



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - January 2015

During Christmas we contemplated the mystery of the Incarnation, we focused our gaze on Emmanuel, God with us, his presence has filled us with profound joy and hope and renewed our strength for the New Year. Let us contemplate him constantly so that he be “*Jesus, a joy ever new, a joy which is shared*” in our personal and communal experience.

Seeing ourselves as part of the whole Church which evangelises - Spiritual Preparation for the General Congress of the Union in July 2015

“Being Church means being God’s people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. This means that we are to be God’s leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God’s salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel” (Evangelii Gaudium, 114).

On this path of our spiritual preparation for the General Congress, let us think about ourselves as Church in today's time. In the midst of a contemporary world characterized by a permanent socio-cultural-religious transition, a marked pluralism and a predominance of individualism, how is the Church to be understood today? How does she see herself? As an organic and hierarchical institution, a multinational with a famous religious leader; a structure or a building in our neighbourhood, a place where people gather to pray and profess a faith; a privileged group that practises a religion? These questions will evoke many responses, both in those who are part of her and those who are distanced from her. Ultimately, the question arises: is the Church a

response to the lack of meaning and the suffering of those who have been losing hope and the joy of living?

The Church is, first and foremost, a people on pilgrimage towards God, a mystery which has its roots in the Trinity, because “*the mystery of the Trinity is the source, model and goal of the mystery of the Church: ‘a people united by the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit’, called in Christ ‘like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race’*” (*Aparecida Document*, 155). This mystery of the Church which also exists concretely in history in a pilgrim and evangelising people (EG 111), a people that is chosen and called by God. “*Jesus did not tell the apostles to form an exclusive group, an elite group. Jesus says, “Go and make all peoples my disciples” (Mt 28:19)*” (EG 113), so the Church is sent by Jesus Christ as a sacrament of salvation offered by God, and through her evangelising activity, cooperates as an instrument of divine grace to proclaim salvation to all (EG 112) and continues the saving mission of Jesus Christ in history.

“*The Church exists to evangelise*” (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14) and what is her programme of evangelisation? “*The programme already exists. It is the plan found in the Gospel and the living Tradition. It focuses, ultimately, in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, to live in the Trinitarian life and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is a program that does not change with shifts of times and cultures, but takes account of time and culture for a true dialogue and effective communication*” (John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29).

All the baptised participate in this programme, since “*in all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization*” (EG119) given that:

“*in virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization*” (EG 120).

Let us remember the words of St. Vincent Pallotti on the universal apostolate, which encourage us to an active participatory co-responsibility in the task of evangelisation: *“Therefore let every Catholic who lives in the Church of Jesus Christ be consoled because, whether priest or lay person, if with their talents, learning, wisdom, capacities, relationships, profession, words, material and worldly goods, and if with nothing else at least with their prayers they do whatever they can so that faith in Jesus Christ be spread throughout the world, and charity be rekindled among believers and spread throughout the world, they will acquire the merit of the apostolate, and all the more they employ for this purpose money, belongings, talents, works, prayers ...”* (OOCC III 145-146).

Francis reminds us that every baptized person is an evangeliser!: *“it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized”* (EG 120) This personal involvement involves *“a kind of preaching which falls to each of us as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel to the people we meet, whether they be our neighbours or complete strangers. This is the informal preaching which takes place in the middle of a conversation, something along the lines of what a missionary does when visiting a home. Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey”* (EG 127)

It is important that the Church grow as an evangelising agent, that she be constantly evangelised so that the entire Church may evangelise: therefore *“we ought to let others be constantly evangelizing us. But this does not mean that we should postpone the evangelizing mission; rather, each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are”* (EG 121). Also, we should keep in mind that the Holy Spirit equips us for this, enriching us with different charisms, gifts to renew and build up the Church, which *“are not an inheritance, safely secured and entrusted to a small group for safekeeping; rather they are gifts of the Spirit integrated into the body of the Church, drawn to the centre which is Christ and then channelled into an evangelizing impulse. A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is*

its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God's holy and faithful people for the good of all? (EG 130).

Conclusion:

The Church understood as the entire People of God which evangelises must be constantly evangelised, called to live in the image of the Trinitarian community, enriched by the gifts of the Spirit and with the active personal involvement of each one of the baptized.

Questions for personal and/or community reflection:

- Do I feel myself to be part of the People of God, chosen and called by him to continue the saving mission of Jesus Christ in history?
- As a baptized person I am called to grow as an evangelizer and to be constantly evangelised. Do I know, love and imitate Jesus Christ? Am I willing to establish relations of communion with others? By my actions do I contribute to the transformation of my surroundings (family, community, work)? Do I allow others to evangelise me?
- As a baptized person, am I an evangelising person who explicitly proclaims Jesus Christ? How am I doing in this?
- Am I using the gifts I have received from God to serve the community, to build up the Church?

Concrete action:

In this coming year, let us recognize the ecclesial spaces where we can evangelise and be evangelised in order to put the gifts we have received from the Lord at the service of the Church.

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