

## New Evangelization Forum: Krakow

### Talk 2: The Whole Body, the Full Gospel and Full Communion

Today we are looking at THE WHOLE BODY, which says something important about the context of all evangelization, but also about the goal, that the church may attain “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), growing as a living body as all long for the coming of the Lord and the glory of the coming kingdom. I want to focus on the Holy Spirit, on Jesus, on Church and on us as members of one body.

Catholic faith believes that the salvation of Christ is mediated through the Church. Faith in Jesus is mediated through baptism through which people are born to faith. Catholics have typically thought Church first, Christians second. Protestants have mostly thought the other way round. But though Catholics have experienced the Church as mother, in the post-Reformation Church there was a strong emphasis on the Church as institution. That meant authority, laws, obedience, and loyalty. Where did Jesus come in? He was definitely there, part of the picture, but often it was like he was an important part of the church package. This is a major element in the “self-referential” Church that Pope Francis criticizes as a sickness, the Church that speaks about itself rather than about Jesus.

With the renewal of the Catholic Church sealed by the Second Vatican Council, there has been a renewal of the theology of the Church. The Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, starts from God, from Father, Son and Holy Spirit (paras 2-4). The key concept now becomes the Church as **communion**. In 2013 we find ourselves as Church partly-renewed. Part of our thinking and behaviour comes from a theology of communion, but part is still shaped by institutional thinking. The way forward is not abandoning the institutional: the institutional is always needed in this world. Renewal means the institutional being placed at the service of communion.

### Renewed Church through Holy Spirit

Only the Holy Spirit can produce this communion – through the Word of God, through the liturgy and the sacraments – but it is always the work of the Holy Spirit. In the Catechism the Church is treated primarily in the section on the Creed, under “I believe in the Holy Spirit” under which comes “I believe in the Holy Catholic Church”. Renewal places Jesus and His Lordship first, with the sending of the Spirit who forms the Church. We also need the Holy Spirit in our theology so as to understand the Church as communion and Jesus as the Spirit-filled Lord who breathes out His Spirit without measure.

Evangelization builds the Church, extends and deepens communion. We witness to Jesus as members of the Church. Our message, the Good News, is not our private message. It is the Gospel the Church has been commissioned to spread (the Great Commission). Note it is not the Church’s possession (institution thinking, self-referential thinking); the message belongs to Jesus the Lord (communion thinking, Jesus-centred thinking). The Church is servant,

steward entrusted with the message. Renewal means being possessed by Jesus: not the Church possessing the truth, not the people belonging to bishop and priest.

Here Pope Francis brings in another important emphasis: **love**. Sharing the Gospel means personal contact, personal inter-action. It is an act of love. Love leads us to share with others what is most precious to us. So with the Gospel message. But do not think individualistically about love: it is not just a “me” and “you” (singular) situation, not just me and Jesus. The love we share is the love of Jesus, communion in the Holy Spirit, that is the deepest reality of the Church. Self-communicating love.

### The New Evangelization

What is the basic need in promoting the New Evangelization? It is not exhortation. It is not organizing evangelistic events. It is preaching Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit: proclaiming the kerygma and inviting people to open themselves to the Holy Spirit. When we lead people to be filled with the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit brings them alive in relation to God and starts to show them their place in the One Body, their gifts, their calling. When we do not understand the work of the Holy Spirit, we fall back on human effort. We try to be better people, we try to love others, we try to help the parish, we try to respond to the appeals of the Pope. But nothing much happens, nothing transforming, nothing infectious.

For the New Evangelization to make an impact/achieve its purpose, we have in the Catholic Church to learn much more about being led by Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit. But we have to learn this corporately, not just as individuals. The Holy Spirit forms *communio*, guides *communio*, deepens *communio*, extends *communio*. Paul VI: “the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization.”<sup>1</sup>

When we think Church-Institution, we think: the Pope says everyone has to evangelize, so I should evangelize. Without the Holy Spirit, this is duty without desire. So everyone has to do the same. The priest can urge everyone to get involved in particular programmes. But when we think Church as communion in Holy Spirit, we preach the Lordship of Jesus who pours out the Holy Spirit, we think callings, we think gifts (charisms); we recognize diversity in unity.

When we preach Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians receive the desire and the capacity to speak of Jesus to others and to share their faith. This is true of all who receive the message. At the same time, they are equipped and empowered with particular gifts and abilities (charisms). So a Holy Spirit-communion view of the Church looks first to discern what the Holy Spirit is doing. The Holy Spirit tells the Church: pay attention to what I am doing. A communion view of the Church means many gifts forming one body. “Now there are varieties of gifts (*charismata*), but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service (*diakonai*), but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working (*energemata*), but it is the

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelii Nuntiandi, 75.

same God who inspires them all in every one.” (1 Cor. 12:4-6). All these play their own role in the growth of the body of Christ.

At the end of 1 Cor. 12, Paul lists some ministries. He asks the rhetorical question: “Are all teachers?” (1 Cor. 12:29). The answer is obviously “No, not in the sense of a specific ministry or service. “Do all possess gifts of healing?” (1 Cor. 12:30). Again the answer is obviously No, not in the sense of a specific ministry calling. But all can pray for the healing of those who are sick. So now we might ask “Are all evangelists?” Though Paul does not mention evangelists here (they are mentioned in Eph 4:11; see also Philip in Acts 21:8), we can say the same: there is a specific call given to some to be evangelists (their distinct service), but everyone is called to bear witness to Jesus. The Church recognizes that a lay Christian like José Prado Flores has been given a specific call. Is everyone called to imitate him? No. All to be inspired and encouraged, yes, but not all to imitate. The people called to be evangelists do not remove the responsibility from other members of the Church to share the Gospel. In fact, those with the specific calling help to make the rest of us aware of their responsibility.

The WHOLE BODY context points us to the many gifts and avoids the danger of our thinking of evangelization only in terms of an evangelizer or evangelizers and the potential audience. Thee many gifts, ministries and forms of working all contribute in different ways to the work of evangelization from the initial proclamation of the kerygma through to catechesis and mystagogia. The Alpha course which is primarily initial proclamation is so successful because among other things it brings together people with different gifts: evangelist, teacher, the gift of hospitality (Rom. 12:13), befriending, listening.

Here I make a suggestion for the church leadership to consider: the possibility of an official liturgical commissioning of evangelists, just as in many places people are already commissioned to be catechists. But this requires careful discernment. Institutional thinking may suggest commissioning two or three people from every parish as official evangelists. But communion Holy Spirit thinking will insist – only commission those showing clearly signs of this calling. The first way, appointing people manifesting no special gifting in this area, would be a fast way of killing off the New Evangelization. The second way could be a big step forward.

### The Role of Church Leadership

So as Catholics it is our responsibility to bear witness to Jesus Christ. But here institution thinking can click in! If we think institutionally, we think: I need permission from the priest or the bishop. But when we think communion, we think: I do this in communion with the bishop and his priests. I accept and honour their role. Communion means communication. A parish initiative requires the blessing and leadership of the priest. A diocesan initiative like this Forum happens with the blessing and the leadership of the bishop. But, your commission as lay Catholics to bear witness to Jesus does not come from the bishop or priest, it came with your baptism and confirmation; just act and speak in the power of the Spirit.

Institutional thinking says evangelization means programs organized by the institution, the bigger the better. But Pope Francis says: “We might think we should work out programmes of evangelization carefully, thinking of strategies and making plans, but these are only tools, small tools. What matters is Jesus and letting ourselves be led by him. We can then plot our strategies but this is secondary.”

Of course, a Holy Spirit-communion vision of the Church is challenging also for the bishops and the priests. It means leadership as service, serving the Word (opening up the Scriptures), ministering the Body and Blood of the Lord; it means encouragement, guidance, and above all discernment. No longer control as the goal, no longer order as top priority, certainly not my personal likes and dislikes. When we consciously give rightful place to the Holy Spirit, then discernment of spirits becomes a central task of those in leadership. With regard to the NE, this means discerning the heart-attitudes of those who offer to serve (not giving responsibility to those who want to use service to dominate, to show off, to get their way, to get recognition); it means discerning content; it means discerning gifts and callings. A commissioning of evangelists cannot happen without the priests and the bishop recognizing this charism in particular people, and encouraging it. In any discernment, *communio* is a key criterion.<sup>2</sup> If someone has a gift for proclaiming the Gospel, but they abuse it to preach against others, if they give way to negative humour, this is a countersign.

### The Gospel of Reconciliation

*Communio* comes from preaching the Good News of reconciliation. Here we find the ideas of Gospel, repentance, reconciliation and communion coming together. The Church is not a gathering of people who like each other, or a gathering of everyone in a nation or people group: it is the communion of reconciled sinners. “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

For this reason, separated Churches and Christian denominations competing with each other, is literally a scandal, a stumbling block to faith, **each one saying ours is the real Gospel**. When we preach against each other, we are preaching a counter-gospel. Instead of the gospel of reconciliation (all being reconciled to God and to one another through the cross of Jesus), we send the message that full reconciliation is not possible. “How can we proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation without at the same time being committed to working for reconciliation between Christians?”<sup>3</sup> This Forum is already an example of our desire as Catholics to learn

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<sup>2</sup> This was emphasized in *Christifideles Laici* (1988): five criteria of ecclesiality offered: 1. Primacy of call to holiness; 2. Responsibility to confess the Catholic faith in its entirety; 3. Strong and authentic communion with Pope and bishop; 4. In line with Church’s apostolic goals; 5. Commitment to presence in society. Under 3 we read: “Church communion demands both an acknowledgment of a legitimate plurality of forms in the associations of the lay faithful in the Church and at the same time, a willingness to cooperate in working together.” (CL, 30).

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 98.

from the experience of other Christian leaders, such as Pastor Ulf Ekman, Bishop Sandy Millar, and Pastor Colin Symes. It is the strongest sign that it will be very blessed.

**The reconciliation focus brings out two other key elements for Christian unity. First, the original foundational reconciliation is between Jews and non-Jews, as we read in the letter to the Ephesians: “that he might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” (Eph. 2:16). I mention this, because some of us here have had the experience that when Catholics and Protestants come together with Messianic Jews, who believe in Jesus as their Messiah and Lord, a different dynamic enters that humbles both Catholic and Protestant. This experience points us back to the Jewish source, and that begins to bring us closer in our teaching. Cardinal Schönborn wrote an article a few years ago that catechizing a Gentile (non-Jew) is different from catechizing a Jew. That is clear to me. But is there a difference in proclaiming the kerygma?**

**Second**, it leads into the question of ecumenical evangelism or evangelization together. Here in Poland, Fr Frantisek Blacknicki was a real pioneer: **for him, ecumenical evangelization was essential for an authentic ecumenism.** When we understand the first place of the kerygma in the proclamation, the possibility of a shared evangelism opens up. For we are not divided on the kerygma: we all believe in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ; we all believe that He died for our sins and rose for our justification (Rom. 4:25). We all believe that the Gospel calls sinners to repentance. We all believe in the forgiveness of sins. We all believe in the resurrection of the body and eternal life.

**But is it enough to say that we can proclaim the Gospel together, but not yet share in any catechesis? Surely, imperfect communion means at least a degree of shared catechesis, not no shared catechesis. But more importantly, sharing in the kerygma will itself help to unify us in teaching. Why? Because focusing on the kerygma is going back to the foundations, it is a restoring of right order.**

**In Holy Week last year I heard two talks at a Holy Week Recollectio for Priests and Deacons in Vienna. The priest leading the Recollectio spoke of the Christian ministry as a ministry of reconciliation. It belongs to the ministry of the priest to be the one who gathers people together to hear the Word and to celebrate the eucharist. He said some strong words: for example, that no man should be ordained priest who is not capable of bringing people together, who is not a reconciler. But it is just another way of saying that a priest has to be capable of preaching the Gospel, has to know Jesus Christ, needs the personal Pentecost of which Jose Prado Flores spoke.**