

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night praise & Worship
July 8, 2018
Participating in Covenant
Mark G.

The topic of tonight's talk is "Participating in Covenant." Participating in the Holy Spirit is a big part of our lifestyle here at Mother of God that changes our life daily... When we understand Covenant the way the Scriptures mean it, the Spirit changes you. Holy Spirit overpouring heavenly life into us.

Who wants to live a happy life? Who wants to have more of a knowledge about how God loves you? Who wants to know that as you can participate in God's love in the Holy Spirit, this Spirit of freedom will change you, and then change the people you daily contact? If you answered yes to any of those questions this talk is for you. Tonight you're going to learn about how covenantal love affects us, empowers us as we allow the Holy Spirit to give us His Covenantal power, lovingkindness and revelation.

When did this all begin? Covenantal love began a long, long time ago in the book of Genesis, when God made a promise to Adam and Eve that He would restore a broken relationship. Covenantal love began with Adam but still again in Genesis with the promise to Noah. Noah and his people of that day ran into dire times in life by a devastating flood, yet the Lord makes a covenantal promise, to start afresh with Noah's family in love. Noah received a bigger promise, better blessings for his family. Why? Because God desires to reveal Himself in a covenantal love, as a part of the Trinity outflowing exchange of loving kindness towards humanity throughout history. I'm going to define that in a bit.

St. Augustine writes that as we look at the very Trinity life, we witness outflow: God the Father outpouring Himself completely into God the Son, God the Son pouring Himself completely into the Holy Spirit – it's an outpouring exchange of their persons. A Father, Son and Holy Spirit giving way within the Trinity. I pray that as you listen tonight, you each ask that the Holy Spirit speak to you in some way, that you might have a clearer insight into this covenantal love that God the Father has for each one of you. Tonight in the Holy Spirit you get to participate.

Who? Well, everyone here tonight, because Jesus died on the cross, His blood established an eternal dialogue with each one of us and still offers it to all the world. Whether or not we receive that, is really up to us. We are free to choose. In 1989 God said a word to Mother of God about covenant...It was Jeremiah 31:31: *A time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers; this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel: I will put my law into their minds and write it in their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people.* Mother of God Community is a charismatic covenanted community. From our very beginning, we saw the value of God's covenant, there is something that God wanted to reveal among us about himself in covenant. Each year we pray, we ask the Holy Spirit to reveal more to us about what His covenantal love means here at Mother of God. And of course we understand so much more from the Scriptures, Hebrews 9: *When Christ came as high priest, he entered the most holy place once and for all by his own blood. How much more then will the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse our consciences so that we may serve the living God?* And it's really because of what Jesus has done for us, that we enter into covenant. It's not the Mother of God covenant, but God's covenantal action among us living in Community as part of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities.

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What does this word covenant mean? What is covenant? It is derived from two words, a Hebrew word, “*berith*” and a Greek word *diathekes*. *Berith* means a solemn promise of God, an exchange of person, and it’s really unilateral; in other words, it’s not bi-directional. God makes a promise, and He fulfills, delivers the promise and lives by the promise whether we received it or not. God gives promises, to Adam, to Noah, to Abram, to Moses, to David – there are five major covenantal promises that we read about in the Old Testament that God made with humanity. Then finally Jesus’s promise. Jesus’s very blood makes the ultimate covenant with us, the new covenant, which is a promise of a bigger and better promises than ever made previously or will ever be made again to mankind. These promises involve a declaration of God’s unconditional promise of blessing. In fact, historically, no matter what mankind did, humanity broke all the covenants, not God and we break all the covenants today. We learn that man is a covenant breaker, and that God is a covenant maker and keeper. God is faithful! Jesus continues to pour out covenantal love, despite how I turn from him, despite my sinfulness, despite my moods - we will always receive His unilateral loving kindness. In Hosea we see this example of Covenant in the word *Hesed*, which means a bond, a betrothal, of how God has wed himself to us, God wed to us. God keeps pouring out a lovingkindness to unfaithful Gomar.

As we study the Greek New Testament we see another word, “*diathekes*” which means covenant. This meaning is more outpouring of self.. It is similar to if I write a will and testament after death. When someone dies they leave a will, their final wishes expressed. God says, I’m going to write a will and I’m going to leave you all my kingdom, all my property, everything in my kingdom! Everything’s yours, I created it, I have the authority, and I’m giving it all to you. That’s the amazing type of covenant we’re talking about in the New covenant – Jesus gives us an inheritance of all the kingdom to each one of his children. Now, each person is free to say, no thanks, I don’t need it, I’ll go my own way. Or we might say, yes, I believe, help me receive. Now a will is only as good as the person who’s written the will, and Jesus offers this will by his death on the Cross. We believe in a God of truth, who says “I am the way, the truth and the life”. Jesus is either speaking the truth, he’s bequeathed a beneficial covenant love to us or it’s not the truth and a waste of our time. He’s left us in our freedom to decide.

Moving further we read in the New Testament this promise of even a greater covenant; Augustine helps us and clarifies these two covenants by the two sons of Abraham – there’s two sons of Abraham: Isaac, who was born of Sarah, who is a free woman, in Isaac we receive freedom, a better promise, he was a son and heir thus he received both sonship and inheritance. And Hagar, the slave woman, gave birth to Ishmael. He is born a slave and had an earthly kingdom – Ishmael did not receive the inheritance of freedom. So Augustine says, “those in the church today who only know how to ask God for earthly happiness, belong to the covenant of Ishmael. These are the ones who conflict with the spiritual men who advance in virtue”. Isaac means light, and an Isaac lifestyle is a life in the Spirit, is covenanted to the freedom of a transcendent loving God. In Isaac we see God; in all we do we are transcendent as the Holy Spirit ascends in our spirit to lift our mind and heart to God.

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Now there's some grave misunderstandings about covenant as we as Americans live today, because there is a lack of a translation, a good translation between English, Hebrew and Greek. And secondly it's because of the dulling of the Christian mind, of the Catholic mind within our culture today. We see things that are ... as ABC News recently stated where the host of "The View" declared that our vice-president has a mental illness, and it's called Christianity. So that person isn't gonna be receiving much light about God's covenantal love. In Australia, I was there this year, I talked to a youth minister and he said there is just an indifference among the young adults in Australia. Youth are not just indifferent they are hostile to God— the church to them is dull and boring. They don't want to know truth, they don't want to read, they don't want to come to an understanding about who God is and his tremendous plan that he has for every person's life.

So there is a basic misunderstanding in the English translation. We have the world view of covenant and it's basically this: it's a contract mentality, it's between two equal people. Say Rick and I have a common interest, I want to go into business with Rick, I write a contract, so it's between two equals. We exchange the terms and conditions. We come to an agreement with the terms. But if I break the terms, Rick gets annoyed, breaks the contract and says to me, we're finished. The Contract is over, goodbye. Unfortunately in our culture today, this is the state of the marriage covenant. We come with a contract mentality, not a Scriptural covenant mentality. In fact, that's why three out of every five marriages today end in divorce. Now, let's compare it to the Biblical Covenant word... Dr. Scott Hahn wrote a book which I read in preparing for this talk, and it's called 'The Father Who Keeps His Promises' I recommend it to all of you; it's an excellent book, and it's about true covenantal love. God the Father's covenantal love. The Scriptural definition of covenant is much more than a contract – it's a transcendent bond involving persons, it's between persons exchanging themselves. An example might be of my wife and I or between my brothers and sisters here in the community. We have asked God to come and be among us and bond us, and bring us together as His people, as his covenanted people, that we might experience here at Mother of God, a real encounter of a covenanted Christian community. We pray that similar to what was happening in Acts 3 when the Holy Spirit came upon the early church.

Next point, St. Augustine says, as you look at the Trinity, there is a moral law to Trinitarian relationship covenant – so within the covenant that we practice as Christians, the Holy Spirit brings the actual moral law of the Trinity Covenantal love. The Father will always be truthful to the Son, the Son will always obey the Holy Spirit; the Spirit will always exchange love. There is a dialogue of morality that the Trinity abides by. Morality of love – they will never be selfish, they will always work in love, to pour themselves out completely for the other... 100% holy. We also see in the biblical definition of covenant: oath which means God included. With God we can do this! I took an oath when I married my wife. I asked God to bless, to be part of my marriage—it's so much more than a contract. A covenant is an exchange of persons. It's an outpouring of oneself: the Father giving to the Son, the Son giving to the Holy Spirit, so there's a person always involved in Biblical Covenants. Contracts buy stuff, make business deals, or define terms. Covenants make people relationships, create marriages, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, a kinship in a covenanted Community.

So I mentioned this exchange of person, a covenantal exchange ... I give all of myself to my spouse, my spouse gives all of herself to me, there's a spiritual union there because we've asked the Holy Spirit to be a part of it.

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An exchange of persons versus an exchange of terms, leading to a transcendent moment where God is present blessing us. You experience God in that covenantal relationship.

Does this make sense? How many want a covenantal relationship? How many want a contractual relationship? One is far better, right?

If we look at covenant in the bigger context of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal history, these covenanted communities go back a long way – beginning in the Book of Acts. In the Book of Acts, we see the Holy Spirit, something happens to first Holy Spirit people – they form communities! An authentic work of the Holy Spirit, people want to give more of themselves, they want an outpouring of themselves given back to God, to their brothers and sisters, so they began communities. Charismatic communities – they encountered the Holy Spirit of freedom. They experienced the Holy Spirit – a Holy Spirit lifestyle, “Go and preach in Rockville” they go and preach in Rockville! Give money to widows ... they give and are more full of Spirit. They were trying and seeking to be a community of the Holy Spirit. If you read St. Basil the Great in 325 AD, in 325 the Church was in such disarray that many theologians wanted to get rid of the Trinity, and make our Lord the Holy Spirit a second-rate God. And St. Basil said, no, he is equal, the third Person: “This covenant is the operative principle of a Trinitarian love.” In 360 AD Augustine is saying: “This covenant God is a God of revelation – he reveals his covenant and this covenant that He gives us, gives us true freedom.” Then in 1800’s, Sr. Elena Guerra – she founded a Holy Spirit order [Oblates of the Holy Spirit] and she just called upon the Holy Spirit, and she saw value of this exchange of the Holy Spirit, this life, this joy of the Holy Spirit, all the time. So she started writing Pope Leo XIII. Now do you think Pope Leo stopped everything and read her letter? No, she wrote 13 letters to him, before the Pope began to think, you know, Sr. Elena’s got something here, this Holy Spirit – this Holy Spirit community is really doing something powerful. So Pope Leo at the turn of the last century, dedicated the whole 20th century to the Holy Spirit. Did you know that? So we move further in history to Pope John XXIII, he asked for a new covenant, a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all the Church. Then in 1968, four ladies at Our Lady of Mercy parish in Potomac, Maryland, began Mother of God Covenant Community. They were praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the world again, like Pentecost: that the Church once again would see the love of God and people would turn to God in a new way – Mother of God Covenant Community was founded. We wanted to live the promises of Jesus of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in 1986 - I think this is really interesting – we can look at Covenant through the eyes of a saint, Pope St. John Paul II, and learn what he says about the Charismatic Covenanted Communities. JP II used to go to a prayer meeting in Rome. And I know this because last summer, my wife and I traveled to Rome for the CCR Jubilee, and we heard Cardinal Cordes who was the secretary for the Council of the Laity under JP II, read to us the personal diary of JP II. JP II used to go to the prayer meeting in Rome and he said, you know, Charismatic Renewal is a wonderful experience for the Church because everyone participates. Cardinal Cordes said the philosophy of JP II was very Aristotelian – he was a student of Aristotle and he believed in participation. Everyone in church needed to participate and the Holy Spirit is how. What he loved about the charismatic renewal was, he would hear everybody praying together, everybody singing. One person standing up with a Scripture, another person with a word of knowledge, another person with a prophetic utterance – it was a very informal work of the Holy Spirit, at the grassroots. Participation. And he said, you know, I feel very comfortable

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here among charismatics – Alleluia! So JP II encouraged the formation of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and today there are 210 around the world.

So we see throughout the whole Old Testament and the New Testament, this desire of God to teach the Church about covenant: to Adam, to Noah, to Abram, to Moses, to David, all throughout the Old Testament. And of course we get to the most significant testament of the New Covenant, where Jesus – he promises the Holy Spirit. Every day at Mass we hear Jesus' words about him being and establishing the new eternal covenant: take this all of you and drink it, for this is my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be poured out, which is outpoured, upon you – that is the love of God upon you from His cross, blood that's poured out upon each one of us – that's the root of our new covenant promise! That's the exchange. Our sin (death) for His blood (life) of heaven.

My wife asked me – well, what does the covenant do? She said, so what? Covenant is really a power to participate, that God is basically saying, you can participate in my love. Each one of you – it's a covenant of my life gifts, the charismatic gifts for all – you can have the power of the Holy Spirit! You too can do this stuff! You know, when I first read the Gospels, I liked this guy Jesus – I really did! I thought he was so cool – he could gather people, he could say to Mike, "Mike, follow me" people would follow him – he would turn things from one state to another state, he was a man of love – I really liked him! I wanted to be just like him – and I still want to be just like him. And one of the ways that you're just like him is having his covenanted love that's just poured out, and expecting nothing in return. Ya know, I was talking to my wife recently, about my kids, and I said, you know, I don't have covenantal love towards my kids. Because I expect this, this, this and this. And I repent. And she said, but you have to have covenantal love, Mark, and I said, I know, I know, but it would be nice to have some return once in a while! But she says, there's no return in covenantal love, other than the love of God. But you get my point ...

The last thing, I'm just gonna make this one last point and then we're going to pray. I love Pope Benedict's point on covenantal love. Covenantal love means that you can have a dialogue, you can have a conversation exchange with God. A word for Mark... and it's like a valve that you turn on water – you can either allow the light of the Holy Spirit dialogue into your heart by listening to God's Word or not.

Of course, Pope Benedict wrote in *Verbum Domini*, we talk to God by reading Scripture – it's in Scripture that we listen to the Word of God, you hear the word of the Lord speaking to you. And to sin, he says, is to refuse to listen. So covenantal love calls us into this divine dialogue with a God who loves. This dialogue is like a water valve on a hose – turn it on, you say, yes, I will listen, to hear the Word, Lord I need you in this situation, Lord speak to my life. Or you can turn it the other way and turn it off, and listen to the world, listen to yourself and listen to other opinions. But I will tell you, if you believe in a God of covenantal love, he loves you, he has good for you, he's gonna really reveal to you what's really the best for you.

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We'll look over the next few weeks at the covenant of the Mother of God Community – we're not going to spend much time tonight because we're running out of time, but there's really three points to it:

- 1) To seek to participate in Holy Spirit imbued life from above and to seek him first. Receive Jesus New covenantal exchange of kinship... Matt 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well...* The One, Good, the True, the beauty of Trinity.
- 2) To seek to participate in the good, the true and the beauty in all our brothers and sisters within MOG and share with them God's goodness. We participate by coming to weekly Praise & Worship; you say yes to being saturated with the Holy Spirit of God. By attending Praise & Worship you are blessed by the Spirit and you bless your family not present and you honor the work of the Spirit to be praised eternally... St. Basil says we can't praise him enough or loud enough with our lips... We try to seek first to discover the good in our brothers and sisters in the Mother of God Community, and share with our brothers and sisters about God's goodness of the Holy Spirit, and then
- 3) To seek to give God's Love away. We try to tell other people that God loves you, God's got a good plan for your life – you too, can be a part of his covenantal love.

So let's just pray now, let's ask the Lord to work in our hearts, to touch our hearts – to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to us about his love for us. Because the essence and proof of his covenantal love is the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit is here because Jesus died on the cross, shed his blood, and sent his Holy Spirit to you. If you've ever been touched by the Holy Spirit in your life, that's because of covenantal love.

So Lord, we ask that your Spirit work tonight in our hearts. We ask that you touch minds, touch attitudes, move people off of a thinking that's based on what I get out of relationships, and move us to your Covenantal love, a love that is being poured out and exchanged by your Spirit in our hearts. Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit, remove any fearful thoughts we might have about you, and fearful thoughts we might have about Covenant, reveal to us, Lord, our true identity as a promise of being sons and daughters of God. And deliver us from any lies about our identity: that I'm a nobody, that I'm lost and I'm not important. Lord, that you would pour out an outpouring of the Spirit of freedom. You give us a spirit of freedom as we know you, Lord, that we are free as sons and daughters in your love. So Father we thank you and we praise you for each person here, and Father we ask you to bless them, with a new understanding of how much you love them. That you have defined your love as covenantal, and this love is continually being poured out for all of humanity and for each person here tonight. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

Over the next few weeks we ask you to be praying about God's covenantal love, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you how he pours himself, has made an exchange of your person for himself. We're going to have a few other talks on covenant, so you have those to look forward to.