



# *Apostles for Today*

*Prayer and Reflection - April 2014*

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## **New Evangelisation and Conversion**

I begin my reflection with the Plan of Evangelisation of the Church of Cascavel, PR, Brazil, (2012-2016): “Evangelising, beginning from Jesus Christ, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, as a missionary, prophetic, disciple Church, nourished by the Word of God and by the Eucharist, in light of the evangelical preferential option for the poor, so that all may have life, (Jn 10:10) on the way towards the definitive Kingdom”.

Among the proposed actions, I will take two which are envisaged and which indicate the path of the entire Diocese: “Parish in a permanent state of mission and Parish, place of biblical inspiration for life and for pastoral work”.

The first of these finds expression in the happy affirmation of Pope Francis, during WYD Rio 2013, when he said: “Go, without fear, to serve. And it is necessary to smell the odour of the sheep”. In the “Document of Aparecida” (DA), the bishops stated that “the pilgrim Church is missionary by nature, because it has its origin in the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of the Father (AG2). Therefore, the missionary impulse is part of the life which the Blessed Trinity communicates to disciples, through Baptism. In order to concretise the evangelising action, groups of reflection, of families, of biblical study and of other types display great effectiveness in making the parish and the baptised be missionary, with visits to families, in welcoming new inhabitants until all are treated as people, with an address and with a place in the life of the community.

The second of these, biblical inspiration in life and in pastoral work, gives priority to formation, to knowledge and to maturation in faith. The people formed in faith should become similar to Jesus and constantly choose in his favour: “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in

me” (Ga 2:20). Pope Francis affirms: “The Church’s closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; “communion and mission are profoundly interconnected”. In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.” (EG 23).

St. Vincent Pallotti, in the Appeals of 1835 and 1836, stated that all, great and small, learned, students, workers, rich and poor, priests, lay people, religious and seculars, merchants and businessmen, officials, artists and craftsmen, communities and individuals, each one in their own state and condition, according to their own gifts, can dedicate themselves to the works of the Catholic Apostolate in order to revive faith, rekindle charity and propagate throughout the world.

The dream of a missionary Church, according to Pope Francis, consists in her being completely at the service of evangelisation and not trapped in her own structures, that pastoral work, independently of what name it is given, be wider and more open, with an express orientation so that those who participate in it go out on mission and bring to all people the joyful proclamation of the Gospel.

The great novelty that the Church proclaims to the world is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made man, Word and Life, has come into the world to make us "sharers in the divine nature" (2Pt 1:4), and so that we might participate in his very life. The proclamation of the kerygma invites us to become aware of the great and life-giving love of God which is offered to us in Christ, died and risen.

The Church is animated by the Holy Spirit with the most diverse gifts and charisms for its edification, spreading the salvific ministry of the Lord, until he comes at the end of time (1Cor 1:6-7). The Holy Spirit awakens and forms in the Church decisive and courageous missionaries like the first Apostles, showing the places which need to be evangelised and choosing those who must do it (At 13:2). God gives talents to everyone and invites all to multiply them. The Church, marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit, opens the doors of salvation to the faithful. St. Paul says to us in 2 Cor 3:3: “you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God”. It is the same Spirit which enlightens, which enlivens, which guides, which strengthens

and which reminds the Church of the marvels which God has revealed to humankind.

God works wonders for Mary, she who is full of grace, the Mother of evangelisation. She, making herself available as the handmaid of the Lord, was with the disciples in the Cenacle and, with them, received the Holy Spirit, the sending, the mission, and was present at the birth of the Church (Ac 1:14). Marian devotion and the prayer of the Rosary have kept many people and families in the path of our Lord Jesus Christ, bringing them to salvation. Therefore, in her many apparitions, Mary has manifested God's desire for the salvation of all. She never puts herself at the centre, but always points towards the centre of life: Jesus Christ! Food for fruitful evangelisation is to be found in prayer, in the Word of God and in the Eucharist. All who nourish themselves in prayer, who feed on the Word and the Eucharist, realise the will of God and live in communion with God.

Innovation in evangelisation, by the grace of God, will occur by beginning from conversion. There is a path to be followed and it is worth highlighting the path of returning to our origins, of returning to the house of the Lord, taking up once more the teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the joyful welcoming of the baptismal mission of going without fear in order to serve the shattering of the structures which enslave and generate death, the humility of allowing the free action of the Word of God instead of manipulating the Spirit and, equally, of receiving the mercy of God and living it out with others, love for the poor, without exclusion, the effort so that religion be at the service of all, overcoming ritualism in view of an authentic ecclesial charity. In summary: conversion to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who desires that all may have life and have it in abundance.

Lastly, this all presupposes a conversion sufficiently radical to lead to an appreciation of the positive aspects of evangelisation discussed above and the strength and courage to welcome and practice the Gospel values necessary for Jesus Christ to be known, loved and accepted by all.

This new evangelisation requires changes in understanding, in commitment, in action, at all levels in the Church, through the example and witness of our own lives.

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## Questions for personal and community reflection:

- Where do we see the greatest need for conversion in our lives? In the life of our community? In the life of the Church at all levels?
- Do we really experience the call to a pastoral and missionary conversion as a burning priority - for ourselves, for our community, for the Union of Catholic Apostolate, for the wider Church? How are we responding concretely to this call and what further do we plan to do to put it into action?
- Pope Francis reminds us that a lack of solidarity towards the needs of the poor will directly affect our relationship with God, that an authentic faith is never comfortable or completely personal, but always involves a deep desire to change the world, that each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society (EG 187, 182-183). How are we responding concretely to this call and what further do we plan to do to put it into action?

## Prayer:

Transform our hearts, O Lord. Create in us a pure heart, a heart free from pettiness and selfishness and fear, a heart full of your tenderness and compassion, deeply convinced of the truth of the Gospel and fully committed to living out its demands and challenges in daily life. Grant us, as individuals, as a community, as a Church, that pastoral conversion needed to renew all things in you; grant us the heart of true apostles, of authentic disciples and witnesses, so that we may be instruments of your solidarity and hope, your peace and justice, your truth and reconciliation, your tenderness and joy and love in a world that, often without knowing it, cries out for you and longs for the coming of your Kingdom. Amen.