

THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL
SEPTEMBER, 2014 TEAM LESSON

Introduction to Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel"-Read
Pages 1-14

(A) "A Joy Ever New, a Joy Which is Shared"

(B) "A Delightful and Comforting Joy of Evangelizing"

(C) "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Faith"

GATHERING PRAYER

Pope Francis presents his vision for the Church for the twenty-first century in "The Joy of the Gospel." In it he challenges us to live out our baptismal call. This, course, is what we try to do as consecrated seculars. With this in mind, begin the team meeting with the renewal of baptismal promises using the attached article with a contemporary formula.

I. "A Joy Ever New, a Joy which is Shared"

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this moment to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ...The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice...There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter...Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could be happy if a thousand conditions were met...We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. (The Joy of the Gospel, pp. 1-6)

The spirituality of the Institute is none other than that of the baptized in the Church: a life of communion with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. In accord with the will of God, each member endeavors to develop in a special way the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, as well as the cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance. These are the foundation of a special balance that shapes the members of the Institute into true witnesses of Christ in the world. (Voluntas Dei Constitutions, Chapter II, #6, p. 7)

Reflection Starters

- A. Share with the team your thoughts and feelings about your own baptism and why you consider it to be the most important event in your entire life.
- B. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Where do you find joy in our Institute? What are some of the ways that you might practice joy by sharing it with others?

- C. Pope Francis is inviting us to a “renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.” Suggest ways that we you might respond to this invitation

II. “A Delightful and Comforting Joy of Evangelizing”

Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others...For here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give lie to others. This is certainly what mission means .Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!...Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise; new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always “new” We should not see the newness of this mission as entailing a kind of displacement or forgetfulness of the living history, which surrounds us and carries us forward. Memory is a dimension of our faith...The believer is essentially one who remembers” (The Joy of the Gospel, pp. 6-10)

The present moment is a plate of happiness; I only have to take what I want from it. We live in a different era, but there has never been an easy one. If we take time to reflect, we will realize that each of us is an administrator, responsible for our own happiness of unhappiness. (“The Present Moment”, Louis-Marie Parent, p. 125)

Reflection Starters

- A. What are some of the ways that we may have “grown stale”? as individuals, a team or as a District? What are some new “paths of creativity” that we might embark upon as individuals, team or district?
- B. Pope Francis challenges us to remember. Share people on your faith journey and your Volutnas journey whom you remember, who have made a difference in your life.
- C. Fr. Parent teaches that we are “administrators of our own happiness. “ How are you doing as that role of administrator in your life?

III. The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Faith

Today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church and the missionary task must remain foremost. What would happen if we were to take these words seriously. We would realize that missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity. Along these lines, the Latin American bishops stated that we cannot passively and calmly wait in our Church buildings; we need to move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry. ("The Joy of the Gospel," p. 12)

The Voluntas Dei Institute seeks to be present in every milieu, and its apostolic objective is to create peace and brotherhood in Jesus Christ. In this way, the Institute shares in the mission of the Church that was commissioned by Christ to reveal and convey the love of God to all people of all nations. (Voluntas Dei Constitutions, Chapter III, #12)

This is an eminently missionary objective. The missionary dimension is basic to the Institute, and it is an indispensable component of the initial grace of its founding. (Voluntas Dei Constitutions, Chapter III, #13)

Reflection Starters

- A. The Voluntas Dei Institute is missionary in its foundation and in its apostolic focus. Pope Francis is telling us that being missionary is at the heart of the Christian life. What does it mean to be missionary? What is the "missionary impulse" to which the pope refers?
- B. How can we be missionary to one another, our parishes, the District, the world?
- C. Ethiopia is a sector of the United States District. In what ways are this a challenge and a blessing for us?

CLOSING PRAYER

Read the following two Texts. Spend a few minutes in silent reflection at the end of each reading:

Matthew 28:16-20

Matthew 5: 13-16

Conclude by each person making the sign of the cross on the forehead of the person next to you saying, "Go and preach the gospel with your life"

Baptismal Promises: Making the Words Bite

Although it is difficult to improve on our baptismal vows, in which we agreed to die and rise with Jesus, rewording of those vows provides fresh insights.

One of the less meaningful parts of the Holy Saturday vigil service is the renewal of the baptismal promises. Please do not misunderstand me. It is important for us to celebrate again the time when we first declared our intention to follow Christ and to live according to the Gospel, but the words of that commitment sound so formal, so harmless. "Do you renounce Satan?" Well, who would not? "And all his works?" Of course, that too is easy, especially if we do not know what works we are talking about. "And all his empty promises?" Again, that does not hurt either. The profession of faith that follows may be important, but it sounds so much like a question-and-answer version of the regular Sunday creed that its relationship to our baptismal commitment can be lost.

Because baptismal spirituality is really the foundation for Christian living, might it not be a good idea to formulate promises that highlight this foundation? After all, the Christian's pledge to follow Christ, which is made at baptism, cannot be outdone. We cannot improve on the vows taken when we agreed to die and rise with Jesus. Even if we attempted to excuse ourselves by claiming that we were too young then to know what we were doing, each time we receive the Eucharistic bread and share the Eucharistic cup we ratify our baptism. We say, in effect, that we are throwing in our lot with Christ. What He stands for, we stand for. What He loves, we love. His way of life, His example and teaching, become the pattern for our own. We are asking the Father to trace the Christ-sign—the sign of the cross—over our lives. The vows pronounced by couples at their wedding, or those taken by men and women on their entry into a religious community, may specify the direction of the

baptismal commitment; but those vows do not improve on that initial promise to be a disciple of Jesus, totally and unreservedly.

With that in mind, I decided last year to write a set of promises that would help to make the underlying meaning of baptism clearer. The congregation welcomed this little innovation, and so I thought it would be worth sharing this suggestion in case others might like to try something similar.

First, I gave an introduction of this kind: "My friends, tonight we recall that when we accepted baptism, we died and rose with Christ. 'We were therefore buried with him through baptism into His death,' St. Paul tells us, 'in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.' That new life has already begun. To know Christ Jesus and to follow the Gospel is to live with the freedom of the children of God."

Next, the connection could be drawn between the local church and the wider Christian community: "Let us, then, together with our sisters and brothers all over the world who are gathered in prayer this night, renew the promises we made by accepting baptism in the name of Jesus."

Then come the promises: "And so I ask you: *Do you accept Jesus as your teacher, as the example whom you will always imitate and as the one in whom the mystery of God's love for the world has been fully revealed?*" The formulation may sound new, but the belief implied in the question is ancient.

"Do you dedicate yourself to seeking the kingdom of God and God's justice, to praying daily, to meditating on the Gospels and to celebrating the Eucharist faithfully and

«William E. Reiser, S.J., is professor of theology at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Mass.»

devoutly?" After all, there can be no Christian life without prayer, and the Eucharist is its center.

Christian existence is a lifelong 'Amen' and an 'I do' to baptismal faith.

"Do you commit yourself to that spirit of poverty and detachment that Jesus enjoined on His disciples, and to resisting that spirit of consumerism and materialism that is so strong in our culture?" This puts some teeth into an old promise about renouncing Satan and his works.

"Do you accept your responsibility for building community, for being people of compassion and reconciliation, for being mindful of those who are poor and oppressed, and for truly forgiving those who have offended you?" All ministry contributes to one thing: helping to build the human community. The church will not be an effective agent for making peace unless as brothers and sisters we know how to become and to remain reconciled with one another.

"Will you try to thank and praise God by your works and by your actions, in times of prosperity as well as in moments of suffering, giving loyal witness to the risen Jesus by your faith, by your hope and by the style of your living?" The whole of a Christian's life is an act of worship, a daily

living out of the basic desire to be with and for the God who has come close to us in Jesus.

"Do you surrender your lives to God as disciples and companions of Jesus? Do you believe that God is Lord of history, sovereign over nations and peoples, and that God's promise to redeem all of creation from its bondage to death and decay will one day be accomplished?" Resurrection faith requires that we assent to this. If Jesus lives, then what choice do we have except to follow Him? If Jesus has been raised, then the future of the world is tied to the power of God to bring the dead—all who have been God's faithful servants—into redeemed life.

And then, to suggest continuity with the liturgical tradition: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting?"

Christian existence is a lifelong "Amen" and an "I do" to baptismal faith. We should do whatever we can, particularly in the context of our liturgies, to help one another to realize the meaning of faith. Questions such as "Do you reject sin?" or "Do you reject the glamour of evil?" need to be spelled out so that people have a firm idea about what exactly they are being asked to reject. And the profession of faith, at least on one night of the year, could be made to reflect those things that define us as disciples of Jesus in a practical way. Prayer, forgiveness, the Eucharist, the spirit of poverty, community, following Jesus—these are some of the living doctrines that bite into our lives. ■

What to Do Before the Archaeologist Arrives

Neighbors of volcanoes always
Should abide there circumspectly,
Beards and morals neatly barbered,
Bills paid up, the toenails whittled
On emerging from the shower.
Any noon or night the brooding
Titan may translate displeasure
Into ashes, into pebbles,
Into petrifying lava,
Sealing every imperfection
Till the nosy nose of science,
Aeons later, comes there sniffing.
Ah, the gleeful excavations!
Ah, what tales these molars tell us!
Better see the dentist pronto,
Bub, before the mountain thunders.
And those amorous graffiti
Scrawled on lavender asbestos—
Really, wouldn't telepathic
Signals, madam, be more prudent?

JOHN NIXON JR.