

COLLEGE PRESENTATION**Carlo and Maria Carla Volpini**Monday July 21st 2008

We have been courageous, yes we must admit it, we have been courageous in wanting to tackle a theme as specific and as difficult as that of prophecy.

The fact that we repeated many times that Fr Caffarel was a prophet of our times and that our movement is a prophetic Movement, maybe makes the word more familiar, but maybe it is also the need to go deeper within that notion, to fully understand the value of that word, to be able to understand how the Samaritan woman saw a prophet in Jesus, to know better the prophets of the past and those of our time, to understand that a prophetic Spirit is always there, at all times, because any time, is the Spirit's time.

Thus our choice is to live this College with prophecy as its theme, starting with a reflection from Fr Angelo this morning, on the profound meaning of this word. We would like to put together these days, by allowing ourselves to be guided by the spirit of ancient and modern prophets and every morning, during prayer time the Responsible Couple of each Zone, will introduce you to prophets from the biblical times and prophets from our time. We will also have the pleasure of presenting to you the synthesis of the works of the Massabielle congress drawn up by Tò and Zè, for which we thank them, where the previous Responsible Couples reflected on the past and on prophecy in our Movement. We will endeavour to find out through testimonies from couples from France, the United States, Australia and Portugal, if there are prophetic signs of life in our countries or in some other parts of the world, which can be prophetic for humanity and signs of the presence of the Spirit of God. We will hopefully be able to identify our conjugal story as a welcoming place for the Spirit of God, to see if our couple can become a place for prophecy in the day to day life and we will try to reflect together on that topic during our talk and especially during the sit-down which will follow.

Are we maybe, a little scared of all this? Are we guilty of presumption? Our goal is certainly not that. We simply started from the idea that the verb «to prophesy» in its root, means to foretell and that the prophet is not someone who can tell the future, not a magician, a guru or a seer, but someone, who can see in the present, in the surrounding reality, signs of the future and we are all called to that commitment, in many ways, with a commitment to reflect, to compare and to look deeply at the meaning of things.

From a biblical point of view, a prophet is someone who is able to provoke, in the literal meaning of the word (pre-vocare), that is who calls on the future so that it can happen in the present. He is the one who picks the seeds of the future while they are still hidden within the movements, the words and the actions of a vast number of Men and Women, who feverishly and often confusedly, live on earth and try to reach for the light, try to blossom in the present. Those seeds are already there, they are in our story and in us, in our personal story and in our conjugal story; the seeds of the future are simply the fruits of our memory of the past, being elaborated into producing new things; the past, just like the future, is in fact a dimension of the present, but often we live forgetting this, without remembering the past and without looking at what our actions will determine in the future.

The prophet is the one who speaks «in the name of..», he is the one who lends his voice to Another, that Other who is at the origin of his words, that Other who is the living God, living in history, through him.

The prophet is someone who is not happy to live the present according to the criteria of the obvious facts and of the expected, of the « already done it all » and the « already said it all » of life and of the written history; it is someone who looks for newness or better still looks at what will make everything new at every opportunity.

The prophet is the one who goes against all types of injustice which takes away people's dignity and against all types of power which oppresses people, against all ownership and model which focuses on people and smothers them, against any culture which is imposed without allowing for any growth, against any faith which demands obedience without asking for love and for freedom of choice.

We are sure that none of us here feel that they are prophets ; but maybe each one of us, like the biblical prophets, are poor in ourselves, in our certainties, in our convictions, in our rules because we want to be full of the God in whose name we speak.

Today, like yesterday and even before yesterday, we are all asked to look into the future, to peer into the horizon for the God who is coming, we are all called to be prophets in the Spirit.

« *Afterwards I will pour out my spirit on everyone : your sons and daughters will proclaim my message* » are the words of Joel in the Old Testament (Jl 3 : 1) and they are words which Peter repeats in the Acts of the Apostles (Ac 2 : 17); a message that has travelled through the Old and the New Testaments and has arrived to us today, with the same power and the same clarity : we will be prophets if we are able to speak with the voice of the Spirit.

The world of today, maybe unconsciously, is thirsting for the spirit : it is certain that the tragedies we find in history, the loss of nations, our own anxieties, the ordeals of many are all cries for the presence of a Spirit able to give life, able to fill the emptiness which seems to spread like an oil spill, among the remnants of the walls of the ideologies of death, among the lack of hope and of projects by the new generations, among the silences which replace the dialogues between people, among families, among nations, among establishments, among the churches.

The reality in which we live has been described as a « *crazy society* », not as a metaphor for a cheerful and happy party, but more like an image of many confused and mad fragments fluttering about, getting lost in the air, falling on the ground and not finding a way of connecting with each other.

Paradoxically, however it is this emptiness which surrounds which again and again makes us all, believer or not, long for something which gives a meaning to life, which gives a significance to everyday actions, which values our thoughts and our choices. And maybe, the people who have faith, us if we have faith, will be fortunate enough to be able to identify, to hear and to herald that « *The Lord's Spirit fills the entire world, and holds everything in it together, she knows every word that people say* » (Ws 1:7), because faith can really become a tool allowing us to interpret the events of our time.

The Lord's Spirit *fills* the entire world ; the verb is used in the present because « *without the Spirit, God is far away, Christ remains in the past, the Gospel is dead letter, the Church a simple organization, authority a domination, mission a propaganda, worship an evocation and christian behaviour a moral doctrine for slaves. But in Him, the cosmos raises itself and moans within the Kingdom's sorrows, the risen Christ is present, the Gospel is life power, the Church means Trinitarian communion, authority is liberating, mission is pentecost, liturgy is a memorial and goes forward, human behaviour is deified.* »¹

The Lord's Spirit which *holds everything in it together* : a sentence which expresses all the paternal and maternal welcome of God, which quashes every distinction, which is delighted by the diversity of creation, which knocks down every wall to breathe in life as much as possible. What a contrast from our narrow thinking which has distinctions for everything, on mine or yours, on the

¹ Ignatios di Latakia, Rapporto di Uppsala, 1968, COE, pag. 297, Ginevra 1969

good or the bad, on the accurate or the erroneous, on the inner self or the outer self. What a contrast from our fears of tackling things that appear different, afraid of running the risk of disturbing our selfish peace and quiet. What a contrast from our ability to put up walls and barriers to protect ourselves, thus being unable to breathe life to the outmost.

The Lord's Spirit which *knows* every word that people say: a sentence which demonstrates the wish and the will of God to become Listening and Word among the voices, with the voices, within the peoples voices. The cry of creation is heard by God, our cries are heard by God, but at the same time there is a cry from God for everything that offends this very same creation. Maybe it is a cry smothered by the fog which darkens our skies, maybe it is a cry complaining because of the angry shouts, the unnecessary words and the deafening protests which surround us; maybe it is a cry gagged by the many malicious masters we listen to and by the many false needs we depend on, but in any case, the Spirit demands a profound listening of humanity and a commitment to humanity because the gifts of the Spirit, of which Paul speaks (Rom 8 : 23) are not a reason for escape and isolation for the believer but a conscious responsibility to reply and to show solidarity.

Our times need prophets, people able to look at the future with confident eyes to understand through intuition and to pick the future which is going forward, that, which has not yet happened but is already here, the God of the eternal becoming history today. It is not by chance that in the Bible, the action of the Spirit, is a dimension often spoken of in the future: « *I will put my spirit in you and will see to it that you follow my laws and keep all the commands I have given you* » (Ez. 36 : 27); « *But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth* ». (Ac 1 : 8).

It is not certain that it is because the Spirit belongs to a dimension that is not able to become reality, but more so because the people of the Spirit are those who are always in the forefront, who look ahead into the future, who are already projected into the future while truly living in the present : actually, when we talk about the Spirit, we talk about everything of God that we have not yet foreseen, encountered, picked, and surely what we don't know yet about God, what has not yet been said, what has not yet happened, what has not yet been lived and much much more than what has been said, what has happened and what has been lived. To stop is to presume that we already know enough about. To not look for newness around us, means that we think that we have discovered all of God's wonders. To not always have new grounds to break in our search for faith and life, means that we think that God's work on mankind is completed with us... Is this the faith we want to bear witness to? Surely there are still many seeds that we have to bring into bud, many fruits that we have to pick, many ears that we have to turn golden.

The Spirit does not have a face, but it possesses many faces. Athanasius of Alexandria writes that *God has become carrier of flesh so that mankind can become carrier of the Spirit*.² We then understand by intuition that the lack of a face, of an image of a definition to attribute to the Spirit is a necessity which allows us to understand that the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit is the Kingdom of human faces and that the spirit is reflected in every face that comes near us and in every face we shall ever meet. We are faced once more by the reality of the incarnation wanted by God to become closer to us, to become a neighbouring God, to offer Himself as a God-man. "*The Holy Spirit is not the generic aspect of God, blurred, neutral, without a face, nearly the God of people becoming the God of everyone... No, it is the God hidden in every face and every soul of every language*."³

The task of looking for, and finding the laws, the rules and the commitments which allow the Spirit to go through, to become present among the people, is incumbent upon us all committed

² Atanasio di Alessandria, *Lettere festali*, ed. Paoline-San Paolo, Torino, 2003

³ L.Sartori, *Atti della XXIII Sessione Ecumenica del SAE*, ed. Dehoniane, Roma, 1995

to the Movement and more specifically here, committed as Spiritual Counsellors, Regionals and Super regionals.

The Spirit is wind, the Spirit is fire. These are beautiful metaphors of the freedom and the love of the Spirit!

Wind, you can feel it... it touches you, caresses you, brushes against you, hits you and slaps you but you cannot catch it, stop it, imprison it..., inside yourself. If wind is enclosed and imprisoned, it is not wind any more.. « *Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting* » (Ac 2 : 2). The Spirit is a wind which arrives strongly and fills us, but maybe it finds us frightened or tired or unable to realise that the Lord is calling us ... The wind of the Spirit is freedom and freedom is a language that everyone understands ...

Fire is the sign of the metaphor of love: an earthly fire which burns, consumes, destroys ... God's fire is a flame which burns for eternity; to receive the Spirit is to be touched by the fire of God's love: love is a language that everyone understands!

Let us allow ourselves to speak the language of the Spirit in our work, let us allow ourselves to speak the language of the Spirit, in front of the Charter: it means allowing wind, fire, freedom and love to lead us in our search.

"The Lord's spirit fills the entire world, and that which holds everything together, knows every word that people say" (Ws 1 :7)

May this college help us to truly become couples and priests at the service of the Spirit, in the Movement of Teams!