



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - November 2014

“Give them something to eat” - Spiritual Preparation for the General Congress of the Union in July 2015

“If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our conscience, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat (Mk 6:37)”.

(Evangelii Gaudium 49)

In this month of November, as we continue our ongoing process of spiritual preparation for the General Congress guided by the overall theme ‘Jesus, a joy ever new, a joy that is shared’, we are invited to take up the challenge expressed by Pope Francis above: “Give them something to eat”.

People are hungry. They search for ‘food’ in many places, among people they may or may not know, using many methods and means to find themselves; they look for the reason of their existence, and sometimes, they are even aware that they are searching for God, but they have simply had no one tell them about Christ.

These are the people Pope Francis encourages us, the People of God, the Church, to reach out to, to give them that reason to live and thrive, that ultimate goal to work for. And how are we to do this? Through evangelization: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you.” (Mt 28: 19a, 20a). Evangelization may be as complex as

preparing talks and retreats to enrich others or as simple as talking with someone, letting them know about God's love for them or introducing them to the basics of the faith and the Church. The Church needs (we need) to be open to all who are searching, regardless of their past choices and their present circumstances.

We have a very special gift to share with the world – the person of Jesus Christ. He is the message we are to bring to all those with whom we come into contact. This has been the message the Church has been entrusted to carry to the ends of the earth. Not our message, but Jesus' message. In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead. (EG 36)

In earlier times, this may have meant going to faraway lands as missionaries. Today, we don't have to travel far to find those who are hungry and thirsty. We have only to look around us, in our own families, our own neighbourhoods, maybe even in our own parishes, to find those who do not know Jesus and his message of love or have let that message become stale in their lives.

And who is to evangelize? We are. As St. Vincent believed and the Pope says: All are called (EG 20), by virtue of our Baptism. WE are the ones who are to take up the mission entrusted to the Apostles and through them to us 'to go forth'. At the end of every Eucharistic celebration we are sent to bear witness to Christ by our lives.

Though these efforts may take us out of our comfort zones, there is a joy which comes from knowing we have sown the seeds of the Gospel. And that joy is celebrated again in the Eucharist. The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving (EG 24). Best of all, Jesus tells us, 'and know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!' (Mt. 28:20b)

Although Pope Francis wants us to focus on the message, he also realizes that some structure is needed to enable the message to be brought to others. Just as for the UAC the local coordination councils are centres which animate gatherings, prayer, formation and collaboration in order to sustain the spirituality common to the members and to foster diverse apostolic initiatives (General Statutes 60), so the parish, as part of the particular Church to which it belongs, is the Church incarnate in a certain place, equipped with all the means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but with local features (EG 30). The UAC as an association is a source of enrichment for the Church, raised up by the Spirit for evangelizing different areas and sectors and we are asked to not lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular church (EG 29). St. Vincent Pallotti founded the Union to serve the Church... Therefore, the members of the Union are committed to remaining in communion with the Pope and the Bishops. (GSt 21)

We are not asked to evangelize alone or without preparation. It is in the parish that we are fed at the table, by Christ in the Eucharist and in the Word of the Gospels, through prayer and preaching, and by the community itself. We are blessed to be members of the UAC, where we learn more about Jesus the Apostle of the Eternal Father (formation), where we share our faith journey with others, where we pray and celebrate Eucharist together and from where we are further encouraged and supported in our evangelization efforts. And although today's vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness (EG 41), we need to remember that all religious teaching ultimately has to be reflected in the teacher's way of life, which awakens the assent of the heart by its nearness, love and witness. (EG 42) When we strive to imitate Christ's love for the Father and for all persons, seeking to live his life-style and apostolate as perfectly as possible (GSt 19) and we give ourselves to a life of service and to fulfilling His will which is

revealed to us above all through the Sacred Scriptures, the teachings of the Church and the signs of the times (GSt 18), we are living evangelization for all to see.

But just as it takes us time to grow in our faith and we expect mercy and patience from God and others for our doubts and failings, we must also allow others the time they need to grow. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God's saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings. (EG 44) We are called to live forgiveness and reconciliation as a pathway to permanent conversion (GSt 23e).

Evangelization is a 'going out' but it is also a journeying together, through our trials and tribulations, our fears and our great joys. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved. (EG 24) Great joy will be our reward.

Reflection Questions

- Whom have I encountered in the last month who was in need of my witness to God's love for them?
- In what ways am I feeding the 'hungry'?

Concrete Action:

We do not have all the answers to the needs and questions of those who come to us seeking help. Let us make time this month to learn of the agencies in our local dioceses which can be of assistance to us and to which we might be of assistance.

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