



ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

**TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR PROMOTING THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

Clementine Hall

Monday, 14 October 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I extend my greetings to you all and thank you for your work at the service of the New Evangelization and of the Year of Faith. You have my heartfelt gratitude! What I would like to tell you today may be summarized in three points: the primacy of witness; the urgency of going out to meet others; the need for a pastoral plan centred on the essential.

1. Often today there is an attitude of indifference toward the faith which regards it as irrelevant for human life. The New Evangelization means reawakening the life of faith in the minds and hearts of our contemporaries. Faith is a gift of God; however, it is important that we Christians demonstrate that we live faith in a concrete way, through love, harmony, joy, suffering, because this gives rise to questions, as those that were raised at the beginning of the Church's journey: Why do they live that way? What urges them on? These are questions which lead straight to the heart of evangelization, to the *witness* of faith and charity. What we especially need in these times are credible witnesses who make the Gospel visible by their lives as well as by their words, and who reawaken the attraction for Jesus Christ, for the beauty of God.

Many people have drifted away from the Church. It would be a mistake to place the blame on one side or the other; indeed, there is no need even to speak of blame. There were responsibilities in the history of the Church and her men, there were in certain ideologies and also in individuals. As children of the Church we must continue on the journey of the Second Vatican Council and divest ourselves of useless and hurtful things, of false worldly security that weigh down the Church and injure her true face.

We need Christians who make God's mercy and tenderness for every creature visible to the men of our day. We all know that the crisis of modern man is not superficial but profound. That is why the New Evangelization, while it calls us to have the courage to swim against the tide and to be converted from idols to the true God, cannot but use a language of mercy which is expressed in gestures and attitudes even before words. The Church says as she stands amid humanity today: Come to Jesus, all you who labour and are heavy laden..., and you will find rest for your souls (cf. Mt 11:28-30). Come to Jesus. He alone has the words of eternal life.

Every baptized Christian is a "*Christopher*", namely a Christ- bearer, as the Church Fathers used to say. Whoever has encountered Christ like the Samaritan woman at the well cannot keep this experience to himself but feels the need to share it and to lead others to Jesus (cf. Jn 4). We all need to ask ourselves if those who encounter us perceive the warmth of faith in our lives, if they see in our faces the joy of having encountered Christ!

2. Here we pass to the second aspect: encounter, *going out to meet others*. The New Evangelization is a renewed movement toward those who have lost the faith and a sense of the deep meaning of life. This dynamism is part of Christ's great mission to bring life to the world, to bring the Father's love to mankind. The Son of God "went forth" from his divine condition and came to meet us. The Church abides within this movement; every Christian is called to go out to meet others, to dialogue with those who do not think as we do, with those who have another faith or who have no faith. To encounter all, because for what we all share in common is that we were created in the image and likeness of God. We can go out to everyone without fear and without renouncing our membership in the Church.

No one is excluded from life's hope, from God's love. The Church is sent to reawaken this hope everywhere, especially where it has been suffocated by difficult and oftentimes inhuman living conditions; where hope cannot breathe it suffocates. We need the fresh air of the Gospel, the breath of the Spirit of the Risen Christ, to rekindle it in people's hearts. The Church is the home where the doors are always open, not only because everyone finds a welcome and is able to breathe in love and hope, but also because we can go out bearing this love and this hope. The Holy Spirit urges us to go beyond our own narrow confines and he guides us to the outskirts of humanity.

3. However, in the Church all of this cannot be left to chance or improvisation. It requires a shared commitment to a pastoral plan which brings us back to the essential and which is *solidly focused on the essential; that is, on Jesus Christ*. To get diverted by many secondary or superfluous things does not help; what helps is to focus on the fundamental reality, which is the encounter with Christ, with his mercy and with his love, and to love our brothers and sisters as he has loved us. An encounter with Christ is also adoration, a little used word: to adore Christ. We need a plan animated by the creativity and imagination of the Holy Spirit, who also urges us to take new paths with courage without becoming fossils! We might ask ourselves: what is the pastoral plan of our dioceses or parishes like? Does it make the essential visible, namely Jesus Christ? Do the various experiences and features that the Holy Spirit grants journey together in harmony? Or is our pastoral plan dissipated and fragmented, such that in the end everyone goes his own way? In this context I would like to emphasize the importance of catechesis as a moment for evangelization. Pope Paul vi spoke of it some years ago in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (cf. n. 44). Starting from there, the great catechetical movement has promoted renewal to overcome the split between the Gospel and culture and the illiteracy that exists today in matters of faith. I have recalled many times something which greatly impressed me in my ministry:

meeting children who did not even know how to make the Sign of the Cross! In our cities! The role that catechists play is a truly valuable service for the New Evangelization, and it is important that parents be the first catechists, the first educators of the faith in their own family by their witness and by their word.

Thank you, dear friends, for this visit. I wish you the best in your work! May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you.