



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 8 March 2023

[[Multimedia](#)]

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer. 6. The Second Vatican Council. 1. *Evangelization as ecclesial service*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In the last catechesis we saw how the first “council” in the history of the Church — a council, like that of Vatican II — the first council, was convened in Jerusalem over a matter linked to evangelization, namely the proclamation of the Good News to non-Jews — it was believed that the Gospel was only to be proclaimed to Jews. In the 20th century, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council presented the Church as the pilgrim People of God through time, and *missionary by her very nature* (cf. Decree *Ad Gentes*, 2). What does this mean? There is a kind of bridge between the first and last Council, under the banner of evangelization, a bridge whose architect is the Holy Spirit. Today we listen to Vatican Council II to discover that evangelizing is always an *ecclesial service*, never solitary, never isolated, never individualistic. Evangelization is always carried out *in ecclesia*, that is, in a community, and without proselytism, because that is not evangelization.

Indeed, the evangelizer always transmits what he or she has received. Saint Paul was the first to write this: the gospel that he announced and that the communities received, and in which they remained steadfast, is the same one that the Apostle had in turn received (cf. *1 Cor* 15:1-3). Faith is received and transmitted. This ecclesial dynamism of the transmission of the Message is binding and guarantees the authenticity of Christian proclamation. The same Paul writes to the

Galatians: “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed” (1:8). This is beautiful, and this is good for many fashionable views...

The ecclesial dimension of evangelization constitutes, however, a criterion for confirmation of apostolic zeal. A necessary confirmation, because the temptation to proceed “alone” is always lurking, especially when the path becomes arduous and we feel the burden of the commitment. Equally dangerous is the temptation to follow easier pseudo-ecclesial paths, to adopt the worldly logic of numbers and polls, to rely on the strength of our ideas, programmes, structures, “relationships that count”. This will not do; this should help a little, but the fundamental thing is the strength that the Spirit gives you to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the Gospel. The other things are secondary.

Now, brothers and sisters, let us place ourselves more directly in the school of the Second Vatican Council, rereading some passages of the Decree *Ad Gentes* (AG), the document on the Church’s missionary activity. These texts of Vatican Council II fully retain their value even in our complex and pluralistic context.

First of all, this document, *Ad Gentes*, invites us to consider the love of God the Father as a wellspring, which “on account of His surpassing and merciful kindness and graciously calling us moreover to share with Him His life and His cry” — this is our vocation — “has generously poured out, and does not cease to pour out still, His divine goodness. Thus He who created all things may at last be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28), bringing about at one and the same time His own glory and our happiness” (no. 2). This passage is fundamental, because it says that the love of the Father is destined for *every human being*. God’s love is not only for a small group, no ... for everyone. Keep that word firmly in mind and in the heart: everyone, everyone, no one excluded. This is what the Lord says, and this love for every human being is a love that reaches every man and woman through the mission of Jesus, mediator of salvation and our redeemer (cf. AG, 3), and through the mission of the Holy Spirit (cf. AG, 4), who — the Holy Spirit — works in everyone, both in the baptized and the non-baptized. The Holy Spirit is at work!

The Council furthermore reminds us that it is the task of the Church to continue the mission of Christ, who was “sent to preach the Gospel to the poor”; therefore, the document *Ad Gentes* continues, “the Church, prompted by the Holy Spirit, must walk in the same path on which Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which death He came forth a victor by His resurrection” (AG, 5). If it remains faithful to this “path”, the mission of the Church is “an epiphany, or a manifesting of God’s decree, and its fulfilment in the world and in world history” (AG, 9).

Brothers and sisters, these brief comments also help us understand the ecclesial meaning of the apostolic zeal of each disciple-missionary. Apostolic zeal is not enthusiasm; it is something else, it

is a grace from God, that we must preserve. We must understand its meaning, because in the pilgrim and evangelizing People of God, there are no active or passive individuals. There are not those who preach, those who proclaim the Gospel in one way or another, and those who remain silent. No! “All the baptized”, says *Evangelii Gaudium*, “whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). “Are you Christian?” “Yes, I have received Baptism”. “And do you evangelize?” “But what does this mean?” If you do not evangelize, if you do not bear witness, if you do not give that witness of the Baptism you have received, of the faith that the Lord gave you, you are not a good Christian. By virtue of the Baptism received and the consequent incorporation into the Church, every baptized person participates in the mission of the Church and, in this, in the mission of Christ the King, Priest and Prophet. Brothers and sisters, this task “is one and the same everywhere and in every condition, even though it may be carried out differently according to circumstances” (AG, 6). This invites us not to become rigid or fossilized; it redeems us from that restlessness that is not of God. The missionary zeal of the believer also expresses itself as a creative search for new ways of proclaiming and witnessing, new ways of encountering the wounded humanity that Christ took on. In short, of new ways of serving the Gospel and serving humanity. Evangelization is a service. If someone says that they are an evangelizer, and they do not have that attitude, that servant’s heart, and believe they are a master, they are not an evangelizer, no ... they are wretched.

Returning to the fountainhead of the love of the Father and to the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit does not close us up in spaces of static personal tranquillity. On the contrary, it leads us to recognize the gratuitousness of the gift of the fullness of life to which we are called, this gift for which we praise and thank God. This gift is not only for us, but rather it is to be given to others. And it also leads us to live ever more fully what we have received, by sharing it with others, with a sense of responsibility and travelling together along the roads, very often the tortuous and difficult ones of history, in vigilant and industrious expectation of its fulfilment. Let us ask the Lord for this grace, to take in hand this Christian vocation and to give thanks to the Lord for what he has given us, this treasure. And to try to communicate it to others.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the members of the Wilton Park Conference and the various groups from England, Denmark, Switzerland and the United States of America. With prayerful good wishes that this Lent will be a time of grace and spiritual renewal for you and your families, I invoke upon all of you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

On International Women’s Day, I am thinking of all women. I thank them for their commitment to

building a more humane society, through their ability to capture reality with a creative gaze and a tender heart. This is a privilege that belongs only to women! I offer a special blessing to all the women in the Square. A round of applause for women! They deserve it!

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to the sick, to the elderly, to newlyweds and to young people, in particular to the high school students from Paola and the students from Monte Romano. During these days of Lent, walk even more courageously in Christ's footsteps, trying to imitate his humility and fidelity to divine will. And please dear brothers and sisters, let us not forget the suffering of the tormented people of Ukraine. They are suffering so much... Let us always keep them present in our hearts and in our prayers.

I offer my blessing to all of you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our catechesis on apostolic zeal, we now consider the ecclesial aspect of evangelization. The proclamation of the Gospel is not the task of isolated individuals, but a communal service to the Church's apostolic faith, which must be passed down in its integrity to every generation. Zeal for the spread of the Gospel is inseparable from this ecclesial dimension, which protects the Christian message from distortion and from accommodation to worldly interests and ways of thinking. The [Vatican II Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity](#) presents all evangelization as having its source in the immense love of God our Father, poured out on the world through the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and prolonged in the Church's mission of proclaiming this saving love to all the ends of the earth. As "missionary disciples", all the baptized are called to imitate the self-sacrificing love of Christ by bearing creative and convincing witness to the truth of his word and its reconciling power, not only for individuals, but for the life of our entire human family.