



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - October 2014

Introductory Reflection - Spiritual Preparation for the General Congress of the Union in July 2015

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day.”

(Evangelii Gaudium 3)

Pope Francis offers us a simple yet profound invitation to constant revival of faith in our lives. Through our continual encounter with Jesus, we are renewed and our hearts filled with the joy of the Gospel (cf. EG 1). This joy, which comes from our encounter with the love of God, moves us outward, beyond ourselves, our cares, our concerns, our needs. “For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (EG 8). The love that we have received stirs joy within us that moves us out into the world on mission as evangelisers who do not proselytise, but attract through our witness. (cf. EG 14). Through this way of attraction, we members of the Union, through reviving faith and rekindling charity, help others experience “Jesus Christ, a joy ever new, a joy which is shared (cf. EG 2, section title).”

For the General Congress of the Union of Catholic Apostolate in Brazil in July 2015, we have taken as our theme, “Jesus Christ, a joy ever new, a joy which is shared”. As a way of preparation for the entire Union, the reflections in *Apostles for Today* until that time will be based on the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. This inspiring and challenging work of Pope Francis calls all the baptised to greater engagement in the life of faith, particularly through our care of the poor and of those on the peripheries. The invitation to engagement is also an invitation to evangelise. “When the Church summons Christians to take

up the task of evangelisation, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment” (EG 10). This “source” is Jesus Christ.

As members of the Union, we “promote the co-responsibility of all the baptised to revive faith and rekindle charity in the Church and in the world, and to bring all to unity in Christ” (General Statutes, 1). We, in “accordance with the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti,” are called to draw all into an encounter with the “source of authentic personal fulfilment,” Jesus Christ. Today, the place of greatest need for this encounter to occur is within the “domestic Church”, the family. Pope Francis summarises the contemporary situation of the family.

The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children (EG 66).

As the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on “Pastoral Concerns of the Family in the Context of Evangelisation” begins this month, we as members of the Union have already recognised the need to assist the family in deepening its encounter with Jesus who will bring true joy and fulfilment. The General Coordination Council of the Union in 2013 offered a common project for the Union this past year that focused on the second spiritual work of mercy, “instructing those lacking knowledge.” The project was called “Know God and Make God Known.” It is important to continue the effort begun in this project in light of this and next years' Synods of Bishops focusing on the family and in our preparation for the General Congress of the Union. The letter announcing the project gave a sound process that leads to encounter with the love of Jesus Christ who will give us a joy that must be shared.

The project, “Know God and Make God Known” is:

- a spiritual project - to 'know God' - to commit ourselves more fully to come to know God more deeply since those who wish to evangelise must always first and continually seek to be evangelised themselves;

- an apostolic project - to 'make God known' - to instruct those whose knowledge of God has not yet reached the depths of their being. It involves engaging in the work of evangelisation, transmitting to others our own lived experience and knowledge of God, whether to members of our own family, our friends, our neighbours, our work colleagues.

Using the method of the project can also bring deeper renewal to our family of the Union and greater unity among us and with Jesus Christ. All of it must be done in a spirit of love which transforms us and moves us outward in joyful sharing of the Gospel. As St. Vincent Pallotti teaches us, “if we are really animated by the spirit of love, we will always treat all with love, we will look on all with love, we will think of all with love and we will speak of all with love” (OCC III, 338). We members of the Union are called to live a love that bears joyful witness to love of Christ. Pope Francis calls into question any hesitation on our part to live joy born out of the experience of God’s love in our lives.

Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our “technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy”. I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (EG 7).

The renewal that Pope Francis calls us to is not something that can be done alone or in a short time. Such renewal of self, others, Church, and world is done most effectively together with one another and with the Holy Spirit. Fr. Jacob Nampudakam SAC, Ecclesiastical Assistant

of the Union and Rector General of the Society, in a letter to the Pallottine Family in India this past June offers some further insight and invites us to prayer through the words of Pope Francis:

Spiritual renewal is a work of the Holy Spirit and not the fruits of our human efforts alone. Therefore, we wish to pray with Pope Francis: “Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love...Star of the new evangelisation, help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illumining even the fringes of the world. Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia” (EG 288).

Reflection Questions

- What are the ways in which I daily encounter Jesus Christ, deepen my relationship with him, and share the joy of the Gospel?
- Can I think of one or more people with whom I could share something more of my 'knowledge' of God, of my relationship with him?
- What apostolic initiatives can we as NCCs, LCCs, groups and members and collaborators of the Union organise to concretely evangelise families, to help families come to a more profound living experience and knowledge of the love of Christ and to choose to live a deeper and more authentic Christian witness?
- How can we support families in the Union in an ongoing way in their path to grow and be transformed more deeply in the love of Christ in daily life?

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