

"The Gospel is proclaimed by moving"

In his 12 April general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal with the second of two audiences about the example of St. Paul.

04/12/2023

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

After having seen, two weeks ago, St Paul's personal zeal for the Gospel,

we can now reflect more deeply on the evangelical zeal as he himself speaks of it and describes it in some of his letters.

By virtue of his own experience, Paul is not unaware of the danger of a distorted zeal, oriented in the wrong direction. He himself had fallen into this danger before the providential fall on the road to Damascus.

Sometimes we have to deal with a misdirected zeal, doggedly persistent in the observance of purely human and obsolete norms for the Christian community. “They make much of you,” writes the Apostle, “but for no good purpose” (*Gal 4:17*). We cannot ignore the solicitude with which some devote themselves to the wrong pursuits even within the Christian community itself; one can boast of a false evangelical zeal while actually pursuing vainglory or one’s own convictions or a little bit of love of self.

For this reason, we ask ourselves, what are the characteristics of true evangelical zeal according to Paul? The text we heard at the beginning seems useful for this, a list of “arms” that the Apostle indicates for the spiritual battle. Among these is *readiness to spread the Gospel*, translated by some as “zeal” – this person is zealous in carrying forward these ideas, these things – and referred to as a “shoe”. Why? How is zeal for the Gospel related to what is worn on your feet? This metaphor picks up on a text from the prophet Isaiah, who says this: “How beautiful on the mountains are / the feet of the one who brings good tidings, / who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation / who says to Zion: ‘Your God reigns’” (52:7).

Here too, we find reference to the feet of a herald of good news. Why? Because the one who goes to

proclaim must move, must walk! But we also note that Paul, in this text, speaks of footwear as part of a suit of armour, following the analogy of the equipment of a soldier going into battle: in combat it was essential to have stability of footing in order to avoid the pitfalls of the terrain – because the adversary often littered the battlefield with traps – and to have the strength to run and move in the right direction. So the footwear is to run and to avoid all these things of the adversary.

Evangelical zeal is the support on which proclamation is based, and heralds are somewhat like the feet of the body of Christ that is the Church. There is no proclamation without movement, without ‘going out’, without initiative. This means there is no Christian if not on the move; no Christian if the Christian does not go out of themselves in order to set out on the journey and bear the

proclamation. There is no proclamation without movement, without walking. One does not proclaim the Gospel standing still, locked in an office, at one's desk or at one's computer, arguing like 'keyboard warriors' and replacing the creativity of proclamation with copy-and-paste ideas taken from here and there. The Gospel is proclaimed by moving, by walking, by going.

The term used by Paul to denote the footwear of those who bear the Gospel is a Greek word denoting readiness, preparation, alacrity. It is the opposite of sloppiness, which is incompatible with love. In fact, elsewhere Paul says: "Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord" (*Rom 12:11*). This attitude was the one required in the Book of Exodus to celebrate the sacrifice of the Passover deliverance: "In this manner you shall eat it: your loins

girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night" (12:11-12a).

A herald is ready to go, and knows that the Lord passes by in a surprising way. He or she must therefore be free from schemes and prepared for an unexpected and new action: prepared for surprises. One who proclaims the Gospel cannot be fossilised in cages of plausibility or the idea that "it has always been done this way," but is ready to follow a wisdom that is not of this world, as Paul says when speaking of himself: "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God' (*1 Cor 2:4-5*).

This is why, brothers and sisters, it is important to have this readiness for the newness of the Gospel, this attitude that involves momentum, taking the initiative, going first. It means not letting pass by the opportunities to promulgate the Gospel of peace, that peace that Christ knows how to give more and better than the world gives.

And for this reason I exhort you to be evangelizers who are moving, without fear, who go forward, in order to bring the beauty of Jesus, to bring the newness of Jesus who changes everything. “Yes, Father, He changes the calendar, because now we count the years beginning with Jesus...” But does He also change the heart? And are you disposed to let Jesus change your heart? Or are you a lukewarm Christian, who is not moving? Think about it: Are you an enthusiast of Jesus, are you going forward? Think about it a bit.

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