



“The Joy of the Gospel”

Formation Theme (2013-2014): An Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

(Rev. Leo E. Patalinghug November 2014)

PART I: Reflection & Opening Prayer:

This following prayer by St. Augustine reflects how the created things can either point to or obfuscate God, the Father and Creator of all. In the Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis reminds us that while we can delight in the created world, it must point to the cause of our Joy, the Word of God, made flesh and now dwelling among us. Pope Francis challenges us to make sure that, like St. Augustine prior to his conversion, we cannot let our delights and desires remain at the level of creatures, but draw us closer to the One who Created all people and all things. Let us Pray:

For behold, you were within me, and I outside. And I sought you outside and in my ugliness fell upon those lovely things that you have made. You were with me and I was not with you. I was kept from you by those things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called and cried to me and broke upon my deafness; and you sent forth your light and shone upon me, and chased away my blindness; You breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and did not pant for you; you touched me, and I have burned for your peace. Amen. (Prayer of St. Augustine)

Part II: Reading from the Scriptures (Matthew 6:25 ff)

That is why I am telling you not to worry about your **life** and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear. Surely **life** is more than food, and the body more than clothing! Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are? Can any of you, however much you worry, add one single cubit to your span of life? And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even **Solomon** in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these. Now if that is how **God** clothes the wild flowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, **will** he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith? So do not worry; do not say, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?" It is the **gentiles** who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things **will** be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow **will** take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.¹

Reflection Questions: Call to mind what we worry about in life, and how to we find comfort and freedom from our anxieties. Where do we turn, to whom or what do we rely upon to get us through our daily struggles, temptations and challenges in life? How can we be more practical in this desire to make God the answer to every question and prayer?



Part III: Section 2 of Evangelii Gaudium, an Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

In this section, entitled, “Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment” Pope Francis uses casual but direct language that challenges humanity with a universal message, speaking to the heart of problems that exist in every human person - from the ambivalent atheist to the believer prone to hypocrisy, and everyone in between. His ultimate goal is summarized in the final paragraph of this section, when he says: “...I have not sought to offer a complete diagnosis, but I invite communities to complete and enrich these perspectives on the basis of their awareness of the challenges facing them and their neighbor. [...] Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor.” (p 108, 109).

What are some of these challenges? Pope Francis provides several observations of “isms”(unbridled consumerism (p60), individualism (p67), doctrinal relativism & subjectivism (p70 p80), sterile pessimism (p84) etc.) to which he encourages us to say, “NO” in order to say “YES” to the Communion for which Jesus Christ endured suffering and death. Below are some highlighted quotes and commentary on these various challenges. The Pope observes, “The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation, even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity.” (p52). Therefore, the Pope exhorts all to say, “NO” to the sources of injustice and division among God’s children.

A1) NO to Economy of Exclusion: In this section, the Holy Father offered a comment that many misinterpreted as speaking against the ‘free market.’ He writes, “In this context [*disposable and exclusionary market system*], some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world.” The Holy Father, not speaking as an economist, but as a spiritual leader, observing that these “trickle down theories” have not bore fruits of compassion and justice, but increased exclusion and a deafening ear to the cries of the poor. The answer is not in money, but in Jesus. This is why he clarifies his position in his next “NO.”

A2) NO to the New Idolatry of Money: As Jesus, the Holy Father warns of the relationship we have with money, when money becomes our lord and has dominion over us. We wrongly believe that only money has the providence to feed us. This love of money leads to an imbalanced mentality of reducing man to a level of “consumption”, and thus we forget humanity’s inherent dignity, while “deifying” the market (p56).

A3) NO to a Financial System Which Rules Rather than Serves: This leads to a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God, and thus the markets and financial systems control lives - no freedom. Again, money and finances become our gods.

A4) NO to the Inequality Which Spawns Violence: The Pope warns that modern societies have become indifferent to the reality that our actions have reactions; and that violence begets violence. Violence, primarily stemming from injustice in the inordinate consumption of finances harms the fabric of society and destroys human dignity.



These “sources” of problems, namely, making money into our god, requires a response from the believing Christian. However, saying “NO” to these inherent evils leads to attempting to discover solutions. This will not be without even greater challenges for those trying to bring the good news to this world. Some of those challenges are:

B1) Cultural Challenges: Some in the church act too individualistically, reducing the faith to mere personal or private matters. This also leads to secularism, requiring the church to be “a mediator in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defenses of life, human and civil rights, and so forth” (p 65), thus noting how much good the church has done, despite the cultural challenges.

B2) Challenges to Enculturating the Faith: While the Church has done much to spread the Gospel message, the Pope observes, “It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition. Growing numbers of parents do not bring their children for baptism or teach them how to pray. There is also a certain exodus toward other faith communities.”

B3) Challenges from Urban Cultures: The Holy Father calls for an “evangelization capable of shedding light on these new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us, and inspiring essential values.” Pope Francis observes that unfortunately, “Houses and neighborhoods are more often built to isolate and protect than to connect and integrate. The proclamation of the Gospel will be a basis for restoring the dignity of human life in these contexts, for Jesus desires to pour out an abundance of life upon our cities (p75).”

Therefore, the Holy Father continues by suggestion that we say “YES” to the “Challenge of a Missionary Spirit,” and “YES” to “The New Relationships Brought by Christ.” and thus say continue to say “NO” to:

C1) Selfishness and Spiritual Sloth; which the Pope calls, “pastoral acedia” caused by unrealistic projects, lack of patience, the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the church which leads to a wearing down and small mindedness.

C2) Sterile Pessimism; which stifles boldness and zeal, and leads to a defeatism, turning the faithful into “sourpusses” (p85). He comments, “Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand.” If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents.” (p87)

C3) No to Spiritual Worldiness; which can be seen in the “attraction of agnosticism” and “self absorbed Promethean neo-Pelagianism” (p 94), both of which leads to arrogance, denying our history, and leads to the sin of “*habriaqueismo*” [which in Spanish translates to] “spiritual masters and pastoral experts who give instructions from on high, [indulging] in endless fantasies and we lose contact with the real lives and difficulties of our people.” (p96)

C4) No to Warring Among Ourselves; and therefore creating an “inner circle” that replaces the universal church. He writes, “I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another,



and how you encourage and accompany the other: ‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ (p 99).

Finally, the Holy Father exhorts the Catholics to consider the realistic ecclesial challenges, such as the inclusion of laity, women, elderly and children in our Church’s evangelization. He writes conclusively that “sacramental power” of the male priesthood should not be understood as “domination” - which leads to the controversies about how to include both genders and all age groups into a hierarchy called to holiness.

In all of these challenges, temptations and struggles facing the modern world, the Holy Father exhorts, “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor”, similarly to the young bishop of an early church, St. Timothy says, “Preach the good news, in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2), persevering until the end, and finishing the race - no matter what challenges lie ahead.

Questions and Considerations: In this lengthy summary, which of these challenges do we find in our personal experiences, and how do we deal with these as members of a Secular Institute, called to be a leaven in the secular world.

Part IV: writings from Fr. Louis-Marie Parent

The Founder, Fr. Louis-Marie Parent, OMI, offered ways for our Church, and individual members of God’s family, to be an instrument of peace in order to bring about the Communion as Pope Francis exhorts. In his book, “It is Possible to Get Along with Others,” Fr. Louis-Marie offers topics that practically expound upon the challenges and temptations to which we ought to say, “NO” as well as virtues and ‘best practices’ to which we ought to say, “YES.” This simple but meaningful book - so simple that it requires a rereading in order to explore the practical profundities - suggests how we can accept others unconditionally, how to endure negative sentiments, how to grow and not take things personally, how to listen, how to trust, and more. One insight resonates well with Holy Father Francis’ words explored above.

Fr. Louis-Marie writes, “The whole world talks of human relations. People say that they are ready to accept their neighbors as they accept themselves. Everyone has his or her own particular conception of love owed to others. Everyone deplores the scourges of war, the social malaise, the tide of anxieties and of misunderstandings which are in the process of polluting the social climate and of brutally tearing about the few morsels of happiness which any human being may aspire to enjoy. [...] The causes of a malaise is generalized to this extent are not as easy to discover as we are led to believe. We are brain-washed to believe that people are nervous, that authority under all its forms is contested or rejected, that the means of communication are, in general, in the wrong hands, etc., etc., One thing remains certain: for a street to be clean it is sufficient to have residents set their hearts on keeping their now front entrances clean.” (page 96, “The Starting Point of Love” from “It Is Possible to Get Along with Others.”)



This observation of the challenges, like the Holy Father, reminds us that we cannot let the problems be blamed on others. All of humanity is in need to check our own individual hearts, and try to put into practice the humility required in order to spread the Gospel Message. Pope Francis' and Fr. Louis-Marie's words are meant to take root in individual hearts. There is no guarantee in finding perfect peace, perfect communion, and perfect freedom in *this* world - a world where the majority are NOT willing to put these words into individual practice. Yet those who keep "their front entrances clean" can take comfort knowing that peace will remain in their hearts, even if the world around us seems to fall apart. This is the gift of faith and joy that comes from the Gospel. Like the prayer of St. Augustine, the Gospel message of trusting in Him, the Pope's exhortation, and Fr. Parents' counsel to individually put these teachings into practice, we are called - as members of Voluntas Dei - to daily live the Joy of the Gospel.

Questions and Considerations: How does Fr. Louis-Marie Parent's analogy of a "clean street" affect our lives, here and now, and for tomorrow?

Part V: Closing Prayer

A meditation from Fr. Louis-Marie Parents, entitled: "In This Sinful World"

My dear children, Ungodliness rages, my laws are ridiculed, everyone lives as they desire, as if they never had to die. The impious will disappear, like the clouds chased by the wind, like the candle burned by the fire. My dear ones, you are my consolation. I count on each of you to sanctify my Name, to build my kingdom, to spread my goodness. I have put my power in you so do not fear. I protect you from the horrors of the Evil One. I will defend you in difficulties of all sorts. I am your Refuge, your strength. The future holds great trials for you; you will have almost insurmountable difficulties to overcome. Do not lose courage, stand firm, lean on me, and I will not fail you. I will purify you even to the depth of your heart, because you are my children, my chosen ones. Give me your lives, I will take charge of them. Trust me, give me all that you are, give yourself to me as you are, in my mercy I will absorb you. I want a total give of your being so that my confidence, my strength, my goodness can live in you. I want to glorify you with my Son Jesus and I will truly be your Father. You are predestined. You are saved; let me love you. Become aware that I am with each of you. Amen.