



## CCEE SYMPOSIUM

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**HE WALKED BY THEIR SIDE (Luke 24:15)**

### **Accompanying young people**

*to freely respond to Christ's call*

28 – 31 MARCH 2017

#### **HOMILY**

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Archbishop of Westminster  
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The first reading in our Mass this evening is one of the most beautiful and evocative passages in the Bible. These words of Ezekiel flow throughout the Biblical texts. They are echoed in the words of Jesus as he proclaims: 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me. Let him come and drink!' (Jn 7:37). They appear in the Book of Revelation where we read this: 'Then the angel showed me the river of life, rising from the throne of God and of the Lamb and flowing crystal-clear down the middle of the city street. On either side of the river were the trees of life' (Rev 22:1-2).

Ezekiel's vision of an issue of water flowing from the Temple came to him on a day when the Temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed. It is, then, a vision of great hope, a vision of a life-giving stream, that widens and deepens until it makes wholesome even the sea itself. On the banks of the great river stand trees that are not supremely fruitful but whose leaves bring about the healing of the people.

The Gospel of John gives us the interpretation of this vision: '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' (Jn 7:38-39). Thus we can readily see that the side of the Temple, of which Ezekiel speaks, is indeed the side of Jesus, from which flowed forth blood and water (Jn 19:34), two of the three witnesses about which John speaks in his First Letter. The third and invisible witness is the Holy Spirit, poured out afresh from the wounds of Christ (1 Jn 5:7-8).

I have long been fascinated by a detail to be found in most images of Christ crucified. I am no doctor, but I know that the heart is situated on the left side of our chest. Yet in all classical crucifixes, the wound through which the heart of Jesus is pierced is to be seen on the right hand side of his body. It is the visual expression of this same text: that the saving waters, the gift of the Holy Spirit, flow from the right side of the Holy Temple, which is his Body.

From the very first moments of his conception, which we have just celebrated, the life of Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is as if he being is filled to overflowing with that presence and power. Today's Gospel is an example. It is in the power of that Holy Spirit that Jesus cures the sick man and, in doing so, begins the process whereby he identifies himself with the new Temple. The person of Jesus is like a jar, filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit. It is only when this alabaster jar is shattered, during his Passion, that its content and fragrance fills the whole house. And that house is, in the first place, the Church.

Indeed we can say that the last breath of Jesus is the first breath of the Church. As he breathes his last, the Church breathes in the new life of the Holy Spirit that is to flow from her, giving healing and life to

all who come to those waters. These words are engraved above the baptismal font at the Lateran Basilica: 'This is the wellspring that cleansed the whole world – having its source in the wound of Christ' (Fons hic est qui totum diluit orbem sumens de Christi vulnere principium).

Today, as we strive to live in the Church by that same Spirit, there is a solemn warning that we do well to heed.

It was spoken by the future Patriarch Ignatius IV: 'Without the Holy Spirit, God is far away, Christ stays in the past, the Gospel is a dead letter, the Church simply an organisation, authority a matter of domination, mission a matter of propaganda, liturgy no more than an evocation, Christian living a slave morality. But with the Holy Spirit, the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth pangs of the kingdom, the risen Christ is there, the Gospel is the power of life, mission is a Pentecost, the liturgy is both memorial and anticipation, and human action is deified' (Bishop Ignatius Hazim, Address to the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, 1968).

As we ponder and explore the theme of this Symposium – accompanying young people – we remember that our task is always to help them discern the will of God for them, the greatness to which our loving Father is summoning them. As Pope Benedict said, we are made not for comfort, but for greatness. Our stance, then, is always one of being open to the Holy Spirit, of wanting, in humble obedience, to discern the promptings of that Spirit and to respond, step by step, to that challenging call.

The Spirit is first poured out in the act of creation in which is first written the basic grammar of our human nature. And it is, as I said this afternoon, a grammar of gift. We who receive life as a gift, find the fulfilment of our lives when we give our lives as a gift, a gift made in faithfulness and love. Yet we are also fallen creatures. Left to ourselves we lose our way in the multitude of options and attractions which confront us. We stand in need, then, of receiving the drama of our salvation, and that drama is so vividly described in that stream of water, flowing from the right side of the Temple, becoming a great torrent of love, which brings healing and growth to all who are caught in its embrace. The salvation offered to us in Jesus is for the healing of our nature so that we may indeed attain the fulfilment for which we have been made: the fulfilment that comes with the utter, unrestricted gift of ourselves.

This is the heart of every vocation. Today we strive to understand the dynamic of the Holy Spirit at work in young lives, and to understand our part in serving that dynamic. At this moment, during this Mass, we open ourselves entirely to that same Spirit, here as we stand at the foot of the Cross and partake afresh in the outpouring of the Spirit from the wounds of Jesus, held before us in this Sacrifice.

We pray again the words of the ancient prayer:

Anima Christi, sanctifica me,  
Corpus Christi, salva me,  
Sanguis Christi, inebria me,  
Aqua lateris Christi, lava me.  
Soul of my Saviour sanctify my breast,  
Body of Christ be thou my saving guest,  
Blood of my Saviour bathe me in thy tide,  
Wash me with water flowing from thy side. Amen.