



# *Apostles for Today*

*Prayer and Reflection - July 2015*

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## *Sent to proclaim “Jesus, a joy ever-new, a joy to be shared” – Reflection to spiritually accompany the General Congress of the Union in July 2015*

We, the Pallottine Family present whether physically or in spirit from July 14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> at the III General Congress of the Union in the Cenacle with Mary Queen of Apostles, “the great missionary”, open ourselves to welcome “the fullness of the Holy Spirit” (*cf.* OOCC X, 86-87), to hear the Word and to reflect on the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, “*Evangelii Gaudium*”.

This document is of the greatest importance, since it touches upon the depths of the apostolic spirit of Saint Vincent Pallotti and also of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, born of his missionary zeal which, from the beginning, was put at the service of all of the faithful for the spreading of faith throughout the world. We are conscious that the missionary aspect was crucial from the beginning of St. Vincent’s foundation, and today we feel particularly challenged to rediscover and recover our missionary dimension.

The mission of each one of us, members and collaborators of the Union, to revive faith and rekindle love, springs from our concrete personal reality as well as from our personal and community prayer, experienced as a living encounter with Jesus, Apostle of the Father. The life of Jesus Christ, the missionary, the one *par excellence* who was sent (Lk 4:18; Jn 4:34), was what attracted Pallotti. He left us Jesus Christ, missionary and Apostle, as the “Fundamental Rule ... to imitate him with all possible perfection in all works of our private life and our public evangelical ministry” (OOCC III, p. 62).

This experience can profoundly transform and evangelise the life of all who take up the path, as Pallotti desired: “My Jesus, may my life be destroyed; give me your life with which I wish to live” (OOCC X, pp. 668-669). The experience of God, infinite love and mercy, opened the eyes of the priest Vincent Pallotti to the fundamental needs of the Church and of the social situation of his time, to which he gave a response. Pope Francis reaffirms the following: the new evangelisation for the transmission of the Christian faith, the proclamation of the Gospel today, is only possible when it is born

of “an encounter ... with a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (EG, n.7). This is “the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization”, according to Francis. “For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (EG, n. 8). Therefore, whether in its origin or in its development, evangelising action maintains its vigour in this encounter: it is not an “heroic individual undertaking”, but a proclamation which is born of and sustains itself through an encounter with this great “Other” who urges us to go to the women and men of today.

## **The “Joy of the Gospel”: a Church with a missionary face**

Vincent Pallotti’s missionary zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world was an important engine of his apostolic activities in the context of the Union. Above all, Vincent understood that everyone, together with Christ, Apostle of the Father, has the right and obligation to actively participate in the mission of the Church. We have the mission of making Christ known and loved, of awakening the consciousness of every Christian to their vocation to the apostolate, and of promoting active participation in the mission of the Church in every part of the world. A concrete example and pioneering initiative of the Union is the revival of the popular celebration of the Octave of the Epiphany, which Vincent Pallotti originally planned and organised. We can say that the solemn celebration of the Octave was and still is today the missionary celebration of the Union.

In proclaiming Jesus, Francis invites us to ‘attend to the “way of beauty”’: “Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties” (EG, n. 167). We are called to be a prophetic presence in today’s world, apostles who heal the wounds, who know how to listen, welcome and visit people and, in the light of the Gospel, to rekindle the hope and joy of following Jesus Christ.

With joy, all of us, members and collaborators of the Union, can unite with Pope Francis in the mission of building a Church which goes forth in missionary and pastoral outreach. Help him to build a Church with a missionary face: close, open, able to go out from itself in new ways towards people, especially to those who live in the geographical and existential “peripheries”. A Church which is free, able to prophetically denounce the injustices of the world.

The Pope seems to indicate certain situations of apostolate/evangelisation which are in need of special attention, which we here would like to underline:

a) The **poor**, who beyond bread, housing, work, health, need spiritual care. The Pope says that “the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. [...] they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith” (EG, n. 200). Even though we do not always succeed in manifesting the beauty of the Gospel, “there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards” (EG, n. 195).

b) **Women**, who are “doubly poor” when suffering “situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence” (EG, n. 212). On her part, “the Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. [...] But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence [...] in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures” (EG, n. 103).

c) **Migrants**, “the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others” (EG, n. 210).

d) The economic system, “unjust at its root” (EG, n. 59), which creates “an economy of exclusion and inequality [...] which] kills” (n. 53). Pallotti was convinced that human beings are created in the “image of God”, while in this system they begin to be treated as “consumer goods to be used and then discarded” (EG, n. 53). In this way begins “a “throw away” culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers” (EG, n. 53).

In our apostolate/mission, according to the Pope, “mystical notions without a solid social and missionary outreach are of no help to evangelization, nor are dissertations or social or pastoral practices which lack a spirituality which can change hearts” (EG, n. 262). The proclamation of the Gospel brings us “to brotherly love, to humble and generous service, to justice and mercy towards the poor” (EG, n. 194), as Jesus taught us. “To

the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society” (EG, n. 180).

From the Cenacle we are sent on a mission to build with joy a Church animated and moved by the spirit of the early Christians. The spirit of the early Christians was an eminently missionary spirit, because they all, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, went out from the Cenacle and scattered throughout the world, bearing witness to Jesus to the Jews and to pagans by word, by their lives and by their own blood. Recapturing the spirit of the early Christians seems to be one of the great contributions which we, the members and collaborators of the UAC, can give to the Church and the world. Revive faith and rekindle charity in the Church: this is the charism of the Union. A charism which is very relevant for our times and which contributes to a new missionary impulse in the entire people of God: bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated, laity.

## **Reflection:**

**Read or re-read the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium***

- ✓ How can I make the gifts which I have received from God fruitful in service of the community, in the building up of a Church which goes forth in pastoral and missionary outreach?
- ✓ As a baptised person, do I put engage in an evangelisation which seeks to proclaim Jesus Christ? Is it an evangelisation which leads people to take up the Christian life?

## **Concrete Action:**

As a member of the Union, in what can I engage more fully to bring Jesus, joy of the Gospel, to others, putting myself at the service of the Church with the gifts which I have received from God, especially for those who live “in the geographical and existential peripheries”?

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