

CWL Executive Talk: February 2017 Fruits of the Holy Spirit

It is my pleasure once again to share some words with you as you begin your executive meetings in Toronto. Unfortunately, I am unable to be with you - but I will be there in spirit for sure. Your president asked me to share some insights with you concerning our theme: **Inspired by the Spirit, Women respond to God's Call**. This is quite a theme.....and it entails many points that can lead to a discussion or discourse in themselves.

Inspired by the **Spirit**. Of course we are referring to the Holy Spirit. For many the Holy Spirit is rather nebulous....we think of flames of fire, a dove, a wind, as the scriptures tell us, but who is the Holy Spirit and how does the Holy Spirit fit into our lives? How can we be inspired by the Spirit and what kind of inspiration is it?

I know for me personally, the Holy Spirit has never really been a big part of my spiritual life. In most cases I pray to Jesus, and can better relate to Jesus, his life, his experiences, his interaction with others, his story.....and this helps me discern my own actions and way of life. However, I have been involved with some Charismatic groups, and I must say, that they have inspired me by their devotion, enthusiasm, intense prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit. I know that I was fortunate to be in Rome during a huge gathering of people of the Charismatic spirituality, and I shared in special masses, and talks given on healing, on the gifts of the Spirit, on works of the Spirit and on communities inspired by the Holy Spirit giving service in the Church. But I must say that the Holy Spirit in my prayer life....has never been such a big part.

Who is the **Holy Spirit**? Well we are taught that the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Blessed Trinity, a mystery. We also know that the Holy Spirit animates the Church, or brings life to the Church. I have often noted that the Holy Spirit is our sharing in the life and love of God. The Holy Spirit is the exchange of love between the Father and the Son, this holy exchange which we are invited to share....and we enter into it through our baptism. The Holy Spirit is the pneuma(Gk) - or the animator of the works of the Church. It was the Holy Spirit to whom the bishops prayed each day at the Second Vatican Council. It is to the Holy Spirit that the cardinals pray when they are in conclave for the election of a new Pope. It is to the Holy Spirit we pray, when we seek healing, and strength.

I have often spoken of the **gifts** of the Holy Spirit and we all know them, since they are taught to us in a special way for Confirmation. Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Piety, Counsel, Fortitude or Strength and Fear of the Lord, or Wonder and Awe before God. These gifts we receive at Baptism, but they come alive and are nourished in Confirmation where we know they will assist us as young adults into our faith journey into the world. As members of the Catholic Women's League, are hearts

are always open to these gifts and we know that they guide us and assist us in our meetings, our workshops, our good works, and our decisions. So the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not new to us, nor are they a stranger to us. I guess we can say that these gifts inspire us ... to be like Jesus in all that we do, since it is the same Spirit within Jesus that guided him, and the same Spirit that came upon Mary and the apostles at Pentecost and inspired and strengthened them.

But my talk with you today, does not deal directly with the gifts of the Holy Spirit but more with the **Fruits** of the Holy Spirit which we find St. Paul describing in his letter to the Galatians. *“But the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”*. When we listen to these, we see how they are in some ways **extensions** of the gifts of the Holy Spirit but in a sense also, how they give **direction** to us in how we are to live our lives.

For this talk, I would like to highlight certain **fruits** of the Holy Spirit and see how these both inspire and challenge us in our work as members of the league and as Catholic women in our world today. I know that as a man, sometimes this might be a bit strange for me, but I will do my best....as I see these fruits or qualities manifest also in my own life.

Let's look at **LOVE** for the first one. The love that St. Paul is speaking of is the love called **“agape”** in Greek. This love is the self-giving love that gives freely without asking anything in return, and does not consider the worth of its object. *Agape* is more a love by choice than *philos*, which is love by chance; and it refers to the will rather than the emotion. *Agape* describes the unconditional love God has for the world. Paul describes love in 1 Corinthians 13: Love is patient, love is kind, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

This type of self-giving is really the heart of this love. It is not just feeling good - it is feeling **for** the good of the other. It requires a decision or a will, and it also contains some **sacrifice**. How does this fit with us, as members of the League? We all love the league, that means loving not just the emblem of the league, or the motto of the league, or the history of the league - which can make us feel good - but we love the members of the league....who are our sisters, made in the image of Jesus.... and who work with us side by side, sometimes in challenging ways, as we seek to build a better world together.

How about this loving in your life and relationship with other members of the league? We know that we don't always **LIKE** everyone, but with agape, can we love everyone, as Jesus did? At least make sure that what we do is for the interest and

good of the other..... and not for our own personal self gain or gratification. This is **not** easy..... it requires a true decision and a willingness on our part.....to try and see the good in everyone, and to seek to encourage that good through our cooperation. It would be good for us to share this reflection in our daily prayer as we look at the end of a day and do a little examination of our conscience, and see how we interacted with one another during that day, even with our families, and was there a sense of **agape** in our cooperation or interaction. Loving everyone as Jesus did, is an inspiration and fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The second fruit I want to share with you is **JOY**. (Greek chara) Well this is really something. Joy is at the heart of the Good News which we share. I bring you 'tidings of great joy' - said the angel. What kind of joy is recognizable in our lives? I would like to share an experience I had with Pope St. John Paul II. I had my first interview with him as the new bishop of Thunder Bay. We sat together and were alone in his office. It was a bit frightening for me initially. I asked him for some advice for a new bishop. He said, Advice from the Pope, he noted that I should be close to my priests, and that I should pray with my people - but he said - most importantly - make sure you do everything with **JOY!** A joy in your heart for the Lord and for his Church. He was talking about this fruit of the Spirit.

We all know people of joy. They are wonderful to be around. They somehow have a special grace or energy that gives them a zest for life. Can we ask the Lord to give us this joy in our work as members of the league? Whether it be at a long drawn out meeting, at a frustrating situation, or at a party at a convention. Can joy be a part of who we are and what we demonstrate in our sharing? Joy is not only fun but it is also infectious. Would you like to infect people with Joy? Joy keeps our hearts full and enthused about God and one another and the League.

The next attribute or fruit I wish to share with you is **PATIENCE**. Isn't that a gift that we all can use more of? In Greek the word is makothumia. Patience includes the concepts of forbearance, long-suffering, and the willingness to bear wrongs patiently. The greek word is made from two words: markros - which means long....and thumos which means temper. So to have a long temper - means to be lenient, to be long suffering, to have forbearance or fortitude. It describes the capacity to continue to **bear up** under difficult circumstances, not with a passive complacency, but with a **hopeful** fortitude that actively resists weariness and defeat.

We all can use more patience. And especially in our lives, with ourselves, with our families and with one another. I think of the patience of Jesus with his disciples: "have I been with you all this time and you still do not understand!" Jn. Even at times Jesus, seemed to be a bit frustrated with his followers - yet he was patient and knew

that in the end - his message would ultimately touch their hearts and they would come around.

I guess as members of the league - we too need this gift in a special way in our interaction with one another and in our approach to our own selves. Sometimes we can become **impatient** even with ourselves and we can lose heart and feel defeated. As the definition said: having patience means to have a **hopeful fortitude** that actively resists weariness and defeat. Patience is needed in our talk, in our actions, in our thoughts and in our response to things. I know that my first bishop taught me to be patient, especially when people put certain demands on you for a quick reply. Tell them you must pray and sleep on the subject so the Lord will give you good judgement to discern the proper course. And you know, it really works! As we pray this weekend, let us ask for an increase in patience in our lives.....which will keep us calmer, more at ease, and more joyful in the work we are to do. It will help us enjoy our work and it will ward off any sense of defeat or failure, or inadequacy within us.

The next virtue or fruit is **KINDNESS**. In Greek the word is *chrestotes* or *benignitas* in Latin. Kindness is acting for the good of people regardless of what they do. Kindness is goodness in action. In the Greek it means to be **friendly** to others, especially with regards to rulers, and governors or those in authority. One scholar has noted that when the word *kindness* is applied to interpersonal relationships, it conveys the idea of being **adaptable** to others. Rather than harshly requiring everyone else to adapt to his own needs and desires, when *kindness* is working in a believer, he seeks to become adaptable to the needs of those who are around him. Kindness is doing something and not expecting anything in return. Kindness is respect and helping others without waiting for someone to help one back. There are many ways to define kindness, what would you say? Is it acting for the good of another, or being friendly with others, or being adaptable for others? It can mean different things for us.... St. Paul saw kindness as that fruit where the Holy Spirit removes abrasive qualities from the character of one under His control.

If we are open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit then we are in a sense, under His control - and kindness should be a natural thing for us. In our relationship with others - kindness is always recognized by those around us - and we are seldom criticized for being kind to others. It is natural that this should be a **hallmark** for us as women of the league. If nothing else we can be kind to one another - even if we don't always see eye to eye on a subject or issue.

I have seen my share of nastiness when people feel they have been wronged by someone and are upset. And the nastiness never leads to a positive result in the end. It breeds anger, and ideas of revenge. Kindness counteracts this - but our hearts

must be open to it. We pray for kindness in our hearts as the Holy Spirit inspires us and takes control - so we can respond as people of faith and with love to one another.

The next fruit of the Spirit is **GENTLENESS** - in the Greek it is called: *praudtes* or in latin - *modestia*. What does gentleness mean in our day today? Pope Francis often notes that in dealing with one another there should be a gentleness in our approach, a gentleness in our words and actions, because power and force do little to convince people or to change minds or attitudes. For Pope Francis, gentleness and patience go hand in hand. Sometimes people see gentleness as **meekness**. This is not an indication of a weakness, but more of having power and strength under control. For people in authority or in leadership positions, this virtue is very important in dealing with others, especially when they don't see or do things the way we expect or explained.

I remember when I was a camp director one summer, working with many young teenage volunteers and with poor families who came to the camp for a week of summer fun, I would at times become a little exasperated with the volunteers (you see I was very organized and had everything programmed) - they wouldn't complete their tasks or jobs and were busy with the families and playing with the kids etc. A kind priest who was the chaplain there, reminded me that I must be gentle with these young people, so as not to discourage them in their spirit. They were learning as I was learning, and since we were learning together, and since I was the **leader**, I had to be the example of gentleness in guiding and instructing them in their duties and of course, supporting them with positive feedback in their good works. Do you see this as a gift you share with your sisters in the league?

As St. Paul said to the Galatians: "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who **live by** the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted". In another text St. Paul says to the Ephesians: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love". These guidelines that St. Paul gave to his communities, were directives for action, and in the early church there was much confusion, sometimes animosity, and in some cases direct defiance for the teachings. Yet St. Paul, as strong and heroic as he was, encouraged gentleness in dealing with one another. This was the way the teachings of the Good News would touch their hearts and not just their minds. We as members of the league, want also to touch the hearts of our sisters and to encourage others to share with us.

Again, as women of faith and women in leadership, I know we can sometimes become uneasy or distressed by the actions of our members, by their lack of initiative and sometimes by their very inaction, but the fruit of **Gentleness** of the Holy Spirit must guide us. As I am sure you can recall, times when a gentle gesture touched the heart of

someone, or caused them to reconsider, or to be more open and understanding, all because you were gentle to them.

The final fruit I wish to share with you today is that of **PEACE**. In the Greek - eirene or latin Pax. Peace from the Holy Spirit or from Christ, we say 'Go in the peace of Christ or peace be with you' - Peace is the result of resting in a relationship with God. Peace is more than an absence of conflict. It is the **tranquil state** of a soul fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of what so ever sort that is. It is a kind of **equilibrium** that comes from trusting that everything is in the hands of God.

Can you have peace in your heart when your neighbour wins a million dollars and you both bought your tickets at the same time? Can you have peace in your heart when you know that the deadline is coming for that report and you haven't begun to write it? Can you have peace in your heart when you have written a huge presentation on your computer, and it crashes before you saved your work? Peace can be very demanding - but it is that **tranquil state** of your soul knowing that God is in control. Not that you give up your responsibility or shirk your tasks and duties, but that you realize that in the end - God directs things for us, and we need that peace in our hearts, to trust in God.

Many times when I have distressed situations in my diocese, and they do happen - with priests, angry people, who complain about the smallest things, and with uncomfortable events and demanding concerns, I often just take a moment to let the peace of the Lord calm my heart - sit in my chapel if I am home, or just sit in a chair and stop and place it before Jesus - and sometimes just leave it there for the time. Maybe it is like a **Timeout** for a moment to get the peace back into you, trusting that God does direct things for us.

Jesus is described as the **Prince** of Peace, who brings peace to the hearts of those who desire it, says St. John. When we have peace with God through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are then able to make peace between one another, and also between people and God, this is called "**evangelism**" or the proclaiming of the Gospel or Good News. Through our peace, we link others to God, since we are children of God, filled with the **spirit of peace**. This also prompts us - as St. Paul said: Never to pay back evil for evil. Take thought for what is right - in the sight of all men". This **taking thought** is prompted by a peace in one's heart.

So the last fruit of the Holy Spirit for our consideration is **PEACE**. I know that I pray for this each day. Sometimes I am doing it in the middle of the night, when I have so much on my mind, and I need to sleep. Maybe you have felt the same at times. But as St. John said; Jesus will give us peace **if we desire it**. Make sure in your prayer, you ask for this each day.

I think if the peace of Jesus is truly in our hearts, then it will bring us back to the first fruit we discussed, that of **Love**. No just a good feeling type of love - but an **agape** love - a self-giving and self-sacrificing love which models the Lord in all that He said and did. A love which guides us as league members and especially as leaders in the league.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are **guides** for us as members of the Catholic Women's League. They **complement** the gifts of the Spirit already in our hearts and they in a sense - **expand** these gifts to do more, to reach more people, and to touch more hearts through us and through our lives.

As you share this weekend in prayer, discussion, relaxation and fun, - let the fruits of the Holy Spirit be most notable in your actions. Think about them during the day - recognize how you manifest them in your actions. Let the Holy Spirit be in control to guide you, as women of faith, responding to your call.

God bless you all - thank you andwe will see you in **Thunder Bay** this summer!!!!