

A theological reflection on Guy Sebastian and Gary Pinto's "Receive the Power"

The song chosen as the theme song for the 23rd World Youth Day, to be celebrated in July 2008 in Sydney Australia, is entitled "*Receive the Power*". It is built around the theme chosen by Pope Benedict XVI: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses" (*Acts* 1:8). This theme is in two parts: on the one hand, Christ renews his promise to send the Holy Spirit (*Acts* 1:8a; cf. *Lk* 24:44-53; *Jn* 7:37-39; 14:25; 16:13-14; 20:22) – a bequest fulfilled when the Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles at Pentecost and beyond (*Acts* ch 2; cf. 3:31; 4:8,31; 8:14-17,39; 9:17; 10:44-48; 11:12-18; 13:52; 15:8; 19:1-7). On the other hand, Christ spells out the response that this gift elicits, the life that this power enables: the disciples are to be his "witnesses to the ends of the earth" (*Acts* 1:8b; 5:32; 10:34-43; cf. *Lk* 24:44-53; *Mt* 28:19; *Jn* 15:27).

Dialogue in the Spirit between Christ and the young disciple

The song very effectively captures the two aspects of the theme. In the chorus the Risen Christ addresses the young people of the world: "Alleluia, alleluia! Receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Alleluia, Alleluia! Receive the power to be a light unto the world." In the verses the young people respond: "we will follow to the ends of the earth"; "we will answer and do Your will"; "we'll forever testify of Your mercy and unfailing love"; "we worship You". This dialogue in the Spirit between Christ and the young disciple is at the heart of evangelization, catechesis, the act of faith and worship. It is at the heart of World Youth Day.

The song is Scriptural

One of the goals and undoubted fruits of World Youth Day is a rediscovery by the young people of the richness of the Word of God, the Holy Bible. It is therefore fitting that not only the central theme inspiring the song, but almost all the words of this song are Scriptural. As the *Acts of the Apostles* makes very clear: the grace of the Holy Spirit is given to the disciple so that he or she may testify to the central proclamation of God's word (e.g. *Acts* 4:33).

The song is Holy Spirit-ual

The theme of WYD08 calls us to reflect upon the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of young people. The song invokes the Holy Spirit three times in the chorus, as Christ invites the young people to "Receive the power of the Holy Spirit". The young people respond in the verse "As Your Spirit calls to rise we will answer and do Your will." The strongly pneumatological aspect of the song makes it particular to the World Youth Day in Sydney.

The song is Christological

The theme of WYD08 is taken from the last words Christ spoke to his disciples before he ascended to the Father. The promise of the Holy Spirit is specifically linked by Christ to the call to the disciple to witness, testimony, even martyrdom. But to whom? The Holy Spirit empowers the young people not to give witness to themselves, not even to give witness to the Spirit, but to give witness *to Christ*. "You will be *my* witnesses," he says. The song articulates the response of the faithful disciple to that call and empowerment.

The song is Eucharistic

The Spirit is given not for our own aggrandizement but to move us to worship and thanksgiving. Thus at Pentecost the Spirit-filled disciples "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and communion, to the Breaking of the Bread and the prayers" (*Acts* 2:42). The young people sing in the opening verse "in Your presence we delight" and in the 'bridge' "Lamb of God, we worship you. Holy one, we worship you. Bread of Life, we worship you. Emmanuel, we worship you." (*Jn* 1:29,36; 6:69; 6:35; *Mt* 1:33) This is a song of adoration which, for Catholics at least, will evoke the Eucharistic Lord they worship. The climax of World Youth Day is the Mass with the Holy Father and one of its fruits is greater Eucharistic devotion.

The song is Universal ('catholic')

The song opens with the words "Every nation, every tribe, come together to worship You" (*Rev* 7:9-10; *cf.* 5:9-11) This is a reference to all the young people from every nation and language who will come as pilgrims and heralds of the Gospel to Australia for WYD08. This captures another pneumatological aspect of the song. In the story of Pentecost the evil of Babel is reversed: no longer are nations pitted one against the other; no longer do diverse languages divide people and leave them uncomprehending. Instead, the Holy Spirit unites them all and all understand each other. This is a gift of Pentecost and a gift of World Youth Day.

The song is Eschatological

In the *Book of Revelation* John has a vision "of a great multitude, too numerous to count, from every nation, race, people and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb... [and] cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation comes from our God... and from the Lamb.'" (*Rev* 7:9-10; *cf.* 15:3-4) The WYD08 song is a premonition, a foretaste, of that day when by the power of the Holy Spirit all divisions between peoples will cease and "every nation, every tribe" will "come together to worship You... Lamb of God."

Specificity and Continuity

Though the song is very specific to the theme of WYD08 in Sydney – with its multiple references to the call and power of the Holy Spirit and to the witness of the young people – it also cleverly recalls and unites the great catechetical themes chosen by the father of World Youth Day, Pope John Paul II: "Emmanuel" (WYD2000 in Rome), "Light to the world" (WYD02 Toronto) and "We worship you" (WYD05 Cologne). Thus the song expresses both the specificity of WYD08 in Sydney and its continuity with more than twenty years of World Youth Days – and indeed with two thousand years of Christian proclamation ever since the Archangel Gabriel first named Jesus "Emmanuel – God with us" (*Mt* 1:33) and John the Baptist first identified him as the "Lamb of God" (*Jn* 1:29,36).

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