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"We must convert every day"

In his 22 March general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal, speaking about the witness of faith.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we will listen to the “*magna carta*” of evangelization in the contemporary world: Saint Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii*

nuntiandi (EN, 8 December 1975). It is topical, it was written in 1975 but it is as though it were written yesterday. Evangelization is more than just simple doctrinal and moral transmission. It is, first and foremost, *witness* – one cannot evangelize without witness – witness of the personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word in which salvation is fulfilled. An indispensable witness because, firstly, the world “is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with” (EN, 76). It is not to transmit an ideology or a “doctrine” on God, no. It is to transmit God who is living in me: this is witness, and moreover, because “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (*ibid.*, 41). The witness of Christ, then, is at the same time the

first means of evangelization (cf. *ibid.*, and an essential condition for its efficacy (cf. *ibid.*, 76), so that the proclamation of the Gospel may be fruitful. Being witnesses.

It is necessary to remember that witness also includes *professed faith*, that is, convinced and manifest adherence to God the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, who created us out of love, and redeemed us. A faith that transforms us, that transforms our relationships, the criteria and the values that determine our choices. Witness, therefore, cannot be separated from consistency between what one believes and what one proclaims, and what one lives. One is not credible just by stating a doctrine or an ideology, no. A person is credible if there is harmony between what he or she believes and lives. Many Christians only say they believe, but they live something else, as if they did not. And this is

hypocrisy. The opposite of witness is hypocrisy. How many times we hear, “Ah, this person goes to Mass every Sunday and then he lives like this, or that”: it is true, it is counter-witness.

Every one of us is required to respond to three fundamental questions, posed in this way by Paul VI: “Do you believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you preach what you live?” (cf. *ibid.*). Is there harmony: do you believe I what you proclaim? Do you live what you believe? Do you proclaim what you live? We cannot be satisfied with easy, pre-packaged answers. We are called upon to accept the risk, albeit destabilized, of the search, trusting fully in the action of the Holy Spirit who works in each one of us, driving us ever further: beyond our boundaries, beyond our barriers, beyond our limits, of any type.

In this sense, the witness of a Christian life involves a journey of *holiness*, based on Baptism, which makes us “sharers in the divine nature; in this way they are really made holy” (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 40). A holiness that is not reserved to the few; that is a gift from God and demands to be received and made to bear fruit for ourselves and for others. Chosen and beloved by God, we must bring this love to others. Paul VI teaches that *the zeal for evangelization springs from holiness*, it springs from the heart that is filled with God.

Nourished by prayer and above all by love for the Eucharist, evangelization in turn increases holiness in the people who carry it out (cf. *EN*, 76). At the same time, without holiness, the word of the evangelizer “will have difficulty in touching the heart of modern man”, and “risks being vain and sterile” (*ibid.*).

Therefore, we must be aware that the people to whom evangelization is addressed are not only others, those who profess other faiths or who profess none, but also *ourselves*, believers in Christ and active members of the People of God. And we must convert every day, receive the word of God and change our life: every day. And this is how the heart is evangelized. To bear this witness, the Church as such must also begin by evangelizing herself. If the Church does not evangelize herself, she remains a museum piece. Instead, it is by evangelizing herself that she is continually updated. She needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. The Church, which is a People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols – many of them – and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the works of God. In brief, this means that she has a

constant need of being evangelized, she needs to read the Gospel, to pray and to feel the force of the Spirit changing her heart (cf. *EN*, 15).

A Church that evangelizes herself in order to evangelize is a Church that, guided by the Holy Spirit, is required to walk a demanding path, a path of conversion and renewal. This also entails the ability to change the ways of understanding and living its evangelizing presence in history, avoiding taking refuge in the protected zones of the logic of “it has always been done this way”. They are the refuges that cause the Church to sicken. The Church must go forward, she must grow continually; in this way she will remain young. This Church is entirely turned to God, therefore a participant in his plan of salvation for humanity, and, at the same time, entirely turned towards humanity. The Church must be a Church that dialogically

encounters the contemporary world, that weaves fraternal relationships, that generates spaces of encounter, implementing good practices of hospitality, of welcome, of recognition and integration of the other and of otherness, and that cares for the common home that is creation. That is, a Church that dialogically encounters the contemporary world, that dialogues with the contemporary world, but that encounters the Lord every day, and dialogues with the Lord, and allows the Holy Spirit, the agent of evangelization, to enter. Without the Holy Spirit we can only publicize the Church, not evangelize. It is the Spirit in us that drives us towards evangelization, and this is the true freedom of the children of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, I renew my invitation to you to read and re-read *Evangelii nuntiandi*: I will tell you the truth, I read it often, because

it is Saint Paul VI's masterpiece, it is the legacy he left to us, to evangelize.

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