



From A Bishop's Journal (632)

Pastoral Orientation Congress for a New Evangelisation (4)

As we prepare for the Pastoral Orientation Congress for a New Evangelisation, I would like to quote Pope Paul VI who, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelisation in the Modern World*, briefly defined who an evangeliser is, and to whom and through whom is evangelisation directed. Despite its thirty years' of age, the document is extremely rich. To those who would be drawn to fatigue and disenchantment, to routine and disinterest, the text can serve as an energiser and revive apostolic zeal.

Jesus, the First Evangeliser

Jesus Himself, the Good News of God, was the very first and the greatest evangeliser; He was so through and through: to perfection and to the point of the sacrifice of His earthly life. As an evangeliser, Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the kingdom of God; and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes "the rest," which is "given in addition." Only the kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative. The Lord will delight in describing in many ways the happiness of belonging to this kingdom. As the kernel and center of His Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by Him, of seeing Him, and of being given over to Him. All of this is begun during the life of Christ and definitively accomplished by His death and resurrection. But it must be patiently carried on during the course of history, in order to be realized fully on the day of the final coming of Christ.

Evangelised and Evangelising Community

Those who sincerely accept the Good News, through the power of this acceptance and of shared faith therefore gather together in Jesus' name in order to seek together the kingdom, build it up and live it. They make up a community which is in its turn evangelising. The command to the Twelve to go out and proclaim the Good News is also valid for all Christians, though in a different way. It is precisely for this reason that Peter calls Christians "a people set apart to sing the praises of God," those marvelous things that each one was able to hear in his own language. Moreover, the Good

News of the kingdom which is coming and which has begun is meant for all people of all times. Those who have received the Good News and who have been gathered by it into the community of salvation can and must communicate and spread it.

Essential Mission of the Church

The Church knows this. She has a vivid awareness of the fact that the Savior's words, "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God," apply in all truth to herself. The task of evangelising all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church." It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection. For the Church, evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: "Now I am making the whole of creation new." But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel.

To All Creation

Jesus' last words in St. Mark's Gospel confer on the evangelisation which the Lord entrusts to His apostles a limitless universality: "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation." To reveal Jesus Christ and His Gospel to those who do not know them has been, ever since the morning of Pentecost, the fundamental program which the Church has taken on as received from her Founder. This first proclamation is addressed especially to those who have never heard the Good News of Jesus, or to children. But, as a result of the frequent situations of dechristianization in our day, it also proves equally necessary for innumerable people who have been baptized but who live quite outside Christian life. Equally for simple people who have a certain faith but an imperfect knowledge of the foundations of that faith, for intellectuals who feel the need to know Jesus Christ in a light different from the instruction they received as children, and for many. The second sphere is that of those who do not practice. Today there is a very large number of baptized people who for the most part have not formally renounced their Baptism but who are entirely indifferent to it and not living in accordance with it. They seek to explain and justify their position in the name of an interior religion, of personal independence or authenticity. Like Christ during the time of His preaching, like the Twelve on the morning of Pentecost, the Church too sees before her an immense multitude of people who need the Gospel and have a right to it, for God "wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth. The Church is conscious of the fact that, if the preaching of the Gospel is to be effective, she must address her message to the heart of the multitudes, to communities of the faithful whose action can and must reach others. The Lord wanted His Church to be: universal, a great tree whose branches shelter the birds of the air, a net which catches fish of every kind, a flock which a single shepherd pastures, an universal Church without boundaries or frontiers.

A Universal Mission

The whole Church therefore is called upon to evangelise, and yet within her we have different evangelising tasks to accomplish. This diversity of services in the unity of the same mission comprises the richness and beauty of evangelisation. We would point out in the pages of the Gospel the insistence with which the Lord entrusts to the apostles the task of proclaiming the Word. He chose them, trained them during several years of intimate company, constituted and sent them out as authorized witnesses and teachers of the message of salvation.

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