

Of Gratitude, Droplets and Sparrows

- *brother Peter*



FIFTY YEARS AGO, IN 1962, NEARLY AT THE END OF THE pontificate of Good Pope John XXIII, Vatican Council II held its first session. The Council produced 16 documents, returned the Church to a more collegial way of governance and gave a voice to the laity, to priests and to bishops. It fostered a real participation in Church life and liturgy with vernacular languages accessible to all. Religious freedom, openness to the contemporary world, and benevolent relations with all Christians and those of other religions, especially the Jewish people, marked a hopeful new beginning for the Church and the world.

Nearly sixty years ago, in 1953, Weston Priory was founded in Weston, Vermont, by Abbot Leo Rudloff of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem. Along with the brothers in the new community, Abbot Leo created an opportunity to renew monastic life, returning to the sources of Benedict's inspiration in the Rule and other seminal monastic writings. They together also tried to discern the signs of the times in the contemporary Western world, embedding and inculturating this new community in its own unique environment. Abbot Leo often said "Be open to the Holy Spirit", a saying which invited participation with him and co-responsibility for the future of this new community. The coinciding renewal of Vatican Council II helped and enhanced this new movement.

Though the accomplishments of the Council have been somewhat disregarded and muted over these fifty years, the experience of hope and of a new Pentecost, a new springtime for the Church, really cannot be lost. As Pope John himself, on the night he announced the convocation of the Council, when he had difficulty falling asleep, reflected "Giovanni, why don't you sleep? Is it the Pope or the Holy Spirit who governs the Church? It's the

Holy Spirit, no? Well, then, go to sleep, Giovanni!"¹

The Holy Spirit continues to speak in the voice of the faithful: laity, priests and bishops. All are more aware of their rights and responsibilities for the life of the Church and for their part in bettering life in our world. This sometimes brings controversy and dissidence in the Church. Is this not a sign of the Spirit's working? Have we not changed from scrupulously following unchanging rules absolutely, to living consciously and conscientiously the love of Christ, wherever that may bring us?

One of the maxims Pope John followed in his life states: "Drops of water hollow out a stone (Gutta cavat lapidem)"² His life exemplified patience, trust in the Spirit, and faithfulness to Christ's Gospel. That's what flowered into Vatican Council II. Today there are many faithful Christians, signs of hope, who will eventually hollow out a way forward for the Church. We are called to be faithful.

I am profoundly grateful for the grace of living my life as a monk of Weston Priory. In this Benedictine community I have experienced the joy of Christian brotherhood, the peace of faithful, mutual commitment, and the continual surprise of living in the Spirit which calls us always forward.

Good Pope John characteristically put it very simply: "Be joyful, seek the best, and let the sparrows chirp."³ Ultimately the Council, the Church and Weston Priory are about a way of life and how we relate to each other from the heart, in the love of Christ. Jesus has promised us abundant life, while splashing in living water and singing our Gospel song! ■

¹ *Wit and Wisdom of Good Pope John*, Collected by Henri Fesquet, © 1964 by P. J. Kennedy & Sons, New York, pg. 45

² *op. cit.* pg. 85

³ Brother Roger Schultz of Taizé recounted in many places this advice he received from Pope John.