



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - December 2012

THE YEAR OF FAITH, THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE NEW EVANGELISATION AND THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CANONISATION OF SAINT VINCENT PALLOTTI

Receiving an invitation to prepare a reflection which in some way includes the above themes, all of which are fairly important for our Pallottine Family, is like being invited to plunge into the ocean. So many themes, such important arguments, so many challenges to face. I am afraid of talking too much; we have less and less time to listen to others and even less again to read what they have written.

I know that my first thought is to put myself at the feet of the Master, of Jesus whom I proclaim to be my only Saviour. What I really need is to be crazy enough to trust in the Lord and desire to entrust all of you to his love.

What immediately comes to mind is the word of Saint Paul (for whom St. Vincent had a deep love) which still echoes in my mind and heart from the time of our Symposium on the New Evangelisation:

“For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”
(1 Co 9:16).

In a changing world, the Gospel does not change. The Good News always remains the same. Our vocation to be its bearers and our responsibility are always current. *“The core of the proclamation always remains the same: the Kerygma of Christ who died and rose for the world’s salvation, the Kerygma of God’s absolute and total love for every man and every woman”* (Benedict XVI, Message for World Mission Day 2012).

I ask myself, what do we, sons and daughters of St. Vincent Pallotti, need in this era of the New Evangelisation?

Like everyone in the Church today, I need to re-examine, with courage and humility, my way of being an apostle, sent to evangelise, I need to understand the profound sense of insufficiency of my proclamation and my witness; otherwise, how can I explain the fact that so many people

around me do not know God and live as if God did not exist?

“God created human beings in time only in order to lead them happily to eternity. His desire is to see all of them saved, enlightened by his graces and by the exercise of his Providence. For this reason, St. Dionysius the Areopagite says that the most holy, most noble, most august, most divine work of all of the Divine, august, noble and holy works is to cooperate with the merciful plans, wishes and desires of God for the salvation of human beings”. OCCC IV, 124).

At some point in the past, each one of us met Jesus, each one replied with love and courage, ‘*Yes, send me*’, to his invitation, ‘*Follow me*’. Each person lives out in their own state of life as mother, father, sister, brother, priest, young, sick etc., day after day, their being an apostle, sent by Jesus. All of us have the same desire, implanted in our hearts by our Creator, to be happy. As good Christians, we must desire the same happiness also for our brothers and sisters. We find the fullness of our happiness in Jesus Christ who is our Way, our Truth and our Life.

Placing myself before the Master, I must find the courage to reflect on the effectiveness of my proclamation and my witness. This is the first and most important step towards my personal contribution to the New Evangelisation. It doesn’t matter if the truth hurts me, because sincerity will lead me to conversion and healing. Habit often extinguishes the power of creativity and enthusiasm, leading to dullness. The lack of fervour in missionary spirit which manifests itself in weariness, in frustration, in disinterest, in indifference, in minimalism, could be a sign of crisis.

Whatever my diagnosis I have to let myself be spiritually renewed by the encounter and lived communion with Jesus Christ. Without the renewing breath of the Holy Spirit there can be no New Evangelisation. Without a deep desire for the Holy Spirit on my part, “the new man, the new woman”, true witness of God, cannot be born in me. I already realize from my life experience how risky and unpredictable it is to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit and his action within us

But if we open our hearts and minds to the fire of the Holy Spirit who acted in the life and missionary activity of the first apostles, of St. Paul, of the saints of all times, including our holy Founder, we can experience unexpected change. Like the disciples of Emmaus, like the disciples who left the Cenacle after Pentecost transformed from simple chroniclers into passionate witnesses of the Risen One, from frightened apostles into

courageous bearers of the Gospel to the very ends of the earth. It is the Holy Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God.

**“For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”
(1 Co 9:16).**

I really find the need to be changed into an ardent witness of the Risen Jesus from whom life springs for me and for the whole world. Not to be simply a chronicler of facts, of events immortalised in the pages of the Gospel, but to believe strongly in the extraordinary power, and feel the life, which the Gospel possesses. The most difficult thing today for each of us, for every Christian, I think, is to take seriously the Gospel which we have in our hands, to try to translate into practise what Jesus says to us about simplicity of spirit. But this is precisely what is being asked of us with great insistence in today. The Good News of the Gospel is always the love of God for each human person; we are expected to give concrete form to this message and it is only then that those close to us will be able to understand the message of love and hope. A “theology of the face”, meaning meeting and welcoming the other in a personalised way, seems more relevant and necessary. It is very much needed today in human relationships. The most effective way to share the Good News with others is to communicate it heart to heart. Every person wants to feel themselves to be worthy of our attention, our interest, our love, and many want to see in us people of God.

I remember a recent encounter with an immigrant from Burkina Faso who stopped me on the street asking for help in order to eat. He was desperate, sad, tired of struggling for his life here in Italy. In our brief conversation he recounted how he had escaped from his country because of the war and had come to Italy, but had also found life difficult here. He seemed to be very sincere, and looking into his eyes I saw a suffering human person who was often denied respect for his humanity. Unfortunately that day I had no money in my pocket and it seemed that I could not help him. I offered to pray with him and I placed my hand on his head, praying for and blessing him. Really moved, he said: *Sister, your prayer for me is worth more than money.*

Yes, to open our eyes and discover that this other is my brother, a son of the same Heavenly Father, just like the Word of God teaches us. Yes, it is true that if our hearts do not burn with the fire of the Word, we will not

set the world on fire with the Gospel which is life. Only you, Lord, can help me to open myself to the “*novum*” (newness) proposed by the Holy Spirit. Otherwise I will always have the same habits, the same methods, etc. and, I ask myself, with what result?

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(1 Co 9:16).**

“Remember, that my Divine Son in the kingdom of Glory, will reward you for every thought, word, work, and for every little thing, that you have committed to the propagation of the holy Faith, and indeed, if you do as much as you can in every way possible for this end, he will crown you for all eternity with the Crown of glory of your Apostolate”. (OCCC IV, 333).

For a moment of prayer:

Lord, I would like my life to become a continuous experience of your presence to be shared with others, a space for the action of your Gospel, of the Holy Spirit, so that you may be known, loved and glorified throughout the world.

Father of infinite goodness and tenderness,
who never tire of sustaining your children
and of nourishing them by your hand,
allow us to draw from the Heart of Christ, pierced on the cross,
the sublime knowledge of his love
so that renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may bring to all people
the riches of the redemption. Amen.
(From the Italian liturgy for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus)

Question for reflection:

Do I feel the need for conversion, for change, in my life?

Do I feel the need for the renewing power of the Spirit of God in my apostolate, in my mission?

Am I ready to open myself to the “to the “*novum*” (newness) proposed to me by the Holy Spirit, in which he wishes to involve me?

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