

Opening Prayer:

Let us pray and in doing so call to mind the needs of our world, our community and our very selves [pause]

God of all peoples and nations, You sent Your only Son into a wounded and broken world so as to heal all those injured by sin and division. Stir up within each one of us that missionary zeal for hearts and souls that desires only to bring to all peoples and times the good news of the Gospel, the joy of Christ and the courage of the Spirit. Help us to become leaven for the world through our “Spirit-filled evangelization” that each day shows forth the new Pentecost and that displays itself through fruitful action and compelling words. Make each moment of our day an opportunity to bring healing and joy into every milieu and thereby in word and deed show forth that we are Christians. We make this pray through Christ our Lord. Amen

CHAPTER FIVE: SPIRIT-FILLED EVANGELIZERS

Pope Francis in this final Chapter of the Joy of the Gospel sets forth the criteria for evangelization as well as the role of the missionary work. He also focuses on the important role that Mary the Mother of God plays in this evangelization, under the title “Mother of Evangelization”. He brings to mind the idea of evangelization that is spirit filled and spirit led. But what does this mean?

259. Spirit-filled evangelizers means evangelizers fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit made the apostles go forth from themselves and turned them into heralds of God’s wondrous deeds, capable of speaking to each person in his or her own language. The Holy Spirit also grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness (parrhesía) in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition. Let us call upon him today, firmly rooted in prayer, for without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty. Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence.

But we might ask why this emphasis on “fearlessness, boldness and courage”. It would seem that the Pope is concerned that efforts directed at this have not been so ‘fearless’ or have been half-hearted or loose efforts; efforts that fade in the face of opposition or that are so mild as to be like milk toast. He suggests reasons why contemporary efforts have been flagging.

262. Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work. 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. These unilateral and incomplete proposals only reach a few groups and prove incapable of radiating beyond them because they curtail the Gospel. What is needed is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity. Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer, and to my great joy groups devoted to prayer and intercession, the prayerful reading of God’s

Formation Theme (2014-2015): **"The Joy of the Gospel"** - An Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis
June 2015 Lesson Prepared by James Burns

word and the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist are growing at every level of ecclesial life. Even so, "we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the incarnation". There is always the risk that some moments of prayer can become an excuse for not offering one's life in mission; a privatized lifestyle can lead Christians to take refuge in some false forms of spirituality.

How is the Christian to overcome this? Pope Francis suggest through a Personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus, i.e., Love begets love. He states in article 264. *"The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence... How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! What then happens is that "we speak of what we have seen and heard" (1 Jn 1:3). The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others."*

But what happens if we find ourselves down, dejected or lacking in fervor or enthusiasm? Pope Francis proposes that this usually happens *"... because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people's hearts: "The missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation".* 265

In paragraph 266 the Pope speaks of our need to have a *"... constantly renewed experience of savouring Christ's friendship and his message. It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights. A true missionary, ... senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise. Unless we see him present at the heart of our missionary commitment, our enthusiasm soon wanes and we are no longer sure of what it is that we are handing on; we lack vigor and passion. A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody.*

Fr. Parent similarly writes when directing the Voluntas on being beings of service *“...to accelerate our rhythms we will be assiduous in carrying out our exercises of piety each day in order to keep the sacred fire of fervor burning. We will never become professionals in serving until we have had a lived experience of Jesus, until we feel his living, moving, active presence within us, until we look upon him as our best friend – he to whom we can tell all and has the liberty of determining and influencing our choices. [Unless we do so] We will be amateurs who work sporadically and when our motivation cools down, we will end up by giving shoddy, indifferent apathetic service.”*

Questions

- 1) Do I see myself as a spirit-filled evangelizer in the manner the Pope suggests? If so how do I show this forth? If not what concrete step(s) might I take to initiate such a call?
- 2) As Voluntas we are called to be missionary. In what ways have I seen Jesus at the heart of my daily commitment to be a missionary with enthusiasm? How do I show forth my love and conviction that Jesus is the center and meaning of all that I do and that He is the one worth bringing others to see? How might I act more so in the future? How have I invited Jesus in to both *determine and influence* my choices?
- 3) No mission activity can be sustained without constant attention to the loved one. Pope Francis directs us to *“... stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence.”* When was the last time I did either of these acts? How can this prompt me to greater attention to be with the beloved? What greater acts might be the fruit of such prayer or other forms of piety?

The Pope next recommends ways we might imbue ourselves with *“the spiritual savour of being a people”* with and for Jesus and our neighbor. In 268 he relates *“To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus’ gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people.”* The Pope then reminds us of our model for such living and our model at a particular moment in his life (269) *“... Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is nothing else than the culmination of the way he lived his entire life. Moved by his example, we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But we do so not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings us joy and gives meaning to our lives.”* Pope Francis acknowledges that there will be times when we are tempted to remain at a distance and want to *“... keep the Lord’s wounds at arm’s length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people’s lives and know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely*

Formation Theme (2014-2015): **“The Joy of the Gospel”** - An Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

June 2015 Lesson Prepared by James Burns

what it is to be a people, to be part of a people.” The Pope then goes on to remind us in 271 (and these words perhaps more so for us as members of a secular institute have direct meaning and appeal as we seek to fulfill our calling). *“It is true that in our dealings with the world, we are told to give reasons for our hope, but not as an enemy who critiques and condemns. We are told quite clearly: “do so with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3:15) and “if possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18). We are also told to overcome “evil with good” (Rom 12:21) and to “work for the good of all” (Gal 6:10). Far from trying to appear better than others, we should “in humility count others better” than ourselves (Phil 2:3). The Lord’s apostles themselves enjoyed “favour with all the people” (Acts 2:47; 4:21, 33; 5:13). Clearly Jesus does not want us to be grandees who look down upon others, but men and women of the people. ...*

This peace that depends upon us which the Pope references in quoting another Pope in First Peter is something that must be cultivated if we are to be true missionaries. In his book *“Searching For and Maintaining Peace”* Father Jacques Phillippe suggests as much when reflecting on, *“Interior peace and apostolic fruitfulness”* He writes, *“The peace of which we speak is that of the Gospels – it is a necessary corollary of love, of a true sensitivity to the sufferings of others and of an authentic compassion. The more our soul is peaceful and tranquil, the more God is reflected in it, the more His image expresses itself in us, the more His grace acts through us.”* This is not a self-focused absorption, or of being impassive trying to extinguish sensitivity in which we seek to create indifference (which is very different from detachment). Rather what we are asked to do is develop authentic peace which will draw forth from us true compassion and a deep sensitivity to the sufferings of others. In this way peace, service and evangelization are all part of the Joy of the Gospel.

Questions:

- 1) In what ways have I plumbed the depths of our tradition in developing a sense of peace that offers me a greater understanding of my own sensitivity to the suffering of others?
- 2) Who am I called upon right now to walk arm and arm with? How can I do so without minimizing others or engaging in “tourism of the poor” but rather in my “work for the good of all”?

The mysterious working of the risen Christ and his Spirit

The Holy Father continues in the encyclical to the reasons many remain immobilized in their work to assist the poor and those in need. He writes in 275, *“If we think that things are not going to change, we need to recall that Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty. Jesus Christ truly lives. ...”* He then speaks of the greatest hope that is found in the resurrection.

Further, paragraph 276 discusses *“... persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty”*. This paragraph stands as a reminder that Christ stands with us all. ... The Pope goes on, *“However many dark things there are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew; it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.”*

But how is a Voluntas expected to witness to this call for justice in a world that constantly calls us to live into a quick fix or an easy out? The Pope provides an answer, *"Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is he who "helps us in our weakness" (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour. It is true that this trust in the unseen can cause us to feel disoriented: it is like being plunged into the deep and not knowing what we will find. I myself have frequently experienced this. Yet there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!"*

Indeed this highlights our total dependence upon Christ for the inspiration of our missionary efforts in order to help build up God's kingdom. One way we can do this is in intercessory prayer. The Pope discusses these and other aspects of faith through the lens of prayer. He relates in paragraph 281, *"One form of prayer moves us particularly to take up the task of evangelization and to seek the good of others: it is the prayer of intercession. Let us peer for a moment into the heart of Saint Paul, to see what his prayer was like. It was full of people: "...I constantly pray with you in every one of my prayers for all of you... because I hold you in my heart" (Phil 1:4, 7). Here we see that intercessory prayer does not divert us from true contemplation, since authentic contemplation always has a place for others."* He goes further in 283 to discuss how the great Saints of our history were also *"great intercessors"*. *This intercession is like a "leaven" in the heart of the Trinity. It is a way of penetrating the Father's heart and discovering new dimensions which can shed light on concrete situations and change them. We can say that God's heart is touched by our intercession, yet in reality he is always there first. What our intercession achieves is that his power, his love and his faithfulness are shown ever more clearly in the midst of the people."*

Questions

- 1) In what ways have I fought "persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty"? How have I allowed myself to be totally taken by Christ in this effort? Has this allowed me to be a better neighbor, employee, teacher, etc.?
- 2) Fr Parent writes "To pray in a natural relaxed manner there is nothing better than solitude. Jesus often goes aside to pray?" In this we are reminded of the need for ongoing prayer. How can Voluntas in particular foster and become strengthened for missionary work through their devotion to a life of prayer? Because this life of prayer is often impelled by missionary efforts and vice versa, how can I find a compatible prayer life to a missionary calling that offers a rich opportunity for my life in general in the secular institute? In what ways does this help me see the need to become a missionary locally or internationally for the Church?

Mary, mother of evangelization

The Pope concludes the encyclical by highlighting Mary's role in the economy of salvation and in evangelization. The Pope in section 284 states, *"With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present in the midst of the people. She joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14) and thus made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost. She is the Mother of the Church which evangelizes, and without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelization."*

The Pope proceeds to then describe the need for forgiveness and understanding in a world that is so fractured and discouraged. In 285 he relates how we are to understand, appreciate and avail ourselves of Mary in this. He writes, *"On the cross, when Jesus endured in his own flesh the dramatic encounter of the sin of the world and God's mercy, he could feel at his feet the consoling presence of his mother and his friend. At that crucial moment, before fully accomplishing the work which his Father had entrusted to him, Jesus said to Mary: "Woman, here is your son". Then he said to his beloved friend: "Here is your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). These words of the dying Jesus are not chiefly the expression of his devotion and concern for his mother; rather, they are a revelatory formula which manifests the mystery of a special saving mission. Jesus left us his mother to be our mother. Only after doing so did Jesus know that "all was now finished" (Jn 19:28). At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation, Christ led us to Mary. He brought us to her because he did not want us to journey without a mother, and our people read in this maternal image all the mysteries of the Gospel. The Lord did not want to leave the Church without this icon of womanhood. Mary, who brought him into the world with great faith, also accompanies "the rest of her offspring, those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Rev 12:17).*

The Pope further describes Mary as the 'Star of the new Evangelization'. He encourages us to go to Mary for her intercession. In 287 he writes, *"We ask the Mother of the living Gospel to intercede that this invitation to a new phase of evangelization will be accepted by the entire ecclesial community. Mary is the woman of faith, who lives and advances in faith,[\[214\]](#) and "her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church".[\[215\]](#) Mary let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness. Today we look to her and ask her to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn.[\[216\]](#) ... He continues "Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for "bringing down the mighty from their thrones" and "sending the rich away empty" (Lk 1:52-53) is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice. She is also the one who carefully keeps "all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19).*

Questions

- 1) How can I appreciate the role of Mary more and more in the evangelization efforts of the Church and in my own milieu? In what ways can Mary be a model for me in discerning my role in the new evangelization?

- 2) Are there ways that I can include Mary as the Star of the new Evangelization in my intercessory prayer? If so how? Are there means by which I can model aspects of my life upon hers especially as I work to portray a life that is more fully devoted to witnessing Christ’s love?

Concluding prayer of Pope Francis:

**Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life in the depths of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own “yes”
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.**

**Filled with Christ’s presence,
you brought joy to John the Baptist,
making him exult in the womb of his mother.
Brimming over with joy,
you sang of the great things done by God.
Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith,
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.**

**Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death.
Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,
that the gift of unfading beauty
may reach every man and woman.**

**Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God’s kingdom.**

**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!**