



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 18 January 2023*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: The apostolic zeal of the believer. 2. *Jesus, model of evangelization*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last Wednesday we began a series of catechesis on the passion of evangelization, that is, on the apostolic zeal that should enliven the Church and every Christian. Today, let us look at the unsurpassable model of proclaiming: *Jesus*. The Christmas Day Gospel defined him as the “Word of God” (cf. *Jn* 1:1). The fact that he is the *Logos*, that is, the Word, highlights an essential aspect of Jesus: He is always in relation, outgoing, never isolated, always in relation, outgoing. The word, in fact, exists to be transmitted, communicated. So it is with Jesus, the Eternal Word of the Father, reaching out to us, communicated to us. Christ not only has words of life, but makes his life a Word, a message: that is, he lives always turned toward the Father and toward us. Always looking at his Father who sent him and looking at us to whom he was sent.

Indeed, if we look at his days, described in the Gospels, we see that intimacy with the Father — prayer — occupies first place. This is why Jesus gets up early, when it is still dark, and goes into deserted areas to pray (cf. *Mk* 1:35; *Lk* 4:42), to speak with the Father. He makes all of his decisions and most important choices after having prayed (cf. *Lk* 6:12; 9:18). It is precisely within this relationship, in the prayer which connects him to the Father in the Spirit, that Jesus discovers the meaning of his being human, of his existence in the world, because he is on a mission for us,

sent by the Father to us.

It is thus interesting to note the first public act that he accomplishes after the years of his hidden life in Nazareth. Jesus does not work a great wonder, he does not send an impactful message, but he mingles with the people who were going to be baptized by John. In this way, he offers us the key by which he acts in the world: spending himself for sinners, putting himself in solidarity with us without distance, in a total sharing of life. In fact, speaking about his mission, he will say that he did not come “to be served but to serve, and to give his life” (*Mk 10:45*). Every day after praying, Jesus dedicates his entire day to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and dedicates it to people, above all to the poorest and weakest, to sinners and to the sick (cf. *Mk 1:32-39*). That is, Jesus is in contact with the Father in prayer and then he is in contact with all the people through his mission, through catechesis, to teach the path of the Kingdom of God.

Now, should we want to represent his style of life with an image, it would not be difficult for us to find it: Jesus himself offers it to us. We have heard him, speaking of himself as the *Good Shepherd*, the one who, he says, “lays down his life for the sheep” (*Jn 10:11*). This is Jesus. In reality, being a shepherd was not just a job that required time and a lot of dedication; it was a true and proper way of life: 24 hours a day, living with the flock, accompanying it to pasture, sleeping among the sheep, taking care of those who were weakest. In other words, Jesus does not do something for us, but he gives everything. He gives his life for us. He has a *pastoral heart* (cf. *Ez 34:15*). He is a shepherd for all of us.

Indeed, to sum up the action of the Church in one word, precisely the term “pastoral” is often used. And to evaluate our pastoral work we need to confront ourselves with the model, confront ourselves with Jesus, Jesus the Good Shepherd. Above all, we can ask ourselves: do we imitate him, drinking from the wells of prayer so that our heart might be in harmony with his? Intimacy with him is, as a beautiful volume by Abbot Chautard suggested, *the soul of every apostolate*. Jesus himself clearly said it to his disciples: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (*Jn 15:5*). If we stay with Jesus, we discover that his pastoral heart always beats for the person who is confused, lost, far away. And ours? How many times do we express our attitude toward people who are a bit difficult or with whom we have a bit of difficulty: “But it’s their problem, let them work it out...”. But Jesus never said this, never. Instead, he always went to meet all the marginalized, the sinners. He was accused of this — of being with sinners — because he brought God’s salvation precisely to them.

We have heard the parable of the lost sheep, found in chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke (cf. vv. 4-7). Jesus also speaks about the lost coin and about the prodigal son. If we want to train our apostolic zeal, we should always have chapter 15 of Luke before our eyes. Read it often. There we can understand what apostolic zeal is. There we discover that God does not remain contemplating the sheep pen, nor does he threaten them so they won’t leave. Rather, if one leaves and gets lost, he does not abandon it but goes in search of it. He does not say, “It left. That’s its fault. That’s its business!” His pastoral heart reacts in another way: the pastoral heart

suffers and the pastoral heart *takes risks*. It *suffers*: yes, God suffers for those who leave and, while he mourns over them, he loves them even more. The Lord suffers when we distance ourselves from his heart. He suffers for all who do not know the beauty of his love and the warmth of his embrace. But, in response to this suffering, he does not withdraw; rather, he *takes a risk*. He leaves the 99 sheep who are safe and ventures out for the lost one, thus doing something both risky and unreasonable, but consonant with his pastoral heart which misses the one who left. The longing for those who have left is constant in Jesus. And when we hear that someone has left the Church, what do we want to say? “Let them work it out”. No. Jesus teaches us nostalgia for those who have left. Jesus does not feel anger or resentment but pure longing for us. Jesus feels nostalgic for us and this is God’s zeal.

And I wonder, do we have similar sentiments? Perhaps we see those who have left the flock as adversaries or enemies. “And this person?” “No, they’ve gone to the other side, they’ve lost the faith, they’re going to hell...”, and we are serene. When we meet them at school, at work, on the streets of the city, why don’t we think instead that we have a beautiful opportunity to witness to them the joy of a Father who loves them and has never forgotten them? Not to proselytize, no! But that the Word of the Father might reach them so we can walk together. To evangelize is not to proselytize. To proselytize is something pagan; it is neither religious nor evangelical. There is a good word for those who have left the flock and we have the honour and the burden of being the ones to speak that word. Because *the* Word, Jesus, asks this of us: to always draw near to everyone, with an open heart, because he is like that. Perhaps we have been following and loving Jesus for some time and have never wondered if we share his feelings, if *we suffer* and *we take risks* in harmony with Jesus’s heart, with this pastoral heart, close to Jesus’s pastoral heart! This is not about proselytism, as I said, so that others become “one of us”. No, this is not Christian. It is about loving so that they might be happy children of God. In prayer, let us ask for the grace of a pastoral heart, an open heart that draws near to everyone, so as to bear the Lord’s message as well as to feel Christ’s longing for each of them. For without this love that suffers and takes risks, our life does not work. If we Christians do not have this love that suffers and takes risks, we risk pasturing only ourselves. Shepherds who are shepherds of themselves, instead of being shepherds of the flock, are people who comb “exquisite” sheep. We do not need to be shepherds of ourselves, but shepherds for everyone.

Special Greetings

I offer a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Australia and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting to the many student groups present. I ask all of you to join me in praying for Father Isaac Achi, of the Diocese of Minna in northern Nigeria, who was killed last Sunday in an attack on his rectory. So many Christians continue to be the target of violence: let us

remember them in our prayers! Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds. At the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, I invite each of you to pray and work so that, among all believers in Christ, the path towards full communion may be affirmed ever more, and at the same time, I encourage you to be committed with dedication and in all spheres of life, to being builders of reconciliation and peace.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, the desire to share with others the joy of the Gospel, we now look to its model and source: the example of Jesus himself. As the eternal Word of God, made flesh for our salvation, Jesus' entire life was devoted to communicating and dialoguing with others, first with his heavenly Father in profound prayer, and then with others, especially the poor, the outcast and sinners. He proclaimed the coming of God's Kingdom not only by his preaching, but also by his ministry of healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. As the Good Shepherd, the model for all pastors in the Church, Jesus was completely committed to the welfare of his flock, protecting the fold yet also setting out in search of the lost sheep. Following his example, may we, in our daily lives, draw joy and strength from our union with the Father in prayer, allow our hearts to be shaped by pastoral zeal for the word of God, and strive, in all our words and actions, to share with others its saving message of joy, hope and new life.