic spirit".*

Libermann had received the love for Mary as one fruit of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at his Baptism. But throughout his life, he welcomed Mary into his home. We cannot have a profound

life with the Holy Spirit unless we love the Virgin Mary. What place does Mary have in my Spiritan missionary life? Have I really welcomed her into my home, in my daily life?

Prayer⁷

*Virgin and Mother Mary,
you were moved by the Spirit,
and welcomed the Word of life in the depth of your humble faith.
You were totally abandoned to the Eternal.
Help us to say our “yes” in our need, more urgent than ever, to make resound the Good News of Jesus.
You were filled with the presence of Christ,
and you brought joy to John the Baptist, making him leap for joy in his mother’s womb.
Thrilled with joy, you sang of the marvels of the Lord.
You remained firm at the foot of the Cross, with unshakeable faith,
and received the joyous consolation of the Resurrection.
You reunited the disciples while waiting for the Spirit
so that the evangelising Church could be born.
Obtain for us now the new ardour of those brought to life again,
so that we may bring to everyone the Gospel of Life.....
Star of the New Evangelisation,
help us to shine out through the witness of communion, of service,
of a burning and ardent faith, of justice, and of love for the poor,
so that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth
and that no part of it be deprived of its light.
Mother of the Living Gospel,
source of joy for the little ones, pray for us.
Amen. Alleluia!*

⁷ (Apostolic Exhortation, **Evangelii gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel** No.288; Summary at the end of the letter “**Be Joyful**” for the Year of Consecrated Life)

Day 4: The Power of the Spirit in Suffering and the Cross

The life of Libermann was marked by the cross. During the first semester of 1828, his father learned of his son's Baptism and wrote "a devastating letter" cursing him. This malediction was like the thrust of a lance, which attacked Libermann to his Jewish core, and which deeply affected his already weakened state of health. The evening before receiving the sub-diaconate, Friday 13 March 1829, in the room of his spiritual director Father Carbon, he suffered his first epileptic seizure, which prevented him receiving Orders. Other epileptic fits were to follow at St. Sulpice, at Issy, right up to and including his stay at Rennes with the Eudists. He suffered physically of course, (migraines, convulsions, fainting fits, and nervous tics). He also suffered in his morale (humiliations, denial of a student bursary, temptations to suicide [ND 1, 290], stress, fears and anguish [ND VII, 238]). This humiliating sickness closed the door to the priesthood, the vocation which he had desired so much, but it also made him belong more and more to Our Lord. Libermann saw grace in all of this. He was very happy to resemble the suffering Christ, as he wrote to a seminarian:

"Leave me in my dear poverty, my dear sickness, and a hundred more similar sufferings. Only sufferings can make me like Our Lord Jesus Christ Our Lord died for me, and I am almost overwhelmed by his goodness and his graces. I have only a very small share in his sufferings and in his cross. I hope that he will give me even more! Otherwise I would not be happy!" (LS 1, 17, 1830).

The Apostles Peter and John, were they not "totally happy to have been judged worthy of suffering for the Name [of Jesus]?" (Acts 6:41). Writing to his brother Samson and his sister-in-law, Libermann presents his "dear sickness" as a great treasure: "I can honestly assure you that my dear malady is like a great treasure to me.....I defy the world to find a man happier than I am..... Our Lord feeds the birds of the air, and so can he not find the means of feeding me as well? He loves me more than the birds in the sky....Whether or not I become a priest..... everything I am and all that I possess belongs to God and to no-one else apart from him" (LS 10, 1830)

Does this not echo the Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians?

Scripture Reading

1 Cor 2: 1 – 15: [2]... the only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the crucified Christ..... [7]The hidden wisdom of God which we teach in our mysteries is the wisdom that God predestined to be for our glory [10] These are the very things which God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God..... [12]Now instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts he has given us. [13]Therefore we teach, not in the way that philosophy is taught, but in the way that the Spirit teaches us: we teach spiritual things spiritually. [14] An unspiritual person is one who does not accept anything of the Spirit of God; he sees it all as nonsense; it is beyond his understanding because it can only be understood by means of the Spirit. [15] A spiritual man, on the other hand, is able to judge the value of everything...

Only the Spirit, Paraclete, Consoler, could have given Libermann his faith outlook on "his dear sickness", and the loving folly to bear this great burden in peace.

The Year of Consecrated Life

“When we walk without the Cross, when we build without the Cross, and when we say we belong to Christ without the Cross, we are not disciples of the Lord; we are worldly, we are bishops, priests, cardinals, popes, but not disciples of the Lord.”⁸

“To persevere as far as Golgotha, to experience being ripped apart by doubts, by being disowned, to rejoice in the wonder and stupor of Easter up to the manifestation of Pentecost and the evangelisation of the nations: such are the stages of joyful fidelity experienced all along one’s life, until the sign of martyrdom.”⁹

“Jesus presents us with consolation as a gift of the Spirit, the *Paraclete*, the Consoler, who consoles us in trials, and illuminates a hope which does not deceive us. That is how Christian consolation becomes comfort, encouragement, hope: it is the working presence of the Spirit”¹⁰
(Jn. 14: 16 – 17)

Spiritan Rule of Life

SRL 88: *In imitation of the life and teaching of Libermann..... a “practical union” – an habitual disposition of fidelity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit..... it is like an instinct of the heart for a person who, having made the sacrifice of self, has become “free ever after to devote himself completely to others and to bring them along to God”. Thus we endeavour to live every experience in the Spirit of God – our joys, our hardships, and our pain, the works we undertake in our zeal, and even our failures. (ND XIII 708)*

Prayer (CSJ c.3 v.15)

O most merciful, most sweet and most good Jesus,
I have the happiness to live following the example of your crucifixion.
You have drawn me wonderfully towards yourself.
You have shown this sign of mercy to a poor soul like me.
You have given me the precious gift of the faith:
please increase it, for this soul is still very weak, through my own fault.
Please, by this faith full of love, make me never live any more for myself,
but only for you and in you.
I sacrifice myself for your love,
for you have sacrificed yourself out of love for me.

⁸ Pope Francis: *Homily of Mass with the Cardinals*, Rome, 14 March 2013

⁹ Pope Francis: *Homily of the Mass to Seminarians and male and female Novices* Rome 7 July 2013

¹⁰ LRV p.12

Day 5: A Type of Ecstasy: Being Present to God for Five Years

Context

The father of Jacob cursed his son for becoming a Catholic, but the Father of Mercy, the God of his Fathers, manifested his blessing to him. He gave him exceptional mystical graces. A little after the malediction of his father, during the cross of epilepsy, Libermann lived in a kind of ecstasy, in a continual presence before the Triune God, and this for five years. He revealed this much later to Jerome, the brother of Father Ignace Schwindenhammer, in a letter dated 3rd August 1846. (*On the condition that you speak of this to nobody*) These important confidences clearly explain to us the secret of his spiritual influence, at Saint Sulpice, at Issy, and the confidence shown in him by the Sulpicians.

It was God who gave me everything. He dragged me along without asking my permission, and with a strength that I have never observed in any other person so far. The Lord helped me to stand up to my father, who wanted me to renounce my faith, but I renounced him rather than the faith. After that, the good Lord came uninvited to draw me out of myself and held all my faculties captive for about five years. During these years I never gave a thought to cultivating one virtue or another, but I just wanted to be with Him, which was a very easy thing to do. Throughout that time, I knew almost nothing about the things of the spirit.

PS. You must burn this letter three days after you receive it.

(Anth. pp72 – 73; ND VIII pp.202 - 204)

Scripture Reading

This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name.

Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3: 14 – 21)

The Year of Consecrated Life

“The fact of living in Christ..... enlarges our heart in the measure of his heart as the Son. The person who lives in his love is attached to the vine like the branch (cf. Jn. 15:1)..... To live in Jesus means being attached to Him, with Him, speaking with Him”¹¹

“Let us cultivate the contemplative dimension, even amid the whirlpool of the most urgent and pressing duties. The more mission calls you to go to existential peripheries, the more your heart must be united to that of Christ, full of mercy and love”¹²

“The fact of living with Jesus forms us to look on history with a contemplative vision which knows how to see and hear above all the presence of the Spirit”¹³

¹¹ Pope Francis: *Discourse to Participants of the International Congress of Catechesis* Rome 27 September 2013

¹² Pope Francis: *Homily to Seminarians and male and female Novices* Rome 7 July 2013

¹³ *Letter on Religious Life for the year of Consecrated Life*

Spirititan Rule of Life

SRL 5: *We live out our mission in willing obedience to the Holy Spirit, taking Mary as our model. This condition of habitual fidelity to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the “practical union” of which Libermann speaks (ND XIII pp.699 – 706). It is the wellspring of our apostolic zeal and leads us to being completely available and making a complete gift of ourselves.*

SRL 88: *In imitation of the life and teaching of Libermann, we too endeavour to put into practice this dynamic of prayer and activity that is at the heart of all Christian living, a “practical union” – an habitual disposition of fidelity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. “Practical union” is like an instinct of the heart for a person, who, having made the sacrifice of self, has become “free ever after to devote himself completely to others and to bring them along to God”. (ND XIII 708)*

SRL 99.5: *We need silence in order to live intimately with God, to welcome in ourselves the gifts of the Spirit and to love our confreres ever more deeply. Each community must arrange for places and times of silence in order to encourage prayer and recollection.*

Bagamoyo General Chapter

2.4: - *We have received a heritage of a spirituality founded on “the apostolic life” (SRL 3). Our fidelity to prayer sustains and strengthens our “practical union”. In addition we hear the call to interiority and to a greater integration between work and prayer.*

No-one can come to Christ, unless the Father who sent him draws him (Jn. 6.44). At what moments of my life have I felt this attraction of Our Lord, have I been seized by Christ? Which spiritual fruits does the Holy Spirit wish to renew in me? Which simple and concrete means can I take in order to grow in practical union?

Prayer (of Pentecost)

*“Lord, by the mystery of Pentecost,
you sanctify your Church in all peoples and all nations.
Pour out the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the immensity of the world,
and continue in the hearts of believers the work of love
which you undertook at the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel”.*
Amen.

Day 6: Libermann's Charism of being a Master of the Spiritual Life

Libermann had the gift of spiritually guiding hearts to Our Lord, whether working with the Bands of Piety in St. Sulpice and at Issy, or by means of his numerous spiritual letters. Many thought that he had acquired great knowledge of spiritual matters. Libermann on the contrary protested his personal poverty in such things, particularly on two occasions in 1846.

*"I believe that it has pleased God to give me a particular grace concerning the truths of salvation and the direction of certain souls. This is where the world is making a mistake in thinking of me what I am not, and what I have never been. The grace I have been given is purely for the benefit of others, and I gain nothing from it myself."*¹⁴

He wrote to Jerome, the brother of Fr. Ignace Schwindenhammer, in a letter of 3rd August 1846: *"Whenever I talked about virtues and perfection, there was no preliminary meditation, but as I spoke, truth became apparent and developed as I went along. At these times, I felt my mind enlightened and my will strengthened and I got the impression that it was not I who was speaking, but that God was using me to help others. I acquired nothing by my own efforts, neither from my intellect, my will or the growth in virtue: it was God who gave me everything."*¹⁵

Libermann bears witness to graces, gifts of the Spirit which gave light to his mind, and he presents here all the characteristic elements of a true charism:

* It is not an acquired science: *Whenever I talked about virtues and perfection, there was no preliminary meditation, I have acquired nothing*

* We are dealing here with a gift from the Holy Spirit: *"It has pleased God to give me"; "truth became apparent and developed as I went along. At these times I felt my mind enlightened"*

* A gift given for a particular moment of service to others: *I got the impression that I was not speaking, but that God was using me to help others*

* A gift for the good of others: *"The grace I have been given is purely for the benefit of others, and I gain nothing from it", "I believe that it has pleased God to give me a particular grace concerning the direction of certain souls."*

What Libermann is talking about here concerning the use of words, (conversations, talks, conferences), evidently also refers to all his spiritual letters. The gift was given by the Holy Spirit when he began to write. St. Paul speaks of the gift of preaching instruction in his letter to the Corinthians.

Scripture Reading: I Cor 12: 1 – 11:

[1] Now, my dear brothers, I want to clear up a wrong impression about spiritual gifts. [4] There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; [7] The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.

[8] One may have the gift of preaching with wisdom given him by the Spirit; another may have the gift of preaching instruction given him by the same Spirit; [10] to another, the gift of recognising spirits; [11] All these are the work of one and the same Spirit who distributes different gifts to different people just as he chooses.

Vatican II reminds us of the presence of these gifts and charisms from the Holy Spirit for the Church of today. Many times the Council cites 1 Cor. 12:7; *"The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose."* The Religious Missionary Vocation is a gift, a fundamental charism for all of us. But there is also a diversity of charisms among us.

¹⁴ To a Father Avignon, 21 June 1846 – LS IV pp 320 - 321

¹⁵ Anth. p72; ND VIII pp 202 - 204

Spiritual Rule of Life

SRL 51: *The call to the religious-apostolic way of life is a special gift of the Holy Spirit, inviting us to give ourselves completely in the Congregation, to the service of the Church.*

Bagamoyo General Chapter:

*2.6: We are a community of brothers endowed with different **charisms** , in our functions and different works. We aspire to live in a simple and transparent way, giving a prophetic witness.*

Certain confreres are called to live for “Justice and Peace”; others carry on Libermann’s charism of spiritual direction. Do we know how to welcome this diversity as a manifestation of the richness of the Holy Spirit? Instead, do we not rather judge those who do not have a share in our personal charism? Do we know how to encourage others in the exercise of our charisms?

Prayer (Lucien Deiss CSSp)

Holy Spirit,
you allot your gifts for the common good of the entire Church.
We ask of you that the diversity of charisms and ministries
strengthen the unity of the whole Body.
May each person in the Church
feel loved because of the particular work which he accomplishes.
Amen

Day 7: Libermann led by the Spirit: “The wind blows where it will”

Libermann experienced the unforeseeable liberty of the Holy Spirit, in the mystical graces which he had received, but even more on the road by which the Spirit led him – Saverne, St. Sulpice, Issy, Rennes, Rome, and finally Paris. Doors were closed, but others opened. His attacks of epilepsy barred his way to the priesthood. The Sulpicians cherished this simple acolyte as a spiritual animator in the Bands of Piety at St. Sulpice and later at Issy. The Eudists asked him to be their novice master at Rennes, but for him, that was a spiritual stoppage time. In February or March 1839, Le Vavas seur and Tisserant spoke to him of the urgent need to preach the Gospel to the Black slaves at Bourbon (Reunion) and St. Domingo (Haiti). On 28th October 1839, the Feast of the apostles Simon and Jude, Libermann felt a powerful attraction to “devote himself completely to the Work for the Blacks”¹⁶. After consulting various spiritual advisers, Libermann left Rennes definitively on 1st December 1839. A mere acolyte at the time, he left for Rome to present the project of the foundation of a missionary society!. In the Spring of 1840, 27th March, Francis Libermann sent to Propaganda Fide a little memorandum about the Institute he wanted to found. While he was waiting for an answer, he wrote his Commentary on St. John. “Francis Libermann at that time was experiencing in his soul definitive union with the Most Holy Trinity: the Commentary flowed out from this divine light!”¹⁷

*“The wind blows where it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:8). So it is with those born of the Holy Spirit. The divine Spirit blows where he wills. The will of my Father determines his divine breath. But the divine Spirit draws this life from himself and breathes where he wants to establish it, even in the mire and dirt of your evil nature, dead and destitute of everything. Secondly, those who receive this new birth do not see the divine Spirit coming; they recognise him only through the effects they experience in their souls, which become completely changed..... They do not know whence he has come nor where he is going; they do not see him either in his origin or in his end.*¹⁸

Scripture Reading

Acts 16: 6 – 10;

Paul and Timothy travelled through Phrygia and the Galatian country, having been told by the Holy Spirit not to preach the word in Asia. When they reached the frontier of Mysia they thought to cross it into Bithynia, but as the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them, they went through Mysia and came down to Troas. One night Paul had a vision: a Macedonian appeared and appealed to him in these words, ‘Come across to Macedonia and help us’. Once he had seen this vision we lost no time in arranging a passage to Macedonia, convinced that God had called us to bring them the Good News.

Paul experienced in his missionary life the sovereign liberty of the Spirit of Pentecost. It is the Spirit who planned the work, who closed some doors and opened others. This was the beginning of the evangelisation of Europe!

¹⁶ Memorandum of Tisserant - **Anth.** p. 103

¹⁷ **CSJ Introduction** p.17

¹⁸ **Anth.** pp. 119 – 120; **CSJ** , 122 - 124

We read again certain passages from our Spiritan Rule of Life (SRL)

SRL 57: *Called by God to the apostolic life and consecrated by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves by a free and public vow to **the following of Christ** in the single state, keeping without compromise for an additional reason the chastity proper to that state.*

SRL 60: *We live **our chastity in the single state** as a God-given gift, that enables us to be available for whatever the Holy Spirit would have us do to serve the Kingdom.*

SRL 76: *The Holy Spirit, who gives us his understanding, imprints the law of love upon our hearts, to help us discern the will of the Father. He gives us willing obedience so that we may conform ourselves to that will, **even should it take us where we “would rather not go”** (Jn.21:18).*

SRL 78: *We place our trust in the faithfulness of God, who has called us to the apostolic life. **The Holy Spirit has consecrated us by the vow of obedience to the following of Christ.** We freely and publicly take upon ourselves in the Congregation the obligation of obedience to the decisions of our legitimate superiors in conformity with the Rule of Life.*

The Roads of Mission

SRL 85: *It is the Spirit of Christ who leads us along missionary paths We are genuine apostles to the extent that, in our daily living, we entrust ourselves entirely to him.*

Bagamoyo General Chapter:

2.2 – *Called by the Father and formed by the Holy Spirit to be disciples of Jesus Christ, we are “set apart” in order to proclaim the Good News (**SRL 1**). We are a Community permanently in discernment, attentive to the signs of the Spirit.*

On what roads has the Holy Spirit already led me? A more fundamental question: Is my strongest desire to lead my own life or to allow myself to be led by the Holy Spirit?

Prayer of Libermann, in the middle of his Commentary on St. John¹⁹

*Blessed are those who hear this divine voice and follow it!
Most holy and adorable Spirit of my Jesus,
let me hear your loving voice.
Refresh me by your delightful breath.
Divine Spirit, I wish to be before you as a light feather,
so that your breath may carry me off where it wishes
and that I may never offer it the least resistance.
Amen.*

¹⁹ Anth. p. 120; CSJ 123

Day 8: Discussion with Nicodemus – Reborn of Water and the Spirit

“In the Springtime of 1840, on the 27th March, Francis Libermann, son of a rabbi, now a Catholic convert, handed in a small memorandum about an Institute which he wished to found. He waited for the decision of Propaganda Fide, while living in a poor garret in Rome. He said, “At the beginning of September, in order to be piously occupied”, he began to write his Commentary on St. John’s Gospel. He worked on it until mid November but was not able to finish it. He only managed to comment on the first twelve chapters. The seven hundred pages were written straight off, with hardly any alterations, using just a New Testament in Latin. It is a marvellous contemplation of the word of God, interrupted constantly with lyrical flashes of praise and prayer!

Francis Libermann wrote alone with God. Like the writings of the Fathers of the Church, it is an intuitive exegesis, one of prayer. There is no question of its being a rigorously scientific document, even for its day. Libermann knew no Greek, and could not consult original texts. He had no commentary with him, and in fact had hardly ever consulted one..... But Francis Libermann lived the interior experience of definitive union with the Most Holy Trinity. The Commentary grew out of this divine illumination!²⁰ What he wrote in Rome was to be a major theme in his spiritual letters.

“Jesus answered: I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Water is the figure and the Holy Spirit is the reality.....But after baptism, the Holy Spirit dwells in us in a vital and life-giving way. He is there to be the principle of all its movements; he becomes, as it were, the soul of our soul. It falls to us to let ourselves be touched and influenced by him and to follow his holy promptings as far as we can, according to grace and our dispositions. The more the Holy Spirit becomes the principle of the movements of our soul, the more he influences our sentiments and dispositions, the more we follow him, the more perfect also will be his life in us and so much more holy shall we be.

Without water and the Holy Spirit, one cannot enter the kingdom of God on earth, that is to say, into the Church, or into God’s kingdom in heaven, that is, into glory.²¹

Scripture Reading

John 3: 1 – 8:

There was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leading Jew, who came to Jesus by night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who comes from God; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him. Jesus answered,’ I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God’. Nicodemus said, ‘How can a grown man be born? Can he go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?’ Jesus replied: ‘I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: what is born of the flesh is flesh, what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit.’

²⁰ CSJ Introduction pp.16 - 17

²¹ Anth. pp.115 – 117; CSJ 118 – 119.

The Year of Consecrated Life

“The life in the Spirit has not yet been fulfilled: it is constantly open to mystery when it discerns how to know Our Lord, and how to see reality with reference to Him On the *via amoris* (*the way of love*) we advance in rebirth: the old man is born again in a new way. *And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here.* (2 Cor. 5:17)

Pope Francis gives a name to this rebirth: “This way has a name, a face: the face is that of Jesus Christ. He teaches us how to become saints. In the Gospel, he shows us the way: that of the Beatitudes (Mt. 5: 1 – 12)That is the way the saints took: those persons who, out of love for God, put no conditions to God in their lives”.²²

A person in the Consecrated Life is called to incarnate the Good News, is invited to the following of Christ who is the Resurrected Crucified One... Concretely, the Religious tries to copy Jesus’ style of life, to adopt his interior attitudes, to allow oneself to be invaded by his Spirit, to assimilate his surprising logic and his scale of values, and to share his risks and his hopes”.²³

A missionary heart is a heart which has known the joy of Christ’s salvation, and shares this joy as consoling, always conscious of human limitations. “The missionary knows that he himself must grow in his understanding of the Gospel, and in the discernment of the paths of the Spirit. Then, the missionary heart does not turn away from the possible good, even if it runs the risk of being sullied with mud on the way”.²⁴

Spiritual Rule of Life

SRL 45: *Fidelity to our vocation demands continual conversion to the Lord, and renewal in the Holy Spirit. These are two basic dispositions for our prayer life.*

A person is not reborn of water on a single occasion, at Baptism, but one has never finished being reborn in the Spirit. The Spirit is living water which spurts out of a source and which continually gathers us, and flows in us, and through us.

Prayer (of Pope St. John Paul II for the Jubilee of 2000 AD)

Spirit of Life,
through whom the Word was made flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary,
the silent and listening woman,
make us docile to the suggestions of your Love,
and always ready to welcome the signs of the times,
which you place on the roads of History.
Amen.

²² Pope Francis: *Not Supermen but Friends of God* Angelus Rome 1st November 2013

²³ Letter **LRV**, Year of Consecrated Life p.8

²⁴ Pope Francis: Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* 24 November 2013 n.45; **LRV** p.17

Day 9: “If Anyone is Thirsty..... He was speaking of The Spirit” (Jn. VII)

To the Samaritan woman, Jesus had revealed the gift of living water (Jn. 4: 10, 14). But when interpreting these verses about living water, Libermann does not speak of the Holy Spirit. Instead, commenting on the solemn invitation of Jesus in the temple, “If anyone is thirsty.....” he speaks at great length of the “extraordinary and perfect” gift of the Holy Spirit. He invites us joyfully to receive the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit, just as the first Christians did. He tells us to beware of a too human prudence, which can destroy spiritual enthusiasm and make our faith cold.

“By these rivers of living water which should come out of those who believe in Our Lord, he wished to speak of the Holy Spirit whom he was to give to all those who believed in Him. Our Lord speaks here of that extraordinary and perfect mission of the Spirit, who was already in a soul by Baptism and by the perfect faith of the same soul. Our Lord develops, extends and renders perfect his gifts and favours, and does so as a result of this particular mission. These gifts were greatly developed in the early days of the Church, where they were very common and produced countless conversions. They poured over nearly all of the Christians like a river, and even today all the saints have had similar great graces..... extremely well developed gifts and graces such as Our Lord promises here, and such as the early Christians had.

Thus, Our Divine Master is always the same towards all those souls who come to him seeking perfection. But these souls, unfortunately, are rare down the ages because souls use too much human reasoning and thus achieve very little. Some are too analytical regarding spiritual things, they explain over much, and in actual fact it is rare to find someone acting fervently and with that simplicity shown by our ancestors and parents in the faith..... Spiritual directors ceaselessly preach moderation in all things spiritual. But instead, they should rather allow the souls they are directing to run in the ways of faith, and let them take off and fly in the joy of the faith. These spiritual advisers should instead fear infinitely more the mistake of deadening the souls in their charge, and of stopping this joy which the faith gives, because the latter seems to them to be acting imprudently.... It is almost impossible not to commit imprudences and excesses in the great fervour experienced by beginners in the spiritual life..... The directors must therefore make sure not to stop such happy leaps of joy coming from grace....”²⁵

Scripture Reading (Jn. 37 – 39)

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood there and cried out: ‘If any man is thirsty, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me!’ As scripture says: From his breast shall flow fountains of living water. He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Spiritual Rule of Life

SRL 6: *We are **dedicated to the Holy Spirit**, author of all holiness and “source of the apostolic spirit (ND. X, 568)*

SRL 9: *The Spirit pours the Father’s love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). It is this love that produces **apostolic zeal** in us, shown by a powerful desire to see the same love established in the hearts of all people*

Bagamoyo General Chapter

*1.2: "Called as we are to become **fervent in the Spirit** (Rom. 12: 11) the risen Christ sends us out into a globalised world".*

Jesus said, "If any one is thirsty..... " Am I thirsty? From which fountains do I prefer to drink?

The Year of the Consecrated Life – The Questions of Pope Francis

" Look into the depths of your heart, into your own personal depths, and ask yourself: do I have a heart which desires something great, or a heart lulled to sleep by the things of this earth? Has my heart kept itself open to searching for something, or have I let it become stuffed to the brim by things, for that way my heart atrophies. God is waiting for you, he is searching for you, but what is your response? Do I take stock of the situation in which my soul finds itself? Or rather do I sleep? Do I believe that God is waiting for me, or rather does such a truth become merely empty words?

"An authentic faith always implies a deep desire to change the world. Here is the question we must ask ourselves: have we a grand vision and great joy? Are we also bold? Do we have great dreams? Does zeal devour us (Ps. 69: 10)? Instead, are we mediocre, and content ourselves with our apostolic experiments as it were in a laboratory?²⁶

Prayer of Libermann

"Let he who is thirsty come and drink.

My Lord Jesus, I hear your appeal, for you are calling to me.

Lord, here I am. I am thirsty, my adorable Jesus.

I am so thirsty that I feel faint.

For I am as it were completely empty, burnt up interiorly.

Take me to yourself, and give me to drink from your fountain of salvation....

so that there will be nothing except you within me.

Give me this grace, my most sweet, most lovable, most loving and well beloved Jesus, so that I may only live with your life, and in your life.

With the same life with which you live in the bosom of your Father, you live in your elect.

Thus may it be.

Amen."

²⁶ Pope Francis: *Mass for the Canonisation of Fr. Peter Favre, 3rd January 2014*