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"The Gospel makes you smile because it touches the soul"

In his 15 November general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal, speaking about joy. It was the first of four audiences summarizing the series.

11/15/2023

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

After encountering several witnesses of the proclamation of the Gospel, I propose summarizing this cycle of catechesis on apostolic zeal in four points, inspired by the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, whose tenth anniversary we celebrate this month. The first point, which we will see today, the first of the four, cannot but relate to the attitude on which the substance of the evangelizing gesture depends: joy. Joy. The Christian message, as we have heard from the angel's words to the shepherds, is the proclamation of "a great joy" (*Lk 2: 10*). And the reason? Good news, a surprise, a beautiful event? Much more, a Person: Jesus! He is the God made man who came to us. The question, dear brothers and sisters, is therefore not whether to proclaim it, but how to proclaim it, and this "how" is joy. Either we proclaim Jesus with joy, or we do not proclaim him, because another way of

proclaiming him is not capable of bringing the true reality of Jesus.

This is why a Christian who is discontented, a sad Christian, a dissatisfied, or worse still, resentful or rancorous Christian, is not credible. This person will talk about Jesus but no-one will believe him! Once someone said to me, talking about these Christians, “But these are blank-faced Christians!,” that is, they express nothing, they are like that, and joy is essential. It is essential to keep watch over our sentiments. Evangelization works in gratuitousness, because it comes from fullness, not from pressure. And when one evangelizes – one would try to do this, but it does not work – on the basis of ideologies: the Gospel is a proclamation, a proclamation of joy. Ideologies are cold, all of them. The Gospel has the warmth of joy. Ideologies do not know how to smile; the Gospel is a

smile, it makes you smile because it touches the soul with the Good News.

The birth of Jesus, in history as in life, is the source of joy: think of what happened to the disciples of Emmaus, who could not believe their joy, and the others, then, the disciples all together, when Jesus goes to the Upper Room, could not believe their joy. The joy of having the risen Jesus. An encounter with Jesus always brings you joy, and if this does not happen to you, it is not a true encounter with Jesus.

And what Jesus does with the disciples tells us that *the first to need to be evangelized are the disciples*. The first who to need to be evangelized are us: we Christians. And this is very important. Immersed in today's fast-pace and confused environment, we too indeed may find ourselves living our faith with a subtle sense of

renunciation, persuaded that the Gospel is no longer heard and no longer worth striving to proclaim. We might even be tempted by the idea of letting “others” go their own way. Instead, this is precisely the time to return to the Gospel to discover that Christ “is forever young, he is forever a constant source of newness” (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 11).

Thus, like the two at Emmaus, one returns to daily life with the enthusiasm of one who has found treasure: they were joyful, those two, because they had found Jesus, and he changed their life. And one discovers that humanity abounds with brothers and sisters waiting for a word of hope. The Gospel is awaited even today. People of today are like people of all times: they need it. Even the civilization of programmed unbelief and institutionalized secularity; indeed, especially the

society that leaves the spaces of religious meaning deserted, needs Jesus. This is the right moment for the proclamation of Jesus. Therefore, I would like to say again to everyone: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.” Do not forget this. And if anyone does not perceive this joy, they should ask themselves if they have found Jesus. An inner joy. The Gospel takes the path of joy, always, it is the great proclamation. “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed ... encounter with Jesus Christ (*ibid.*, 1, 1.3) Each one of you, take a little time and think: “Jesus, you are within me. I want to encounter you every day. You are a Person, you are not an idea; you are a travelling companion, you are not a programme. You, Jesus,

are the source of joy. You are the beginning of evangelization. You, Jesus, are the source of joy!” Amen.

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