



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - May 2015

The spiritual motivations for mission (EG 262-283) – Spiritual preparation for the General Congress of the Union in July 2015

“We wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21) – some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem appealed to the Apostle Philip with this question, a question which also resonates in our times. The duty and task of proclaiming the Gospel was and always remains valid for the entire Church, which “is missionary by her very nature” (*Ad Gentes*, 2). We too, as members of the Union, are invited by Jesus to proclaim newness of life.

Like the Greek pilgrims of two thousand years ago, many people today ask us, perhaps at times unconsciously, not only what we can “tell” them about Jesus, but above all what we can “show” them of Jesus. We are called to help our sisters and brothers who live close to us or in the most distant parts of the world that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and that in him we ourselves have found the meaning and purpose of our lives.

There are many people which the Good News has not yet reached. For this reason the missionary mandate of Jesus (“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” - Mt 28:19-20) is still relevant today.

What did Jesus command his disciples to do? The first and most fundamental commandment which Jesus gave us is the commandment to love. If this is so, the missionary mandate which all of the baptised have received consists above all in revealing God who is LOVE; Saint Vincent Pallotti used to say that God is “Infinite Love”

The Apostles not only heard from their Master that “God is love” (1Jn 4:8). They themselves experienced the love of God and received the

grace to communicate it to others. This experience generated enthusiasm in their hearts. The Gospel speaks of the joy of the first disciples of Christ sent by the Master to the cities and villages with the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

All disciples of Christ are called to multiply this joy which is born in us as a fruit of the recounting of the life of Jesus described in the Gospel: to bear witness to the love with which he touches the life of every person, nourishing it with his Word. It is a joy which is born of and multiplies through making Jesus known to others, as friend and guide on one's path of life. It is necessary to return to the "first love" with which Jesus filled our hearts, generating enthusiasm and joy: we can bear witness to our adherence to him who sends us every day to our sisters and brothers. Acting in this way, we can fully live what St. Paul expressed in words written to the Christians of Corinth: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).

A woman who has recently settled in a city where many young people live was telling me: "Often, going to the centre, I pass by two brothels, one with the name "Heaven" and the other beside a building with the words "I do sin, but I am not the devil" written in large letters in English. Seeing these places, I also observe the faces of the young people and, thinking about their lives, I am often spontaneously filled with sadness. I feel the love of Christ for them in my heart, and recall his life, given for their salvation. I reflect and seek ways to bring Christ into these places: I tell him about these people, young and older, who in a certain way are lost in their lives, and I entrust them to Mary Immaculate. I don't get discouraged and I continue to believe that, one day, they too can meet Jesus. And in such moments, hope is transformed into joy and sadness loses its power". This woman would still like to share her preoccupation for these young people with other members of the Union and will certainly do so.

Pope Francis, speaking to us of the Church which "goes forth", refers to the characters of the Old Testament such as Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah. He also indicates the witnesses to Jesus: Peter and the whole community of disciples. In this list of persons who go forth, God has inscribed our Founder, Saint Vincent Pallotti. But our names are also written there, Jesus also saying to each one of us today: "Go".

A Moment of personal prayer:

I invite you to open yourselves to the Holy Spirit and to feel in the depths of your heart this desire of Jesus and his sending: “Go”. He invites you to begin a path on which you will meet people who have not yet found either joy or the love that God has for each one of us.

“The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy. [...] This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present” [EG 21].

Duc in altum! (Put out into the deep!) Jesus also invites us to put out into the deep sea in the world of today. The missionary spirit which should inspire us moves us to welcome his exhortation with the certainty that he is with us. Only by living in communion with him will we not fear to meet people who, at times, because of their complicated situations, can frighten us. Jesus desires that all may rediscover, in service directed to others, the joy and missionary enthusiasm of the Gospel. We do not expect ourselves to be strong people having solutions to all of life’s problems. Above all, it is necessary to look at what Jesus did and learn from him to listen to every person, to feel their pain and express with trust and conviction that there are THREE of us together who are carrying the weight and, if possible, resolving the problems. Jesus who sends us is always with us.

The Pope says to us: “A missionary heart is aware of these limits and makes itself “weak with the weak... everything for everyone” (1 Cor 9:22). It never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness. It realizes that it has to grow in its own understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit, and so it always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street”(EG 45).

“A Church which “goes forth” is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with

someone who has faltered along the way. At times we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily pass through it” (EG 46).

God, Infinite Love, leads the Church towards all people who live at the ends of the earth, sending evangelisers who are faithful to Jesus, their Master. They too, in order to preserve the freshness of their own vocation, fill their hearts with the love which flows from the Heart of Jesus. It is the place where they learn to be sensitive, compassionate, available for service, meek of heart and interested in knowing the problems of others in order to commit themselves to helping them.

Community sharing:

Each person is invited to recount a difficult situation in which they live or a meeting with others. Together as a group, reflect and seek ways to invite Jesus into the paths of our lives and to do it as THREE. Finish the sharing with spontaneous prayer for all of the people mentioned and their situations.

Let us pray together:

“Star of the new evangelization, 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, illuminating even the fringes of our world. Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia!” (EG 288).

Prayer in the month of May:

In this month dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, we pray for families in serious difficulties, for young people who face challenges greater than their strength and for all of the members and collaborators of the Union, so that they may live their missionary commitment moved by the love of Christ and by love for the sisters and brothers that they encounter on the path of life.

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