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Intercession: Spiritual Discernment

■ **Dariusz Jeziorny**

Intercession is the action of intervening on behalf of another in front of the Lord. That means that people who intercede present God the problems of a person in need. The most important thing in such an action is to have a compassionate heart and to love your neighbor. But friendly words are not enough. St. Paul says: “our gospel came to you not only in words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with great effect” (1 Thes 1,5). This power is visible in various charisms we serve interceding, i.e. healing, prophecy, word of knowledge etc. A gift of spiritual discernment is crucial in such a ministry. It allows people to understand the nature of a problem a person may have, and how to pray. It also gives them an opportunity to verify that the understanding coming from the prophetic word and word of knowledge is true. But at a certain point, one must ask what we are to do if asked to intercede and we were not given such a charism by the Holy Spirit. Can we go on? Or, should we not start the intercessory prayer?

St. Ignatius of Loyola who used to be a master in spiritual discernment gave us several rules which can be very helpful for people who do not have the charism of spiritual discernment but would like to discern spirits. He lived in the sixteenth century, and there were no teachings on charisms present in the Church then. In his time, it was much more important to be subservient to the Pope than anything else. These rules of spiritual discernment are available in his Spiritual Exercises, numbers 313-336. I would like to present three of them to show how well we can be assisted by St. Ignatius in spite of the old-fashioned language.

Rule 12 states: “The enemy acts like a woman, in being weak against vigor and strong of will. Because, as it is the way of the woman when she is quarrelling with some man to lose heart, taking flight when the man shows her much courage: and on the contrary, if the man, losing heart, begins to fly, the wrath, revenge, and ferocity of the woman is very great, and so

without bounds; in the same manner, it is the way of the enemy to weaken and lose heart, his temptations taking flight, when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things opposes a bold front against the temptations of the enemy, doing diametrically the opposite. And on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself commences to have fear and lose heart in suffering the temptations, there is no beast so wild on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in following out his damnable intention with so great malice”. Knowing that such a comparison has nothing to do with political correctness of today, I decided to quote St. Ignatius. His observation taken from the everyday life of his times is very helpful for each intercessor in many situations. When someone is in need and sees no fruit in his or her prayer, the temptation to give up the spiritual battle comes quickly. It does not matter if the enemy wants to frighten us by various strange behaviours of a person prayed for or to discourage us by showing no sign of improvement. It is still the same struggle for a poor person who is not able to do it on their own. St. Ignatius’ rule says nothing else than “go on” if you are certain you do not pray against God’s will.

Sometimes we are not successful in our intercession because the causes of weakness or illness are hidden and we do not know exactly what to pray for. St. Ignatius says something very interesting about such a situation, “Likewise, he [satan] acts as a licentious lover in wanting to be secret and not revealed. For, as the licentious man who, speaking for an evil purpose, solicits a daughter of a good father or a wife of a good husband, wants his words and persuasions to be secret, and the contrary displeases him much, when the daughter reveals to her father or the wife to her husband his licentious words and depraved intention, because he easily gathers that he will not be able to succeed with the undertaking begun: in the same way, when the enemy of human nature brings his wiles and persuasions to the just soul, he wants and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to his good Confessor or to another spiritual person



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Intercession: Gifts and charisms in service *(continued)*

that knows his deceits and evil ends, it is very grievous to him, because he gathers, from his manifest deceits being discovered, that he will not be able to succeed with his wickedness begun” (Rule 13). When we face such a situation we are called to renew a dialog with a person prayed for to discover more. Of course we must be very careful and delicate because it very often touches the question of her/his sin. Sometimes a person is not able to say anything more concrete because of various reasons. Then the only thing that remains is to pray in tongues in hope that during such a prayer the Holy Spirit will give us deeper understanding of the situa-

tion. It is very frequent that we receive some insight while praising and worship the Lord in tongues. The Holy Spirit is always helpful for those who seek Jesus’ will.

Usually, at the end of every intercession we invoke the Holy Spirit over a person we pray with. It is important not to leave her/him without the empowerment for everyday life. But it is particularly important to invoke the Holy Spirit to the weakest spheres of this person’s life. St. Ignatius teaches in his Rule 14: *“Likewise, he behaves as a chief bent on conquering and robbing what he desires: for,*

as a captain and chief of the army, pitching his camp, and looking at the forces or defences of a stronghold, attacks it on the weakest side, in like manner the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us”. That is the reason why it is good to get to know the weakest point of our defence against evil. However, we are not the followers of the Freudian psychology that says that the knowledge about a problem means solving the problem. So people need to be both aware of their weaknesses and equipped from above. There is no chance to survive in everyday life counting on our own will and perfectionism.

The Ignatian spirituality gives people a lot of assistance. It allows us to work out the attitude of a discerning heart and is useful practice for one’s life. Persons ministering as intercessors also receive a wonderful tool that is helpful for serving people better. I gave only several examples but the possibilities are much wider. Exercising the rules of spiritual discernment, you may be more effective even without a charism which is always a grace. The rules just say that spiritual warfare exists and it does not matter whether or not one is aware of this fact. Having some assistance how to move in the spiritual world of the Charismatic Renewal can be more effective in its services of intercession. 



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Love in Action: Healing

■ **Christof Hemberger**

Inspired by the topic of the “Love in Action” ICCRS conference held in Kkottongnae in 2009, I am writing about the importance of love and the use of charisms in our lives and ministry.

Jesus calls us to a life that is focused on a heart attitude of love. Asked about the most important commandment he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God—with all your heart, soul and strength. And you shall love your brother/sister as yourself.”

Jesus made it very clear that love shall be the motivation of all our actions. Of course most importantly, love for God. Our actions shall be rooted in our relationship to God. He is the one who deserves all glory and honour. We shall live and work for this goal: to live and work according to His will and to give glory to Him alone. Secondly it is the love towards our brothers and

sisters that shall be our motivation. It is quite easy if we are living in easy-going relationships, but it gets more complicated if we end up in a situation with someone we do not like or know very well. The third aspect of love is our love for ourselves. Jesus calls us not to neglect our own inner being. Our ministry and our actions shall not become too big next to the needs of our body, spirit and soul!

With His answer about the most important commandment Jesus pointed out what it means to live according to God’s will: Surrender your will and give up your rights (love the Lord and His will more than anything else) and take care of your brother and sister (whatever this means in a certain situation) as well as yourself!

To be honest — knowing myself I have to admit that this is a fact that I tried to live throughout



my whole life as a committed Christian. But I cannot count the many times when I had to realize that I failed. So, I raise the question: How can we live up to this high ideal? How can we fulfill Jesus' commandment in our daily life? It is not by our own strength, power and might! We cannot and will not manage, but it is by the Spirit—God Himself offers His help to us in pouring out His Spirit and charisms in our lives!

Charisms are not given in order to make our lives more comfortable or as a kind of a reward from God because someone is a very humble or spiritual person. The charisms are given in order to be used to build up the Kingdom of God. And we know: The Kingdom of God is all about love since the King is Love. So, the charisms are given to serve Love. Let us not forget this simple truth. The gift of healing for example is not given because someone has reached a higher level of holiness—and the gift of interpretation of tongues is not a sign for high-level-disciples! They are given to be used in obedience to the will of the Lord. In being a humble servant to the will of God you can see the disciple's respect and love towards our Lord. In being a humble servant to the will of God we will also show our respect and love towards our brother and sister—whoever this might be at any given moment of our lives.

I want to make it clear at this point: No one but God Himself can truly look into our heart and can "read" and see our true motivation. Is it in order to give glory to God and to show love to the people around me, or is it in order to present myself as a "good disciple/leader/man of God?" Is it because I am obedient and humble or because I want to show how gifted I am? Is it because I love and respect the other one or because I want to feel better and for this reason that I do some merciful act? Is it love that has become active or is it my humanity that reveals itself?

Seeking His will and living according to His will is what we are called to. Everyone knows this by heart I suppose. But very often I end up asking myself: "What led me to this decision?". Was it me and my very own motivation, or was it truly love that became active? What is the right

deed of love in a certain situation? What is the right word of love in this moment? Is it better to approach a person or to be silent? Is it better to do this, or that? The charisms of discernment, wisdom and knowledge become very important in answering this question.


The Holy Spirit did not give us charisms only to work for and within the Kingdom of God (healing, signs and wonders, prophecy, etc.) he also gave charisms (discernment, wisdom, etc.) to discern how and when to use them!

In letting love become active in our lives, it is important to focus on two aspects:

First, seek love!

Focus on loving the Lord with all of your heart, soul and strength. He is the "great I am" and Emmanuel, "God with us". He deserves all of your love and honour, if only because he is Love. Let us also focus on loving the brothers and sisters. Our family, our neighbours, our colleagues, the person who sits in the bus every day, the man in front of us in the queue in the supermarket, and the abandoned one who does not fit into our society. Sometimes this will be easy, sometimes it not. It is God Himself who will pour out His love into our hearts—in order to pass it on to others! That is why it is so important to live a close and personal relationship with God when we try to reach out to others and share our love and life with them—we can only share true love when we receive true love.

Secondly, seek the charisms!

Do not try to express love by your own strength or how you think it is right. Seek the will of the Lord and use the charisms in discerning and fulfilling it! Be open to His lead, His guidance and encouragement. And most of all: be open to His love because this shall be our heart attitude and motivation! 

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QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission is headed by Bp. Joseph Grech (Australia) and is formed by Fr. Peter Hocken (Austria), Fr. Francis Martin (USA), and Dr. Mary Healy (USA). The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission is in consultation with theologians from around the world.

Baptized in the Spirit, more than once?

To answer this question let us consider the case of Mary the Mother of Jesus, who was with the disciples in Jerusalem praying “in one accord” for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). In a catechesis on this passage (May 28, 1997), Pope John Paul II noted that the Holy Spirit had already descended upon Mary many years earlier at the Annunciation, bringing about her divine motherhood. Having already experienced the gift of the Spirit, now in the upper room “she was in a condition to appreciate [this gift] more than anyone.” Indeed, her experience up to that time “made her ardently long for the Spirit’s coming.” Thus, the Pope said, she prayed in “deep communion with the Apostles (and the others) for the gift of the Spirit for herself and for the community.” Why would she need the gift of the Spirit for herself, since she was already filled with the Spirit? First, the pope says, “it was appropriate that the first outpouring of the Spirit upon her... should be repeated and reinforced.” Secondly, several weeks earlier, at the foot of the cross, Mary had received a new mission: to be Mother of all Jesus’ disciples — and this new mission called for a renewed gift of the Spirit.

John Paul II’s references to Mary in the upper room provide a helpful basis for reflecting on what might be called supplemental baptisms in the Spirit.

Mary could appreciate the gift — more than anyone

Many people who are baptized in the Holy Spirit can testify to unique and unrepeatable encounter with the Spirit, one that casts their whole life into a “before” and “after.” In this sense it is a unique event, like Pentecost in the early Church. However, this does not preclude the possibility of renewed comings of the Spirit, as also occurred in the early Church (Acts 4:31). By analogy, we can imagine that the Blessed Mother’s whole outlook in the upper room was deeply conditioned by that baptism she received when the Spirit came upon her as a young girl at Nazareth, and by the fruit brought forth by the Spirit (Jesus!) that illuminated her entire life. Clearly, the Annunciation was the greatest before-and-after outpouring of the Spirit of all time. Yet it is precisely from her deep appreciation of this personal experience that Mary prays “with ardent longing” for the Spirit to come in another history-making episode — Pentecost. Anyone who has been baptized in the Holy Spirit is prepared by personal experience to appreciate the utter need and joyful expectation of the


Spirit to bring about the next step in their life.

Mary had an ardent longing for what comes next

Baptism in the Spirit so heightens a person’s desire for God that further “seekings, askings, and knockings” become a normal accompaniment to life in the Spirit. The prophet Isaiah expressed this pattern of needfulness when he said, “morning after morning he opens my ear than I might hear” (Isa 50:4). The longings aroused in us by the Spirit are not disappointed, because “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words... according to the will of God” (Rom 8:27), so that we can indeed count on God’s wherewithal for realizing his plan.

Jesus too implies a dynamic like this within himself when he says to his disciples at the Samaritan well, “my food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). Jesus’ life and ministry depended on the power of the Spirit, who rested on Him as a full and continuous anointing. When the Spirit cultivates an ardent desire in us to “accomplish God’s work,” it requires divine help in ways we can’t predict — coming from deep within the mystery of God. We need the power of God to do God’s work, and that power is the Holy Spirit outpoured! Whether this astonishing power comes continuously, or in bursts or chunks or streams throughout our lives, is in the end something that “pertains to God” of which no one else knows “except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11).

Mary was concerned for future fruitfulness

God’s will is that our life in the Spirit be immensely fruitful, bearing the divine type of fruit that “remains” (John 15:1-17). The only means to fruitfulness in this world, however, is the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, acting from within. The ideal way to express our desire to bear fruit according to God’s will is thus by a continuous openness to the Holy Spirit. Before Pentecost, Jesus himself had told the disciples to expect the Spirit to come upon them in power (Acts 1:8). The Virgin Mother was with them, and as John Paul II says, led the others in a devoted prayer of expectancy, anticipating the fruitfulness of her next mission — the one that continues today. May all of us who continue to pray as she did never doubt God’s willingness to supply the gift of his Spirit by whatever cycles of refreshment are needed, since “he gives his Spirit without measure” (John 3:34). 

ICCRS receives many questions about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and we do our best to answer as many as we can with the help of the ICCRS Doctrinal Commission members who kindly take the time to check their references and credit their sources. The questions and answers featured in this section of the Leadership Formation each issue are selected for their relevancy and helpfulness overall for those involved in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org