

"The Spirit makes the fruit grow"

In his 6 December general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal, speaking about the necessity for proclamation to take place in the Holy Spirit. It was the fourth of four audiences summarizing the series.

12/06/2023

Dear brothers and sisters,

In the last catecheses we saw that the proclamation of the Gospel is *joy*, it is *for everyone*, and it is addressed to *today*. Now let us discover a final essential characteristic: it is necessary that the proclamation takes place *in the Holy Spirit*. Indeed, to “communicate God,” the joyful credibility of the testimony, the universality of the proclamation and the timeliness of the message are not enough. Without the Holy Spirit, all zeal is vain and falsely apostolic: it would only be our own and would not bear fruit.

In *Evangelii gaudium* I recalled that “Jesus is the first and greatest evangelizer;” that “in every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God,” who “called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit” (no. 12). Here is the primacy of the Holy Spirit! Thus, the Lord compares the dynamism of the

Kingdom of God to “a man [who scatters] seed upon the ground and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how” (*Mk* 4:26-27). The Spirit is the protagonist; he always precedes the missionaries and makes the fruit grow. This knowledge comforts us a great deal! And it helps us to specify another, equally decisive: namely, that in her apostolic zeal the Church does not announce herself, but a grace, a gift, and the Holy Spirit is precisely the Gift of God, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn* 4:10).

The primacy of the Spirit should not, however, induce us to indolence. Confidence does not justify disengagement. The vitality of the seed that grows by itself does not authorize farmers to neglect the field. Jesus, in giving his last recommendations before ascending to heaven, said: “You shall receive

power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth" (*Acts 1:8*).

The Lord has not left us theological lecture notes or a pastoral manual to apply, but the Holy Spirit who inspires the mission. And the courageous initiative that the Spirit instils in us leads us to imitate his style, which always has two characteristics: *creativity* and *simplicity*.

Creativity, to proclaim Jesus with joy, to everyone and today. In this age of ours, which does not help us have a religious outlook on life, and in which the proclamation has become in various places more difficult, arduous, apparently fruitless, the temptation to desist from pastoral service may arise. Perhaps one takes refuge in safety zones, like the habitual repetition of things one

always does, or in the alluring calls of an intimist spirituality, or even in a misunderstood sense of the centrality of the liturgy. They are temptations that disguise themselves as fidelity to tradition, but often, rather than responses to the Spirit, they are reactions to personal dissatisfactions. Instead, pastoral creativity, being bold in the Spirit, ardent in his missionary fire, is the proof of fidelity to him. Therefore, I wrote that “Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him, and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 11).

Creativity, therefore; and then *simplicity*, precisely because the Spirit takes us to the source, to the “first proclamation.” Indeed, it is “the fire of the Spirit … [that] leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father’s infinite mercy” (*ivi*, no. 164). This is the *first proclamation*, which must “be the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal;” to say over and over, “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you” (*ibid*).

Brothers and sisters, let us allow ourselves to be drawn by the Spirit and invoke him every day; may he be the source of our being and our work; may he be at the origin of every activity, encounter, meeting and proclamation. He enlivens and rejuvenates the Church: with him we

must not fear, because he, who is *harmony*, always keeps creativity and simplicity together, inspires communion and sends out in mission, opens to diversity and leads back to unity. He is our strength, the breath of our proclamation, the source of apostolic zeal. Come, Holy Spirit!

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