

"The Joy of the Gospel"

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I. The Entire People of God Proclaims the Gospel - Chapter Three

Introduction

A people of everyone and of many faces.

There is a blaring voice in the Church these days that asserts that the liberal media is misinterpreting Pope Francis. At every turn they aggressively pronounce that the media is not reporting fittingly or accurately the message of His Holiness. I find myself perplexed by this assertion since the media has rarely gone out of their way to shine a positive light on the Catholic Church. I suppose one could insinuate that the media is attempting to undermine the authentic teaching of the institutional Church. But that too seems like a shallow allegation since the end result, in their eyes, would be esteem the Roman tradition. Thus, I maintain that such a statement rings hollow. Francis has captured the spiritual imagination of billions of people. He has reframed our tradition with a more engaging and a fresh perspective. Instead of telling people how they are falling short, he seems to see something rich in the human soul. Rather than demanding that we refrain from discussing difficult topics, he apparently wants to open new venues of communication. As a substitute for rigid religious categories he longs for a Church that is open and vital in a hurting and broken world. Like those who flocked around Jesus of Nazareth, the people who are deeply touched by Francis' words are those who have felt bullied and beat up by life and thus desire a genuine encounter with Jesus.

Many years ago Bishop Utner from Saginaw Michigan said that his dream for the Catholic Church was that we would be recognized for our compassion and mercy like the Amish are recognized for their horse and buggy. Like it or not our tradition has been perceived as harsh and unbending. Some see us as an obsolete dinosaur who has outlived our usefulness. Some even remark that we are a dangerous organization that works against human progress. Though these allegations might be offensive to us in the Church, it would be imprudent to

ignore the fact that these opinions are held by many. With this said, Pope Francis has been a genius in portraying our tradition from a more positive and compassionate perspective. Though he makes many squirm, he is relentless in building bridges with a world who has grown to mistrust us.

The brilliance of Pope Francis is that he has not changed or adjusted any Catholic teachings or cherished beliefs. Rather, he has reached deep down within the tradition and pulled out a pearl of great price. With a smile on his face he is unyielding in holding out his hand with the precious pearl of faith and spiritual practice in a way that attracts rather than repels. He has mastered the art of evangelizing a culture who have become disenchanted with our cherished Church. People who felt discounted and dismissed feel welcome to join us at the table once again. This introduction sets the tone to explore Chapter Three of the Joy of the Gospel. It has been said, that John Paul II told us the importance of evangelization, Benedict told us what to do, and Francis has said to go do it.

Chapter Three, The Proclamation of the Gospel, is laced with Pope Francis' passion for Christ Jesus and the joy of being a disciple. Though Francis has changed nothing of the doctrine of the Church, he has seriously adapted people's perceptions of the Good News of Jesus. Quoting John Paul II, Francis clearly states that "there can be no true evangelization without explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord." And repeating the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, he maintains that it is the responsibility and duty of every baptized believer in Christ Jesus to spread the Good News. The whole people of God have a role to play in this vibrant evangelization. After all, we are all a pilgrim people who are advancing on its way towards God or as Teilhard articulated so beautifully we are moving toward the omega point of God's creative design.

Clearly, Pope Francis is neither fearful nor intimidated by diversity. In fact, this chapter is quite clear that the varied and rich diversity of the Church contributes to her beauty and attractiveness. However, the picture of diversity that Francis paints is not a disorganized or jumbled chaos but a gorgeous community of faith that is dripping with God's grace. He presents an adventurous and courageous image of the Church that calls all of us to live in unity through diversity. He clearly

is suspicious of a uniformity that imprisons our souls and limits the creative movement of the Spirit. It is a firm reminder that in the institute we should be zealous in thinking outside the box. Moreover, he is distrustful of a fanaticism that undermines authentic apostolic zeal.

Pause for Discussion

- 1. *In what ways do you contribute to presenting the Church in a positive light that attracts rather than repels?***
- 2. *Does Francis' approach excite or frighten you? Why?***

We are all missionary disciples

Francis states, "In all the Baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization." Thus, he once again affirms that participation in this saving work of God is for all of us to engage in in various ways. Moreover, Francis defends that God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an - *instinct of faith - sensus fidei* - which helps all of us to discern what is truly of God. The Holy Father apparently is dusting off some gems of the Catholic theological tradition. Though the concept of the *sensus fidei* is not new to the tradition, we certainly have not heard it being highlighted in recent years. Reflecting his esteemed Jesuit spirituality, Francis has a radical trust of the goodness of the human person and the richness of human experience. In short, God speaks to us directly, and that voice can be trusted. This exhortation appears to be taking down some of the fences between the clergy and the laity and gathering us into one pilgrim people who work together for the building of God's kingdom. The new evangelization calls for the full and active participation of all the people of God.

Reflecting the splendor of the spirituality of our Institute, the exhortation invites us to communicate the truth of Jesus in our daily interactions. It is through our daily actions, attitudes, and unique approaches to life that we convey the love of Jesus in our milieu. As members of a secular institute we are called to be in the world but not of the world. By being a leaven in the dough we help transform the world by practicing the presence of God. At the heart of this section of the

exhortation Francis speaks to the heart of our spirituality. Said differently, the document is calling us to live in the present moment in order to bring Christ into the world more dramatically and tangibly. Isn't the heart of our spirituality to be explicit in making the saving love of God known in the world?

- 1. Why is unity and diversity essential to the missionary evolution of the Church?**
- 2. Concretely, how are you a vibrant and assertive missionary?**

Popular Piety

Coming from his South American heritage, Francis has a unique appreciation for the local customs and devotions of a particular people. It is through our encounters with God in prayer that we become more fully who we are called to be in Christ Jesus. Piety or devotion is an important part to the spirituality of our institute and the Christian life as a whole. *Our five daily spiritual practices of reading the Word of God, Sharing in the Eucharist, Meditation, Devotion to the Blessed Mother (rosary), and visits to the Blessed Sacrament enrich and feed our souls.* The "people's mysticism" incarnates the presence and experience of God in our lives. This in and of itself is a missionary activity that touches the soul of a particular culture. People must experience their faith in a lived and vibrate way. This is a direct link to the spirituality of our institute because it alludes to the fact that, if we live in the presence of God, we are evangelizing without saying a word. It is in our prayer that is a lived encounter with the holy that speaks loudly to a world that longs to have what we have in Christ Jesus. "The essential element of prayer is believing that God is alive, that he lives in all the dimensions of my being, that he is attentive to my thoughts and to the least of my actions." (Footsteps of Jesus .18) Here we must ask ourselves if we use the tools or practices of the institute to grow in the love of God and neighbor.

- 1. Which of the five practices feeds your soul most dramatically?**
- 2. How do you incorporate the five practices into your daily life and spirituality?**

Person to Person

Today the Church is on fire for a renewed missionary vision. This missionary work takes place most effectively through direct one on one interaction. It is through person to person contact that we introduce people to the person of Jesus the Christ. There is a kind of preaching that takes place when people engage each other in respectful, kind, and gentle interactions. We meet others in various settings and in the context of honest conversations we invite others into renewed faith-filled perspectives. It is our objective as members of Voluntas that we are always ready and eager to bring the love of Jesus to others, especially the poor and outcast. Pope Francis maintains that the first step to person to person evangelization is a dialogue that is always respectful and gentle. Does this not sound identical to the words from our beloved founder's lips? Thus, in various settings we must be a personal witness through word and deed to the love of Christ Jesus. This perspective radically mirrors our commitment to live in the present moment without complaint or criticism. It is when we are complaint- and criticism-free that we best witness to the Gospel. Moreover, to the point of person to person evangelization we are called to be available to the needs and service to others. "In the Gospel, Jesus shows us that he is present to others. He is so present that we can say he is completely focused upon the person in front of him, be it an important person like the centurion or simply a child or teenager." (FSJ .45) Deep and profound evangelization demands that we are available and ready to respond to the needs of each other and humanity. This multi-dimensional communication requires a broad spectrum of communication styles and skills.

- 1. How do I encounter other people in daily life? Difficult people? People who are not respectful of me?***
- 2. In what ways am I supple in the hands of God with my encounters with others?***

Chrismas at the service of a communion which evangelizes

The diversity that exists between people and cultures must always be reconciled by the help of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of the mission of the Church and the

institute is a people who are passionate about becoming peacemakers—people who unite rather than divide, people who build up rather than separate, people who gather rather than scatter. The Church and the institute have a responsibility to be a model of peace in our world. We are entrusted with the divine commission to be reconcilers and healers in a broken world. Being faithful to our tradition, it is essential that we evangelize with the assistance of faith and reason. We must rely not only upon faith but also the rich intellect that God created the human person. "A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God's holy and faithful people for the good of all." (JOG . 69)

- 1. What charisms has God given to you? How do you use them for the common good?***
- 2. Fr. Parents challenges us to let Jesus act through us; he states that Jesus was willing to serve all categories of people without exception. How do we let Jesus act through us?***

The Homily

Finally, Francis addresses the importance of preaching. Though he clearly draws our attention to the importance and necessity of quality liturgical preaching, preaching is far more expansive and touches upon how we live our lives. With this said Francis states, "The Homily is the touchstone of judging a pastor's closeness and ability to communicate to his people." (JOG p. 71) It is in the context of the homily that a dialogue is maintained between the great deeds of salvation and the people of God. Thus, in order to preach and evangelize effectively the preacher must know the heart of his community. Moreover, the homily must give life and meaning. The homily must become food for the soul. The purpose of the homily is to guide the people of God to a life changing encounter with Christ in the Eucharist. Francis points out that the Church is a mother and she must speak to her children. It all comes down to understanding how Jesus looked at people. When we are inside this profound perspective, we are transformed by how we interact with others. Though most of us in the institute are not liturgical preachers, we are all called to preach and teach.

- 1. How do you speak to the heart of others to effectively communicate the Good News?***
- 2. I remember my homiletic instructor saying to us in class, "Gentlemen, don't forget that you are preaching GOOD NEWS." How are we Good News to others, especially those most difficult in our lives?***