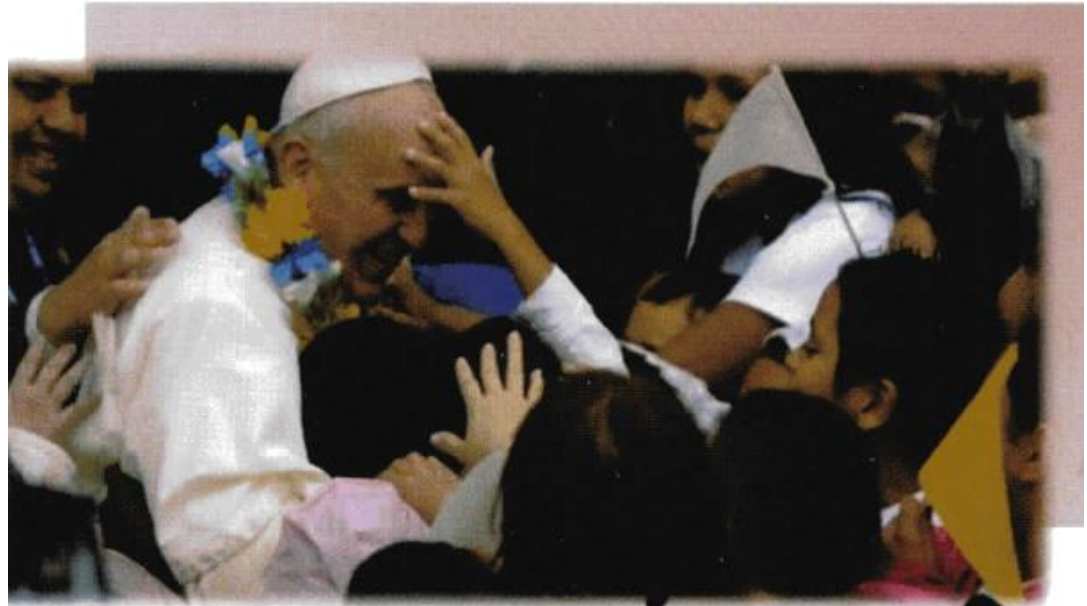


The Joy of the Gospel

Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation
November 2013

Reflections on the Evangelii Gaudium



Franciscus

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives
of all who encounter Jesus
Evangelii Gaudium 1

Apostolic dimension in the
Apostleship of the Cross

Translated in house by AC Bothell, WA, 2014

Missionary Dimension of the Apostleship of the Cross

Introduction

Why be an apostle? What does that have to do with our vocation as baptized Christians and the Apostleship of the Cross? Why is Pope Francis insisting so much in the missionary vocation of the lay person?

To be an apostle is the logical consequence of my baptismal commitment. You cannot hide a lamp. Being an apostle is my right, nobody can take away my dignity of being an apostle. What you have learned as Apostle of the Cross is your dignity to be somebody important for God and others.

You don't need titles, money or fame to be an apostle. It's about being witnesses and passing on that which I have received. The Holy Spirit makes a witness of me, and gives me the graces I need to do it. My Baptism and my Christian vocation (the Apostleship of the Cross) is my warranty as an apostle. Through them we all need to be apostles, without exception. Through them, nobody is exempt.

The apostolic dimension is at the root of our vocation to the Spirituality of the Cross. It's at the source of our name: Apostles of the Cross! The cry which has given life to our spirituality is apostolic. This is why we can say at one voice, and we can say it out loud, in union with our founders, with all our lives: Jesus, Savior of all people, save them! save them!

The Church and the Apostleship of the Cross will be alive as long as they offer themselves to the cause of the Kingdom. Prestige, power, worldly possessions, they don't guarantee the future. We must look back to our origins, our reason for being in the Church and society, and recharge our batteries so we can tap into the intuition, creativity, courage, apostolic prophesy of Jesus and His followers, of our founders. They always had an eschatological vision of the life of the Church: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1). Moved by this vision, and in spite of the obstacles, they always moved forth amid true every day problems. Yeast ferments the dough and does it in silence. That's where our baptized brothers and sisters and apostles of the Cross need to be (Conchita used to say: I can see them coming!), giving thanks for the gift of life and defending people's rights and family values; sharing the fate of those who are persecuted, with the sick, with the suffering; evangelizing in high risk areas; working for the poor and marginalized, promoting a solidary economy and a sustainable ecology; promoting education and health; present in the media and taking advantage of the many possibilities information society gives us.

Pope Francis, following Jesus, repeats often: “Go”, “Go out”, “Make noise”; we, on the other hand, ask for them to “Come”. “Let them come to Mass. Come to baptize their children. Let them come to authenticate their papers for marriage. And those who can’t come anymore because they are dead, somebody bring them to us!...” How are they going to come if nobody reaches out to them?. We need to go out, walk, cross to the other side.

May the Holy Spirit move us with His loving breath and lead us to be true apostles of the Cross!

Note¹: this booklet about the “Evangelii Gaudium” consists of eleven reflection worksheets with selected texts from Evangelii Gaudium. Each worksheet gives the texts first followed by a guide to reflect upon them and apply them to our lives.

¹ Translators’ Note: This Booklet was created in Spanish in the Concepcion Cabrera de Armida Region, in Mexico. Our Regional Council (Christ the Priest Region) is gifting us these booklets so we can benefit from these materials.

First Reflection

A Personal Encounter with Jesus Christ

Illumination:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. (3)

God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. (3)

With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. (3)

I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”. (7)

Reflection:

1. What does the invitation the Pope is making “to renew your personal encounter with Christ” mean to you?
2. What has your experience been in being a “forgiven child” by Christ and in having a Father always ready to renew His love and eternal forgiveness? How do you feel meditating about this experience?
3. What effect has this encounter with the Love and person of Christ had in your life? What things have happened to you through this encounter with His love?
4. In your “encounters with your neighbor”, what things are stirred in your heart that make you seek their wellbeing, and how do you set off doing that?

Second Reflection

A missionary option capable of transforming everything

Illumination:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything. (27)

The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. (47)

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being **caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures**. (49)

If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. (49)

Reflection:

1. If you had a meeting with the Holy Father and he said to you: “I dream of a “missionary option” capable of transforming everything”, what could he be inviting you to do?
2. What are some “securities” that make you keep stagnant, closed in, comfortable?
3. Of the things you listed in answer #2, what can be done to go on mission, go out and preach, go out and help your neighbor?
4. What does the following statement from the Pope mean to you? What invitation do you hear? “If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life”.

Third Reflection

An economy of exclusion and inequality

Illumination:

No to an economy of exclusion.

Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say **“thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality**. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. (53)

Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers”. (53)

Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others.

Reflection:

1. Look around our environment and community, what signs of “an economy of exclusion” do you see around you?
2. What are some things you can do in your own life and community to foster care for the resources and the promotion of a fairer and more equitable distribution of goods?
3. What does the following statement say to you, and what do you feel invited to do when you hear it? “Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others”.

Fourth Reflection

Know and feel that I am part of an evangelizing Church

Illumination:

In many places an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach, as does a concentration on administering the sacraments apart from other forms of evangelization.

We must recognize that if part of our baptized people lack a sense of belonging to the Church, this is also due to certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of our parishes and communities, or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems, be they simple or complex, in the lives of our people. (63)

We are living in an information-driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data – all treated as being of equal importance – and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment. In response, we need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values (64) such as generosity, forgiveness, responsibility, humility, honesty, friendship and respect.

Reflection:

1. Have you experienced the feeling of being “part” of the church? If so, could you share: what was this experience like and what helped you feel that way? If you answered no, what has been your experience?
2. What values do you fight for and strive to live in your life, your family and your community?
3. What values would you like to see in your life and your community?
4. How much are you willing to do to truly live those values in your life and your community?

Fifth Reflection

Being courageous and creative for the Evangelization

Illumination:

I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structure, style, and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. (33)

Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way. (46)

When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. (35)

The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing. (35)

Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But **the Church is not a tollhouse**; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems. (47) I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. (198)

Reflection:

Meditate and reflect in your community on this statement from the Pope *“I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structure, style, and methods of evangelization in their respective communities”*.

1. What invitation do you hear in this statement?
2. What are the goals and the methods of evangelization?
3. Do these goals and methods respond to the needs and sorrows of your community? Do you have any suggestions to better respond to the needs of your community?
4. What could you do so that you yourself and your community may have that experience of love and/or rekindle that experience?

Sixth Reflection

Family, the fundamental cell of society

Illumination:

The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple. (66)

We cannot overlook the fact that in recent decades there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young. It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition. (70)

New cultures are constantly being born in these vast new expanses where Christians are no longer the customary interpreters or generators of meaning. Instead, they themselves take from these cultures new languages, symbols, messages and paradigms which propose new approaches to life, approaches often in contrast with the Gospel of Jesus. (73)

The Church is called to be at the service of a difficult dialogue. (74)

Reflection:

Meditate upon this statement: “the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children”.

1. What feelings does this statement stir in you?
2. What experiences have you had regarding this statement?
3. What have you learnt throughout your life about the family dynamics?
4. What struggles have you endured and what have you learnt so you can “live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another” based on Christian love and respect?

Seventh Reflection

Love for humanity inspired by Jesus

Illumination:

The pain and the shame we feel at the sins of some members of the Church, and at our own, must never make us forget how many Christians are giving their lives in love. They help so many people to be healed or to die in peace in makeshift hospitals. They are present to those enslaved by different addictions in the poorest places on earth. They devote themselves to the education of children and young people. They take care of the elderly who have been forgotten by everyone else. They look for ways to communicate values in hostile environments. They are dedicated in many other ways to showing an immense love for humanity inspired by the God who became man. I am grateful for the beautiful example given to me by so many Christians who joyfully sacrifice their lives and their time. This witness comforts and sustains me in my own effort to overcome selfishness and to give more fully of myself. (76)

Reflection:

1. Recall the testimony you heard from a priest, religious brother or sister, or committed lay person which spoke about giving their lives to love them, what did that witness message leave in your soul? How did you feel about yourself upon hearing this testimony?
2. Share with us an experience of yours helping and sharing with someone in need, how was your life enriched by helping them? How did you feel about yourself at the time?
3. What are some changes you are willing to make so you can continue helping your brothers and sisters in ways that are loving, positive, generous and without expecting a reward?

Eighth Reflection

Missionary enthusiasm

Illumination:

I would like to call attention to certain particular temptations which affect pastoral workers. (77)

Today we are seeing in many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women, an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, a heightened *individualism*, a *crisis of identity* and a *cooling of fervor*. These are three evils which fuel one another. (78)

At the same time, the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. (78)

Many pastoral workers, although they pray, develop a sort of inferiority complex which leads them to relativize or conceal their Christian identity and convictions. They do not identify with their mission of evangelization and this weakens their commitment. (79)

Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm! (80)

Reflection:

The Pope talks about some “temptations” that pastoral agents, called to live like Christ, are facing: individualism, crisis of identity, cooling of fervor. Mistaking the spiritual life with religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, or engagement with the world. Inferiority complexes which may place their own Christian identity and convictions at risk. Lack of identification with their mission of evangelization, weakened commitment. Evils which fuel one another. (78)

Among these statements:

1. With which of them do you identify yourself?
2. What are some means you may use so these attitudes and ways of “being apostle” may be transformed into enthusiasm, identity, evangelization, identification with Christ?

Ninth Reflection

Selfish acedia²

Illumination:

No to selfish acedia.

Today's obsession with immediate results makes it hard for pastoral workers to tolerate anything that smacks of disagreement, possible failure, criticism, the cross. (82)

One of the more serious temptations which stifle boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, "sourpusses". (85)

Disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with themselves, they experience a constant temptation to cling to a faint melancholy, lacking hope, which seizes the heart. Called to radiate light and communicate life, in the end they are caught up in things that generate only darkness and inner weariness, and slowly consume all zeal for the apostolate. (83)

To go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us. To be self-enclosed is to taste the bitter poison of immanence, and humanity will be worse for every selfish choice we make (87). For all this, allow me to say: No to a sterile pessimism! The Lord said to Saint Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). (85)

Reflection:

I invite you to think about the apostolic projects you have been working on these last few years, the goals you have set for your community, or the goals you have set for yourself the last three years.

1. What are some of these goals?
2. What has happened with them? What steps have you taken to bring them to fruition?
3. Which have been some of the difficulties you have found which have rendered them unfinished or mere "wishful thinking"?

² Apathy, boredom, especially in the spiritual life.

4. How does it feel to give way to a sterile pessimism which kills all inspiration and desire to do good?

5. What would happen if you were to take one of these goals, dreams or apostolic objectives and, rather than feeding them with the pessimism that makes them sterile, you were to fertilize them with Christian hope, where your job is to “sow the seed and let the Sower grow the seed”? What would happen if you think that “you truly can with the help of God” follow your heart’s wishes to be a better Apostle and a better Christian?

Tenth Reflection

Spiritual worldliness

Illumination:

No to spiritual worldliness.

Spiritual worldliness, which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, consists in seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being. It is what the Lord reprimanded the Pharisees for: "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (Jn. 5:44) (93)

It is a subtle way of seeking one's "own interest, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:21). Since it is based on carefully cultivated appearances, it is not always linked to outward sin; from without, everything appears as it should be. But if it were to seep into the Church, "it would be infinitely more disastrous than any other worldliness which is simply moral". (93)

In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church's prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time. It can also lead to a business mentality, caught up with management, statistics, plans and evaluations whose principle beneficiary is not God's people but the Church as an institution. God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! (95. 97)

Reflection:

1. When you read the following statement: "Spiritual worldliness, which hides behind the appearances of piety and even love for the Church, consists in seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being". What does it make you think about, what does it bring to your mind and your heart?

2. What can you do in your life or your community so whatever is there of managerial operations, where there's more concern for accomplishing, completing projects, looking good, seeming fervent or mystic; may be transformed into a real commitment to your brother and sister, in attitudes of simplicity, kindness and altruism?

Eleventh Reflection

Warring among Ourselves

Illumination:

No to warring among ourselves.

Beware of the temptation of jealousy! We are all in the same boat and headed to the same port! Let us ask for the grace to rejoice in the gifts of each, which belong to all. (99)

Our world is being torn apart by wars and violence, and wounded by a widespread individualism which divides human beings, setting them against one another as they pursue their own well-being. (99)

It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts. Whom are we going to evangelize if this is the way we act? (100)

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). (99)

Reflection:

To what extent this statement from our Pope is a reality in your life or your community: “It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities, and even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy...”

1. What are you willing to do to be able to counteract these feelings and attitudes of division, deception and selfishness?
2. How can you be a source of forms and attitudes which foster unity, goodness, truth, forgiveness and simplicity within your community or family?
3. What does this mean to you and what does this call you to do: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”?

Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the
Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life
in the depths of
your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely
to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own “yes”
to the urgent call,
as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of
Jesus.

Franciscus