Dear Friends,

We need God. We really need God. In this month’s newsletter, Sr. Ann movingly writes about finding him as our point of reference in the midst of the confusion and pressures we are experiencing at this time. Recently Pope Benedict XVI called for the whole Church to be baptized in the Spirit: “Today I would like to extend this invitation to everyone: Let us rediscover, dear brothers and sisters, the beauty of being baptized in the Holy Spirit; let us be aware again of our baptism and confirmation, sources of grace that are always present.” In this newsletter and the next I’d like to share with you some reflection I’ve done about what the Scripture says about being “baptized in the Spirit” and how this gift is for everyone and how important it is for the whole Church today.

This month we will celebrate the feast of Pentecost which was originally a Jewish feast. The Jews gathered together to celebrate harvest, the first fruits, as well as the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. It is very significant that Jesus fulfills his promise to baptize in the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast of Pentecost because it’s the way of the harvest, the Church coming to birth. It also points to the law which is now being placed in the heart, the fulfillment of all those prophecies about the Lord putting his own Spirit, his own heart, his own law into our hearts so that nobody would need to say to their neighbor ‘know the Lord’ but everybody would know the Lord.

Pentecost is the name of the feast on which something happened. It doesn’t really tell us WHAT happened. The substance of what happened on the day of Pentecost is that the disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit. So when we celebrate Pentecost, what we are really celebrating is people being baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is the language used in the New Testament—by John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, and the Apostles.

The New Testament takes the issue of being baptized in the Holy Spirit very seriously. In Matthew 3, John the Baptist is preaching and he’s a little ticked off at the Pharisees and Sadducees who come to be baptized because he doesn’t believe they are sincere. He says don’t presume to say “we have Abraham as our Father, for I tell you God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Mt 3:9-11). This is tough language! It says your repentance had better be sincere. If you claim to be turning away from sin and turning towards God but it’s not sincere, you are going to be cut off and thrown into the fire!

We know that John the Baptist was kind of rough around the edges and that he lived in the desert and this was his language. But Jesus adopts the same language. In John 15 Jesus says that those who are bearing fruit will be pruned so they can bear more fruit. Those who aren’t bearing the true fruits of repentance, those whose faith really isn’t being expressed in good works and charity are going to be cut off and thrown into the fire!

The Word of God is a serious word—it is about life and death, heaven and hell, salvation and condemnation, and it makes a difference how we respond to this Word and how we live in accordance with it. John goes on to say,
Dear Friends,

“I am baptizing you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:11–12). There is an apocalyptic, eschatological dimension to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is intended to cleanse the human race. Those who receive its purification will bear fruit and be gathered like wheat into the Lord’s barn. But those who resist the Spirit and its cleansing run the risk of being thrown into the unquenchable fire because they’ve dried up and don’t bear fruit.

Jesus himself uses several terminologies to talk about what’s going to happen. At times he talks about the promise of the Father, or about being baptized in the Holy Spirit, or being clothed with power from on high. “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them thus it was written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance for the forgiveness of sin would be preached in his name for all the nations who came from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed in power from on high” (Luke 24:46–49).

Although the disciples have three years of the best possible teaching, personal attention, personal spiritual direction, and personal formation from Jesus, and despite further instruction from the Risen Lord, Jesus tells them, “You are not ready yet.” There is something else that must happen to make it all come together. They need to receive the promise of the Father in order to fully understand and carry out the mission Jesus entrusts to them.

When Jesus meets with them he enjoins them not to depart from Jerusalem but “to wait for the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak. John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). This is the language of Jesus. When they gather together, they ask him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?” So despite the explanation of the Risen Lord, they still don’t get it.

Jesus tells them not to get into end time speculation, but to focus on their task. “It’s not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has established by his own authority but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

He tells them what they need to know, but they also need to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, be baptized in the Spirit and get on with the mission. So they wait and they pray. And then it happens—the day of Pentecost.

“When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” (Acts 2:1-4).

(Part two of this article will appear in next month’s newsletter).

Like everyone, the economic collapse has affected our donors as well. Some who have been regular supporters are not at the moment able to help, and we are praying for others to step forward. Others are steadfastly continuing to support the mission of Renewal Ministries even in the midst of economic turmoil. Your help enables us to keep supporting mission work—and missionaries—in many countries of the world, and more than ever, a vigorous proclamation of the gospel through radio and TV on a scope greater than any we’ve yet seen. The darkness is indeed growing deeper, but the Light is shining more brightly. Your ongoing support in prayer and giving is making this possible.

Gratefully,

Ralph Martin

P.S. A much fuller version of my teaching entitled “Why Everyone Needs to Be Baptized in the Spirit” was recorded at a conference at Franciscan University of Steubenville. It is available in both CD and DVD format and this month in honor of Pentecost we’re making it available at a discount. One parish just ordered 100 copies to share widely within the parish! See the enclosed Reply Card for details.
Is God my refuge? Is God my place of safety; a place of aid, relief, escape, shelter, and protection? Do we know the ways of the Lord? How he speaks, and how he acts? Are we equipped to hear His voice? Do we have confidence in Him and in the ways He acts?

The psalmist speaks repeatedly of finding our place of security and safety in God; there are 29 major scripture references in the Old Testament to God as our refuge. We need to pay attention to the Scriptures because so often we seek our place of safety, security or refuge in something or someone who cannot possibly provide it, especially in very difficult circumstances.

The times we now live in are unsettling at best and frightening the closer our national policies affect our personal lives. Over and over decisions are being made that are based on expediency. Relativism has taken over. Objective truth has in many cases simply been set aside. What are we to do? We cannot hide our heads in the sand and hope that all this chaos and confusion doesn’t touch our personal lives. Such thinking is silly. If government policies have not yet invaded our “personal space”, they soon will. What we are facing is a “sea change” of tsunami proportions. What are we to do?

In this article I want to speak of one area we each need to address. Where is my place of safety and protection? I am not talking about a place of escape. As Christians we cannot run away when times get hard. I am talking about a place of safety where I can think clearly, receive wisdom and courage, and renew my energy to continue the battle for the hearts of men and women for Christ. When I am frightened, to whom do I turn? When I am confused, where do I look for clarity? When I am angry, how do I seek resolution? When I face overwhelming circumstances, what is my first reaction, where do I go?

The answers to these questions and to similar ones can shed light on what place the Lord, His Word, and His sacraments play in our daily lives. Is God truly my refuge or do I merely pay lip service to this reality? Is God honestly my Savior or do I look to myself or to someone to “save” me when I am in trouble?

In prophetic words some 34 years ago the Lord told us: “prepare yourselves for the actions that I begin now, because things that you see around you will change; the combat that you must enter now is different; it is new. You need wisdom from me that you do not yet have…You need the power of my Holy Spirit in a way that you have not possessed it; you need an understanding of the ways that I work that you do not yet have. Open your eyes, open your hearts to prepare yourselves…” (Rome Conference, 1975)

The best way we can be prepared to stand firm and to be used by God to reach others

continued on pg 4
with the truth is to make sure now that we are firmly planted in the Lord—that He is our daily refuge. Some years ago when I lived in Steubenville, Ohio, there was a particular residential street that was lined with trees on both sides, for four or five blocks. In the spring, summer and fall the street was beautiful. One spring there was a terrible storm with tornado-like winds. When the storm was over, all the trees on that street were blown down. The devastation was awful. When I could, I walked through that area and was shocked to see that the trees, once towering and lovely to look at had in fact very shallow roots. To all external appearances, they were a place of refuge, but when the really big storms came, they were useless. The roots were too shallow to withstand the storm.

A way of asking if you are prepared is to see how deeply your roots are planted in Christ. At the same Rome Conference referred to above, the Lord also said this to us: “I want to prepare you for what is to come...Supports that are there for my people now will not be there. I want you to be prepared, my people, to know only me and to cleave to me and to have me in a way deeper than ever before. I will lead you into the desert...I will strip you of everything you are depending on now so you depend just on me. A time of darkness is coming on the world but a time of glory is coming for my Church, a time of glory is coming for my people. I will pour out on you all the gifts of my Spirit. I will prepare you for spiritual combat. I will prepare you for a time of evangelism that the world has never seen...and when you have nothing but me you will have everything: land, fields, homes and brothers and sisters and love and joy and peace more than ever before. Be ready, my people. I want to prepare you.”

Are you walking with Him in a way that His priorities are yours? Are you ready to stand firm for the truth of the Gospel no matter the consequences? If so, praise God, but you will need a refuge. The Lord in His mercy is telling us He wants to make us ready. Even now, when you may be experiencing financial loss or cutbacks, retirement funds decreasing, shaky job market, limited ability to fund the basics of food and clothing and shelter, remember, that the Lord told us 34 years ago that He would prepare us, not just to survive but make us ready to be disciples. The Lord wants to make us a people of hope and love and trust in Him. Perhaps you have heeded this word through the years and can say with confidence, *God is my refuge!* But if that is not the case or it is not as true as you wish it to be, then as we approach the great feast of Pentecost, this is a time to examine your heart and open yourself to an increase of faith and hope and love. God desires to strengthen, deliver, and heal whatever is needed.

The theme for our Gathering this month (May 29–31) is “I Am with You Always.” I urge you if at all possible, to come to the Gathering so we may pray together and grow in confidence and wisdom. “God is my refuge; I am confident and unafraid.”

**Please Pray...**

+ that the Holy Spirit will be poured out in a fresh and powerful way upon the Church and its leaders.
+ that the upcoming Renewal Ministries Gathering at the end of May will be a time of spiritual refreshment, encouragement and empowerment for all who attend.
+ that the Lord will continue to provide the opportunities and the financial resources for the ongoing mission work of Renewal Ministries throughout the world.
+ for the prayer intentions of all our supporters and their family members, especially as they face the challenges of illness and economic uncertainty.

*Thank you for your continued support through prayer as we labor together for the Gospel and the renewal of the Church.*
Liberia is home to 3.5 million people—40% of them Christian and 20% Muslim. The country was founded by free African-Americans and freed slaves from the United States in 1820. Numerous political upheavals in the 1980s resulted in a violent civil war which lasted from 1989-2003. Charles Taylor was one of Africa’s most prominent warlords during the First Liberian Civil War in the early 1990s. In 1997 he took over the government through violence and he won the presidential election through fear and intimidation. During his time in office he continued the nightmare of killing, maiming, and destruction of many Liberians. Liberia’s economy was severely affected and there has been a steep decline in living standards.

On August 11, 2003, under intense international pressure, President Taylor resigned office and departed into exile in Nigeria. The UN took over security in Liberia and the United Nations Mission in Liberia has grown to its present size of over 12,000 troops and 1,148 police officers. Two years later in 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected president in the most peaceful elections in Liberia’s history. She is trying to rebuild this devastated country and has established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to uncover the atrocities of the war that ravaged this country for 14 years. Their meetings are broadcast daily to the entire country and the next step will be to seek justice for the crimes.

The devastation of Liberia is still physically visible in the city of Monrovia. Even greater is the devastation in the hearts of the people and there is much need for reconciliation, forgiveness and spiritual healing in a country whose name literally means “land of the free.”

Renewal Ministries was invited to Liberia by Rev. Monsignor, Andrew J. Karnley, to help bring God’s healing power and forgiveness through the proclamation of the gospel message, teaching, and prayer. Fr. Karnley is a dynamic young priest who is doing a wonderful job as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Monrovia, filling in for the Archbishop who is currently ill.

Fr. Karnley took the lead in inviting other non-Catholic clergy to the workshop teachings and he provided the facility. It seemed the problems are so great here that most clergy decided to work together so the people can be healed and move ahead. This coming together of different denominations was repeatedly called “an historical event.”

The devastation in the hearts of the people and there is much need for reconciliation, forgiveness and spiritual healing in a country whose name literally means ‘land of the free.’

The day before we left we held a workshop with several hundred members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Liberia. They were overjoyed to be with us and open to all that the Holy Spirit wanted to give them during our time together.
Our first morning there we did a live interview for Radio Veritas on the Catholic Radio station. We shared our testimonies, and talked about God’s desire to bringing healing and reconciliation to the country. We would be at both Catholic and Protestant venues for the next week and we invited everyone listening to come to whatever event they could.

That evening we spoke at Sacred Heart Cathedral and afterwards the Pastor, Fr. Sumo Varfee Mohubah, took Jesus around in the Monstrance. Then Fr. Karmley blessed everyone with Holy Water, we sang and left. Many people reported that they received a healing. In this country especially, we believe that the most important healing was an increase or a return of hope.

The next day, after a breakfast of fish and plantains, we were taken by car through the market and we passed what seemed like 100,000 people on the side of the road buying and selling, moving and negotiating. They were all looking for some way to make enough money to provide food for their families that day. We arrived at St. Dominic’s, a rural parish with a school and small hospital, and were greeted by Fr. Gary Jenkins SMA, originally from the UK. He took us to the back of his property where a six foot cross had been placed over the graves of all those from this village who had died in the war. He and the people of the town were totally cut off from all supplies, so many children and the elderly and sick died from lack of food and medical supplies. Many of the people in this small town were rounded up by rebel forces, locked in the school classrooms and then brought out in groups to the bridge. They were then stabbed or shot to death and thrown in the river. Miraculously, out of 350 people, seven survived. They have now been encouraged to come forth to testify to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission over the radio. This takes great courage because the very rebels, who raped, murdered and pillaged have now become politicians.

We went in the church and we spoke on God’s love, repentance, and forgiveness. We also did a short skit. Although they spoke very good English, the skits brought another dimension of communication. At the end we invited them to pray to accept Jesus as their Savior. In the audience were two white women and when we finished they invited us to come see their place down the road from the parish. We were amazed to see four women—three from America and one from the Netherlands who have opened a school for deaf children. They also have a chapel under construction. This is all under the umbrella of “Mary’s Meal,” a group that feeds 15,000 children in this land. Astoundingly, in Malawi, they feed 350,000 kids!

On Sunday we were warmly welcomed by Fr. Tony at St. Anthony’s Parish. He decided to put his four Sunday Masses together for one huge Mass under tarps strung in the trees next to the school steps. There were about 1200 people at a beautiful Mass with three separate choirs. After Mass we taught on forgiveness and then Fr. Tony took Jesus around in the Monstrance. Later, Lloyd called up all those who are discerning a call to the priesthood or the religious life and at least 75 people came forward. Then the priest said something that I have never heard from the pulpit; he pleaded with his people that a Charismatic Prayer Meeting be started at St. Anthony’s. After Mass we had a gracious meal and we left to go back to town.

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In this country especially, we believe that the most important healing was an increase or a return of hope.
The next day we started the three day seminar, which was open to both Catholics and Protestants. The workshop, on healing and deliverance using the Unbound model of prayer, was limited to around 100 people, but of course at least 140 were there each day. We fed the participants breakfast at 8 am each day, and the workshop ran until 1 pm. Renewal Ministries generously paid for the meals of the participants because the poverty here is pervasive. We taught each day and then the team prayed with people until 5 or 6 pm. Many priests and religious attended the workshops and one older Monsignor stood and gave a testimony that he was able to forgive for the first time in 25 years. John Kazanjian, who accompanied us from Michigan, gave his testimony of forgiveness and the people loved and really related to him. Each of our days began with Mass with Fr. Karnley and the nuns who run the day to day operations of the church.

One of the days after the workshop we went to St. Charles Lwanga Minor Seminary, about an hour from Monrovia. It was in a very rural area with no paved roads and the red dust which settles on everything was unbelievable. The Head Master was thrilled we were there and he left us alone with about fifteen young seminarians with eager faces. At the end of the year will be the discernment as to whether they go to the major seminary or be sent back home. We talked on forgiveness and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and then prayed for them to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nothing beats seeing young future priests receive the gift of tongues and the joy on their faces.

The day before we left we held a workshop at the Cathedral for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Liberia. There were several hundred participants and they were delighted we were with them. Their praise and worship was great, and then Lloyd and John spoke and afterwards took questions. Then we prayed over everyone and asked the Holy Spirit to come with His gifts. Everyone, even the Apostolic Administrator, wanted whatever the Holy Spirit was offering that day.

On our last day Fr. Karnley asked Lloyd to give the homily at Mass, which was broadcast throughout Liberia. He did a fantastic job! Monsignor Karnley has asked us back next year to do a retreat for all the priests in Liberia. The Bishop in Sierra Leone is a classmate of the Monsignor and he wants to invite him and some priests from Sierra Leone as well.

On the way to the airport we stopped to see the Archbishop of the Diocese. He has many health problems and he cannot talk but understood everything we said. During the war he stood against the forces of evil and saw many atrocities. His life was threatened many times and his face was full of wisdom born of pain. Liberia is a very difficult place to survive. The perpetrators of violence in the war are now politicians that are prospering. There is much hate, unforgiveness and suspicion, but when darkness abounds, His Light shines brighter!

We were warmly welcomed, to St. Charles Lwanga Minor Seminary to meet with fifteen young seminarians there. We had the opportunity to speak with them about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and then pray with them for the baptism of the Spirit.
On the Road

May 2009

Long Island, NY, Day of Renewal
May 9
Sr. Ann Shields
Contact John Palmer at 516-678-5800 ext 408
or jpalmer@drvc.org

Mission to Vietnam
May 17–27
Don Turbitt & Team (men only)
Contact Jessica at 734-662-1730 ext 32
or jsherwood@renewalministries.net

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Catholic Charismatic Renewal Conference
May 22–24
Ralph Martin
Contact: www.catholicrenewalservices.com
or 204-895-7544

Plymouth, MI, Renewal Ministries Gathering
May 29–31
Contact Jessica at 734-662-1730 ext 32
or jsherwood@renewalministries.net

June 2009

Mission to Serbia
June 3–22
Don Turbitt and Team
Contact Jessica at 734-662-1730 ext 32
or jsherwood@renewalministries.net

St. Paul, MN, RM School of Evangelization
June 4–7
Peter Herbeck, Lloyd and Nancy Herbeck
Contact: deaconmike@core-ministries.org

Steubenville, OH
Men’s Leadership Conference
June 7
Peter Herbeck

Livonia, MI, St. Michael the Archangel Parish
Evening of Renewal
June 9
Ralph Martin
Contact number: 734-261-1455

Rockville, NY, Diocese of Rockville
Workshop on Holiness and Evangelization
June 13
Ralph Martin
Contact John Palmer at 516-678-5800 x408
or jpalmer@drvc.org

Mission to Papua New Guinea
June 19–July 5
Lloyd and Nancy Greenhaw and Team
Contact Jessica at 734-662-1730 ext 32
or jsherwood@renewalministries.net

Steubenville, OH, Franciscan University
Graduate Theology Course
June 22–July 10
Ralph Martin

Breathe in me,
O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts
may all be holy.

Act in me,
O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too,
may be holy.

Draw my heart,
O Holy Spirit,
that I love but
what is holy.

Strengthen me,
O Holy Spirit,
to defend all
that is holy.

Guard me, then,
O Holy Spirit,
that I always
may be holy.

St. Augustine of Hippo

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