

WROCŁAW

Tuesday December 15, 2015

NEW EVANGELIZATION

In this Advent mission (Recollection), we are reflecting on our Christian lives and the life of the Catholic Church in relation to two major emphases of the Holy Spirit: on Divine Mercy (yesterday) and on New Evangelization (today). Both themes were always close to the heart of St John Paul II.

I want to look at NEW EVANGELIZATION with the help of two small words of Jesus from the Gospels: COME and GO.

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11: 28).

"Come and see." (John 1: 39). Jesus says to the two brothers, Andrew and Simon Peter.

"Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." (Luke 10: 3).

"Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28: 19).

This is the pattern: COME to Jesus and then GO in the name of Jesus. This pattern applies to every aspect of the Christian life, of the mission of the Church. It is fundamental in the NEW EVANGELIZATION. It is there in the Mass which ends with the instruction "Go. The Mass is ended."

So yesterday we looked at God's mercy made visible in his Son Jesus Christ and made present to us in Word and sacrament, especially through the liturgy of the Word and of the Eucharist. Yesterday I spoke about receiving God's mercy in the forgiveness and the taking away of our sins, so that then we can be instruments of God's mercy to others. Here we see this COME and GO pattern. First we come to

Jesus, to receive from Him, to be made new through Him, so that then we can go to others in his Name, filled with His Spirit. We come to experience the love of God in Jesus, before we can go and give others the love of Jesus.

Notice how COMING and GOING are activities. It is not enough just to think. We have to move. COME and GO belongs to the renewal of the Church, to a new dynamism in the Church.

Today with the theme of the NEW EVANGELIZATION, we must look at the role of the Word of God, and the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

We **come** to hear and receive the Word of God, before we can **go** and proclaim His Word. The Word comes first, for faith comes from hearing and receiving the Word of God. That is why every liturgy begins with the liturgy of the Word.

The Word of God comes first. This is the pattern in our worship, and it has been the pattern from the beginning. In John chapter 1, we read first "In the beginning was the Word." (John 1: 1). And then a bit later: "The Word became flesh." (John 1: 14). The Word comes first, and the Word takes on flesh. Word first, and then sacrament.

The Word of God has a power to pierce our hearts. "For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Heb. 4: 12). The Word of God is both like a knife of the Holy Spirit, and a lamp of the Spirit. Coming to Jesus means allowing the Holy Spirit to open our hearts. Open our hearts to the words, the message of Jesus; open our hearts to His love; open our hearts so we can follow him.

So love and revere the Word of God, that teaches us about Jesus, about the ways of God. The Scriptures reveal God acting in history, in the Incarnation, in the disciples, it is not only doctrine and laws. Faith begins with the Good News about Jesus, with his words. Evangelization does not begin with doctrine, but with good news. Something has happened – that changes everything. Our great feasts celebrate events: Christmas, Resurrection, Pentecost.

When I was young, before I was ordained to the priesthood, I made a decision to read some chapters of the Bible each day, working right through the whole of both Old and New Testaments. Looking back, I can see that this was one of the best decisions I ever made. The biblical imagery, the biblical symbols, the biblical message becomes part of who we are. The Word of God, the teaching of Jesus, has then become part of us.

People today badly need this rooting in the Scriptures. We are bombarded with words and images from morning until night – through the media, the internet, with Smartphones, Facebook, etc. We are shaped above all by what we hear and what we see. How can 5 minutes of the Word of God impact us when we spend hours exposed to words and images that do not bring us life and at worst really damage us? We have to give time to the Word of God.

The apostle Paul said: "We have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2: 16). How do you think he could say that? It could only be because he had heard and deeply received the teaching of Jesus – in the context of the Jewish scriptures that he had deeply studied. As we feed on the Word of God, the Lord forms and shapes our minds and hearts. The Holy Spirit gives us the desire to know Jesus more deeply, to love the Scriptures, and the desire to share this with others.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of communion, that is sharing together in the life of Christ. For this, we must feed on Word and sacrament. We come to church to receive. There is a natural process here – but a process of actions: Come; feed; listen, eat and drink; go out. This is how we receive new life, new desire, new love. We go out to share and to give what we have received.

The NEW EVANGELIZATION emphasizes this going out and sharing what we have received. Receive mercy, give mercy. Hear the Word, receive the Word, share the Word, speak the Word.

One reason that I am emphasizing the Word of God, the Scriptures, is that as Catholics we have not given the Word its full place – often in reaction against Protestant emphasis on the Bible. We have to get beyond all opposition between the Word of God and the Eucharist. I have not said much about the Blessed Sacrament, and our devotion to Our Lord in the Eucharist. But here the Word of God is foundational. For it is from the Scriptures that we know Jesus, we learn his ways, his priorities, his strong love and mercy. This real Jesus is the one made present in the Sacrament. Feeding on the Gospels and the Scriptures protects us from just bringing our own imagination of Jesus and projecting that on to the Lord truly present in the tabernacle.

I think Pope Francis has been adding something to the NEW EVANGELIZATION launched by St John Paul II and continued by Benedict XVI. The initial focus of the NEW EVANGELIZATION was Europe, the Europe that was forgetting and losing touch with its Christian roots. Francis is not focused on Europe. But he is talking a lot about GOING OUT. He contrasts a Church which is focused on itself, talking about itself, its needs and its problems, and the Church that goes out in mission – goes out to serve,

goes out to spread the Gospel. He is calling for a “pastoral and missionary conversion” of the whole Church, everywhere in the world; of everything in the life of the Catholic Church. This means the whole Church living this COME and GO pattern; coming to the Lord, going out in His grace, empowered by His Spirit.

When we believe the Good News, believe in God’s promises, it changes our hearts. Without a change of heart we will not go out. To evangelize, we have to go out from ourselves. It means dying to our self-image, refusing to be dominated by what other people will think. This is a real conversion. It is a work of God’s grace. It cannot just come from our will power.

“Evangelizing, proclaiming Jesus, gives us joy. Egoism makes us bitter, sad, and depresses us. Evangelizing lifts us up.” (Francis, Pentecost 2013).

“The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy.” (para. 24).

Francis tells us not to think that New Evangelization simply means big campaigns, holding meetings in football stadia. It is becoming people who share, people who walk together, people who can love others, who can listen to them, can feel for them, and share something from God.

I have suggested trying to make a different kind of confession of your sins in the sacrament of reconciliation. Ask yourself if you love the Scriptures. Do I feed on the Word of God? Or do I neglect the Scriptures? Let the Holy Spirit show you how this dishonours the Lord! A repentance here could really change your life.