

# What is apostolate? Who are today's apostles?

The Greek word "apostoloi" means "sent." It refers to Christ's call to the disciples to continue his own mission: proclaiming the kingdom of God throughout the world.

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## Summary

1. What is apostolate?
2. Why do apostolate?

### 3. How does apostolate give light?

“Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries,' but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples.' If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: 'We have found the Messiah!' (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him 'because of the woman’s testimony' (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint

Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120)

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## **1. What is apostolate?**

The Greek word *apostoloi* means “sent.” It refers to Christ's call to his disciples to continue his own mission: proclaiming the kingdom of God throughout the world. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21); "ambassadors of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20), "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1).

All Christians, by the nature of the Christian vocation, are called to spread the Kingdom of Christ throughout the earth. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 858-859; 863).

## Meditate with St. Josemaría

- An apostle — that is what a Christian is, when he knows that he has been grafted onto Christ, made one with Christ, in baptism. He has been given the capacity to carry on the battle in Christ's name, through confirmation. He has been called to serve God by his activity in the world, because of the common priesthood of the faithful, which makes him share in some way in the priesthood of Christ. This priesthood — though essentially distinct from the ministerial priesthood — gives him the capacity to take part in the worship of the Church and to help other men in their journey to God, with the witness of his word and his example, through his prayer and work of atonement.

Each of us is to be *ipse Christus*: Christ himself. He is the one mediator between God and man. And we make ourselves one with him in order to offer all things, with him, to the Father. Our calling to be children of God, in the midst of the world, requires us not only to seek our own personal holiness, but also to go out onto all the ways of the earth, to convert them into roads that will carry souls over all obstacles and lead them to the Lord. As we take part in all temporal activities, as ordinary citizens, we are to become leaven acting on the dough. (*Christ is Passing By*, 120)

- If you decide -- without any oddities, without leaving the world, in the midst of your usual occupations -- to enter these paths of contemplation, you will immediately feel yourself a friend of the Master, with the divine commission to

open the divine paths of the earth to the whole of humanity. Yes, with this work of yours you will contribute to the extension of Christ's reign in all continents. And there will follow one after another, the hours of work offered by the distant nations that are born to the faith, by the peoples of the East barbarically prevented from freely professing their beliefs, by the countries of ancient Christian tradition where it seems that the light of the Gospel has darkened and souls are struggling in the shadows of ignorance.... Then, what a value that hour of work acquires, to continue with the same commitment for a while longer, for a few more minutes, until the task is finished. You convert, in a practical and simple way, contemplation into apostolate, as an imperious

need of the heart, which beats in unison with the most sweet and merciful Heart of Jesus, Our Lord. (*Friends of God*, 67)

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## **2. Why do apostolate?**

Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth.

For lay people, "this evangelization . . . acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world." This witness of life, however, is not the sole element in the

apostolate; the true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers . . . or to the faithful. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 900, 905)

## **Meditate with St Josemaría**

- Don't you long to shout to those young men and women all around you: Fools, leave those worldly things that shackle the heart and very often degrade it..., leave all that and come with us in search of Love? (*The Way*, 790)
- Our Holy Mother the Church, in a magnificent extension of love, is scattering the seed of the Gospel throughout the world; from Rome to the outposts of the earth. As you help in this work of expansion throughout the whole world, bring those in the outposts to the Pope, so that

the earth may be one flock and  
one Shepherd: one apostolate!  
(*The Forge*, 638)

- With the amazing naturalness of the things of God, the contemplative soul is filled with apostolic zeal. "My heart was warmed within me, a fire blazed forth from my thoughts." What could this fire be if not the fire that Christ talks about: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" An apostolic fire that acquires its strength in prayer. There is no better way than this to carry on, throughout the whole world, the battle of peace to which every Christian is called, to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

And so I keep on repeating to you that the world can be made holy. We

Christians have a special role to play in sanctifying it. We are to cleanse it from the occasions of sin with which we human beings have soiled it. We are to offer it to our Lord as a spiritual offering, presented to him and made acceptable through his grace and with our efforts. Strictly speaking, we cannot say that there is any noble human reality that does not have a supernatural dimension, for the divine Word has taken on a complete human nature and consecrated the world with his presence and with the work of his hands. The great mission that we have received in baptism is to redeem the world with Christ. We are urged on by the charity of Christ to take upon our shoulders a part of this task of saving souls. (*Christ is Passing By*, 120)

- The Christian apostolate — and I'm talking about an ordinary Christian living as just one

more man or woman among equals — is a great work of teaching. Through real, personal, loyal friendship, you create in others a hunger for God and you help them to discover new horizons — naturally, simply. With the example of your faith lived to the full, with a loving word which is full of the force of divine truth.

Be daring. Count on the help of Mary, queen of apostles. Without ceasing to be a mother, our Lady is able to get each of her children to face his own responsibilities. Mary always does the immense favour of bringing to the cross, of placing face to face with the example of the Son of God, those who come close to her and contemplate her life. It is in this confrontation that Christian life is decided. And here Mary intercedes for us so that our behaviour may

lead to a reconciliation of the younger brother — you and me — with the firstborn Son of the Father. (*Christ is Passing By*, 149)

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### **3. How does apostolate give light?**

"You are the light of the world and the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:11-16). The light of the Gospel is "a light that attracts." Seeing the good works of the Christian, the neighbor is led to give glory to God, to discover and praise the ineffable love of God. The apostolate bears witness to the light.

In this preaching, which is always respectful and gentle, the first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs. Only afterwards is it possible

to bring up God's word, perhaps by reading a Bible verse or relating a story, but always keeping in mind the fundamental message: the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship. This message has to be shared humbly as a testimony on the part of one who is always willing to learn, in the awareness that the message is so rich and so deep that it always exceeds our grasp. At times the message can be presented directly, at times by way of a personal witness or gesture, or in a way which the Holy Spirit may suggest in that particular situation. If it seems prudent and if the circumstances are right, this fraternal and missionary encounter could end with a brief prayer related to the concerns which the person may have expressed. In this way they will have an experience of being listened to and understood; they will

know that their particular situation has been placed before God, and that God's word really speaks to their lives. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 128)

The message of salvation must be authenticated by the witness of Christian life in order to manifest before people the power of truth and the radiance of the Gospel. The very witness of Christian life and good works carried out in a supernatural spirit are effective in attracting people to faith and to God.

Christ, sent by the Father, is the source of the Church's whole apostolate; thus the fruitfulness of apostolate for ordained ministers as well as for lay people clearly depends on their vital union with Christ. Charity, drawn from the Eucharist above all, is always "as it were, the soul of the whole apostolate." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 864, 2044)

## Meditate with St. Josemaría

- Be a Eucharistic soul! If the center around which your thoughts and hopes turn is the Tabernacle, then, my child, how abundant the fruits of your sanctity and apostolate will be! (*The Forge*, 835)
- What other advice do I have for you? Well, simply to do what the Christians who have really tried to follow Christ have always done, and to use the same means employed by the first men who felt prompted to follow Jesus: developing a close relationship with Our Lord in the Eucharist, a childlike recourse to the Blessed Virgin, humility, temperance, mortification of the senses ('it is not good to look at what it is not licit to desire,' was St Gregory

the Great's warning) and penance. (*Friends of God*, 186)

- Filling the world with light, being the salt and light — that was how our Lord described the mission of his disciples. To bring to the ends of the earth the good news of God's love. All of us Christians should devote our life to doing this, in one way or another.

So we have to awaken the people who have fallen into the dangerous sleep our Lord mentioned. We must remind them that life is not something to play with — it is a divine treasure which must grow. We must also show the way to those who have good will and good desires, but don't know how to put them into practice. Christ urges us. Each one of us has to be not only an apostle, but an apostle of apostles, bringing others along, so that they in turn will

encourage others to make Jesus Christ known to everyone. (*Christ is Passing By*, 147)

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