

## **GUIDELINES ON CHARISMATIC RENEWAL, PRAYER SERVICES, AND PREACHERS**

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal has produced remarkable conversions of individuals and communities: increased quantity and quality of prayer life in the Church; renewed the love for the Word of God and Eucharist, and its spontaneity have enriched the liturgy. Many people are grateful for the Charismatic Renewal because they have had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ within the Catholic Church, which has revolutionized their lives, transforming them into new men and women. The more their fervour, the more honest and intense their worship, the greater their power to renew the Church, parishes, groups, and people's hearts. This flow of renewing grace comes from God, not from human strength.

While it is theologically certain that there are in the Church a variety of charisms, the Church's function of discerning charisms must always be admitted. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is integrated into the Church and is subject to the shepherding and discernment of the Catholic Church. It is marked by its gentle listening to the Holy Spirit and its submission to Church authority. Vatican Council II speaks of the responsibility of Bishops to supervise and encourage, promote and support authentic popular movements of piety (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nos. 24-25).

Every Bishop bears the pastoral task of "not extinguishing the Spirit, but testing all things and holding fast to that which is good" (1 Tim 5:19) and making sure that what is done 'is best for each other and the community' (cf. 1Thes. 5:12-18; *LG* 12). In this sense, the discernment of charisms is always necessary. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (*CCC*) clearly states that no charism is exempt from being referred to and subjected to the shepherds of the Church (no. 801). As a result, the Diocesan Bishop has the pastoral responsibility to ensure that all that occurs within his diocese is in accordance with Catholic traditional practice, doctrine and laws.

While we are aware of the benefits that flow from charisms both for individuals and for the whole Christian community, at the same time we are also aware of the power of sin and how it can disturb and confuse the lives of the faithful and of the community (*Christifideles Laici* 24). Pastors and leaders in the Church must protect the vulnerable lay faithful from self-styled preachers, particularly those who appear to be Catholics and deviate the gullible faithful from Catholic life, faith, and practices.

In order to encourage and assist the faithful, the clergy and religious should learn more about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and be available to help and guide the prayer groups and individuals in their parishes so as to provide a more gospel centered service to the parish community. The prayer groups should serve inclusively and actively, not just as a resource for prayer for the participants but for the entire parish community. Because charisms are the graces of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the Church, they are ordered to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world (*CCC* 799). Consequently, no group or person can manipulate others for selfish motives and vain glory.

In recent times, there have been complaints from the clergy and the lay faithful about some people, including Catholics, having their own prayer centres and groups that do not adhere to the right teachings of the Bible and deviate from the faith and practice of the Catholic Church. It has come to our attention that some preachers banned in other dioceses have started their own gospel retreat teams, prayer groups, and so-called retreats in the diocese, inviting Catholics to them. People have been led into confusion and manipulation, which has driven them away from the faith, sacraments, and all that is inherently Catholic.

Experience shows that some groups 'apparently' Catholic at the start have ended up gradually having separated themselves from the authentic Catholic teachings and have become separate sects on their own. Many of their Bible interpretations are contrary to the sacred traditions and teachings and even to common sense. Neglecting the sacramental life, the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in salvation history, and apostolic traditions, they have gradually gone astray from the Catholic communion.

In light of the pastoral context of the diocese and the alleged dangers to the faith and practice under the guise of charismatic prayer meetings, services, retreats, etc. conducted in the diocese by unauthorized clergy and lay faithful, we deem it proper that some guidelines are issued so as to promote the genuine charismatic renewal and also other prayer meetings and to warn against the possible deviations on account of some extraneous factors.

1) Parish Priest should encourage the faithful in their zeal for prayer life and enable them to have charismatic and other prayer meetings in the church. When the faithful have a longing to quench their spiritual thirst through prayer sessions, the absence of opportunities or prayer sessions in the parish drives the people away from the church to private houses for prayer meetings. It is important that Parish Priests encourage and invite people to the church for prayer meetings/sessions/retreats and promote genuine spiritual renewal through their active presence and guidance.

2) It is strongly advised to promote intercessory prayer groups in the parish, in which the Parish Priest or another member of the clergy participates. A certain period each week should be spent in front of the Blessed Sacrament for the needs of the Church and the world. This perseverance in prayer will undoubtedly rekindle a sense of ecclesial belonging. The needs of our people are our own, for which we pray and intercede.

3) The charismatic prayer and other prayer meetings differ in nature, as the former possesses charismatic elements (see Rom.8:26; 1 Cor. 12: 1-13; Gal. 5:22). There is an activation of charisms, which one received in baptism and confirmation through the infusion of the Holy Spirit. The other prayer meetings could have various approaches with pious practices, such as novena, rosary, scripture meditation, etc. The faithful are at liberty to participate in these meetings depending on the type of spirituality that suits them. Since genuine spirituality has no elite form, there is no room to consider one form of prayer superior to another, except that the "Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life."

4) The faithful participating in the charismatic prayer meetings should be given a proper understanding of the Word of God. The charismatic renewal has brought about a tremendous resurgence in the reading of the Bible among Catholics. But it is important that Catholics do not descend to fundamentalism or forget that the Bible needs interpretation and that ultimately only the Church can authoritatively interpret it.

5) There are sects prying upon the Catholics to get members for their fold who also make use of the charismatic prayer meetings and disseminate ideas and teachings against the Bible and Church to gullible and non-educated people and people with weak faith. Proselytizing and sectarianism result in divisiveness, particularly when there is a lack of instruction, supervision, pastoral effectiveness, etc. In this context, the pastoral assistance of Parish Priests to the faithful assumes greater importance.

6) Prayer in charismatic renewal should be balanced with all the elements of Eucharistic prayer in its praise, thanks, repentance, and intercession and it should also include an invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the apostles and saints and have frequent recourse to Sacred Scripture. As the movement is based on the Word of God, the latter should not be used merely to elucidate a doctrinal reality but as a source of God-experience. The interpretation of the

Bible should not be literal, subjective, and fundamentalist based on one's state of mind and attitude. The ecclesial role of interpretation cannot be minimized.

7) There is a dangerous tendency in some charismatics while they claim to pray in tongues they tend to look down on traditional devotions to the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, and the Way of the Cross, the Eucharistic Celebrations, and classics of spiritual reading. Faithful should not neglect the authentic and time-tested traditional pious practices of spiritual life practiced even by great saints. Faithful should find spiritual treasure by participating in the celebration of sacraments. They should appreciate and esteem the Sacrament of Penance and have recourse to it as a means of healing. The charismatic healing services cannot replace the healing role of the sacrament instituted by Jesus: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20: 22-23).

8) "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" is an experience of Christ in a personal way as the result of the release of the power of Baptism and Confirmation. It usually leads to a deep devotional life, an attraction to prayer, Sacred Scripture and sacraments and marks the beginning of closer union with God. However, it is not another sacrament, but a surrender to the gifts. It empowers a person for Christian life and service. In other words, it is an activation of the grace of baptism by personal self-surrender.

9) Discernment of gifts and charisms is essential in ecclesial dimensions. As in every gift, so also in healing, gifts of tongues, etc., - there is a danger of exhibitionism and selfish use of them unless care is taken to foster their correct evaluation and use. A kind of spiritual elitism among some charismatics who consider themselves above other Christians and above the Church etc. is harmful to life in the Spirit. All gifts should be tested against the spirit of unity and charity.

10) All involved in prayer services, charismatic or otherwise, preachers and lay leaders in praise and worship, should be cautioned to avoid overemphasizing miracles of healing and to refrain from making themselves the centre of attraction. The focus should be on understanding the will of God through the promptings of the Holy Spirit and submitting to it as we pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

11) It has come to our attention that some self-proclaimed preachers are promoting superstitious practices. We must be vigilant to ensure that our people do not become easy prey for such malpractices or fraud.

12) St John of the Cross, in his classical doctrine on the charisms warns, against the harm that comes from rejoicing excessively in the possession of such gifts. The one who does so, leaves himself open to deception, either by the devil or by his own imagination; in relying on this charism, he loses some of the merit of faith; and finally, he is tempted to vainglory. The personal cult of any individual preacher, whether clergy or lay faithful, should find no place in preaching and healing services. All should be directed to the glory and adoration of God. "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory" (Ps 115:1).

13) Prayer sessions, at times, involve giving testimony. We need to remember that the real testimony is in the witness of life and action given at home, in the wards and parish, and not in the various claims of healing and deliverance which take place at retreat centres. The testimony is real when people see a person's life in his family and with his neighbours, parish, and place of work as edifying and authentic. "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

14) The prayer life should empower the faithful to reach out to the poor and needy. Absence of social concern and restriction only to saying prayers tends to create an imbalance in spiritual life. "The one who says 'Lord, Lord' shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven but the one who does the will of my Father." Moreover, there is no opposition between our prayer life and our life of charity; because we are also judged according to our life of charity: "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me." Cooperation and involvement in the parish is indispensable to the healthy growth of the movement.

15) The prayer groups should have the approval of the Parish Priest, and he must always be invited and informed. During the prayer meeting it should be his prerogative to proclaim and explain the Word of God. Priests should attend the meetings and should know the good aspects and also the other human weaknesses that creep into the prayer groups, and they should be vigilant to guide the people in the right direction.

16) Every spiritual renewal group has to grow within the boundaries of parishes under the guidance of a Parish Priest. It is unhealthy that some groups operate as parallel outfits within parishes. There should be collaboration with the Parish Priest, which must be fortified by means of constant communication about the life and activities of the parish prayer group through regularly scheduled meetings and reports.

17) Prayer services, meetings or retreat sessions should not be scheduled to coincide with regular Masses and other gatherings of the whole ecclesial community.

18) The charismatic leaders must be practicing Catholics with a mature grasp of the Catholic faith and be prayerful people who are respected in the church as well as in the secular community in which they live. The nature of leadership is to offer service, not for self-benefit or glory.

19) Lay faithful should not preach at prayer services, retreats, and recollections in parishes, schools and houses without the permission of the diocesan Bishop. They should obtain proper formation and indicate their faithfulness to the Church in view of seeking permission. Efforts will be made to impart due formation to the faithful in the area of this service as per the discretion of the ecclesiastical authority.

20) Those who invite retreat preachers or groups for retreat and prayer meetings should ensure that they have the approval of the competent authorities of the Catholic Church. Whenever a Parish Priest intends to get a lay preacher for retreats or missions, he must ask for the testimonial of the Bishop of Mangalore, and if he or she is from outside this diocese, a testimonial letter from his/her Bishop. The Diocesan Director for the Charismatic Renewal must be informed about such preachers so that their basic credentials can be ascertained. The lay leaders trained by the Charismatic Unit of our Diocese could assist the Parish Units only for meetings and Praise and Worship sessions.

21) When priests from outside the diocese are invited to conduct charismatic renewal retreats, etc., they should be found in good standing in their own diocese and the Parish Priest should inform the diocesan Bishop about his preaching in the parish. This applies to any group intending to conduct retreats, conventions or recollections.

22) To avoid some of the excesses and issues that occur in such venues, charismatic or other prayer groups should be held in parish churches rather than private buildings, schools, or houses. Permission has not been granted for prayer meetings, retreats, or preaching in any private facility, center, or house.

The directive guidelines are given with the intention of fostering and guiding charismatic and other prayer meetings and for maintaining the unity of faith, sacraments, and ecclesiastical governance. This would help in safeguarding the faithful from succumbing to the influence of divisive enthusiasm, the liturgical aberrations, and the spurious and erroneous teachings that creep into prayer meetings, although they are comparatively rare. The guidelines are meant to support prayer gatherings or services -whether charismatic or otherwise - in achieving their full potential as an integral part of the Church.

The National Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, approved by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, also promotes the movement, and specific statutes govern it. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the diocese remains accountable to the Bishop. After taking into account the growth and the strengths and weaknesses of the movement in the diocese, further norms and guidelines will be issued as and when required.

The above norms of prudence, borne out of our episcopal responsibility, in the hope of leading a life worthy of our calling to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph4:3) and issued on November 1, 2023, Solemnity of All Saints ,are easily understandable and apply to all, both clerics and lay faithful.

✘ **Peter Paul Saldanha**

**Bishop of Mangalore**