

Moments of Presence, Listening, Service, and Action: Keys to New Evangelization

An Address to the Synod of Bishops
for New Evangelization

The following address was presented by Fr. G. Gregory Gay, CM (Superior General, Congregation of the Mission) delegate to the Synod for New Evangelization, on behalf of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the members of the world-wide Vincentian Family.

The document *Instrumentum Laboris* for New Evangelization offers a central truth: **Announcing and proclaiming is not the task of any one person or a select few, but rather a gift given to every person who answers the call to faith** (IL, #92).

This truth came alive for me some thirty years ago when I was called to our Vincentian mission in the Republic of Panama. There, I experienced a Church alive; a Church making sincere efforts to adapt the teachings of Vatican II to the reality of life in Latin America. The formation of the laity was carried out by the efforts of religious congregations, diocesan clergy, and bishops. In experiencing the Word of God come alive in basic Christian communities, I witnessed many simple people participate enthusiastically in their faith.

At that time, I said, “This is the Church I want to be a part of. This is the Church that was envisioned by Vatican II”. I was privileged to work in that part of the world for more than two decades. Working collegially with bishops, diocesan clergy, religious men and women, and the laity to achieve a common good, in the service of the Church and the world has been both the promise and gift of Vatican II for me. The Church of Latin America continues to inculturate the Gospel, as can be seen in its documents from Medellin to Aparecida, the most recent and often quoted document at this Synod. These times have

been energizing and life-giving for me as a missionary of a religious congregation and now as its Superior General.

In order to proclaim the gift of faith and strengthen the Church's renewal, there are three moments of encounter and two pathways I consider crucial for new evangelization.

- **A moment of presence:** Presence has two dimensions: the first is that Presence we call God, and the other is the presence we find in opening ourselves to the other. Those whom God puts in our path reveal the person of Jesus Christ, especially the poor, marginalized, and abandoned. In the Presence of God, we gain strength to be present to all members of the Body of Christ in a courageous and prophetic way.

- **A moment to listen:** Listening also has two contemplative moments: *an inner and an outer one*. The inner moment is given to the Word of God, the Eucharist, the prayer of the Church, and the experience of the poor. In this 'inner room' of our soul, we allow the person of Jesus to enter the quiet of our hearts to accompany us in our daily journey. This leads us to the outer rooms of deeper relationship with the world and one another. Before we can teach and preach, we must first listen.

- **A moment of service:** Being present and listening allows God's grace to lead us into service. New evangelization calls us forth and unites us with an enduring element of our faith: love of God and service of neighbor. "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). Service in Jesus' name is about action and advocacy, not only on behalf of the poor, but together with the poor. In the crucible of service, the Church finds its true identity and salvation, in and through Jesus Christ.

- **A pathway to service by virtue:** We evangelize by entering into the world of the poor, and by growing in the virtues of *humility, simplicity, charity, and justice*. This is at the heart of our Vincentian heritage. The preferential option for the poor is fundamental for new evangelization. In the experience of community, we make visible and credible the person of Jesus, promoting a civilization of love. In living out these virtues, we draw nearer to God, each other, and the poor, our lords and masters.

- **A pathway from virtue to action:** With love for God and the poor who image his Son Jesus, we can bring new evangelization to fruition by revitalized popular missions. With religious, clergy and laity collaborating, we evangelize by being present, listening, and serving in the way of Jesus Christ, the first evangelizer. In following pathways of virtue, action and advocacy, we not only preach and teach the Good News, but we become Good News for the world. The words of Jesus

to the young person healed will also ring true for us: “Go home to your people and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you” (Mk. 5:19).

I humbly entrust these thoughts and our efforts at this Synod to Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the poor, and to Mary, his Mother, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

16 October, 2012

***His Excellency, Most Rev. Markos Ghebremedhin, CM,
Titular Bishop of Gummi and Apostolic Vicar of Jimma-
Bonga (Ethiopia).***

The program of preparing and educating catechists in dioceses must be reviewed, reformed, and revitalized to prepare them for their particular ministry in the Church. The ministry of catechist needs to be given prominence by making it a permanent office of the local Church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church remains very difficult to understand for many of the faithful. There is need to simplify it and also to have such versions made available in various local languages. Catechesis must be situated within the context of ongoing formation, to change the prevalent and incorrect assumption that it is only for children and youth

The catechetical program must be fashioned so it will be appealing to the faithful of various age groups. Catechetical materials must be adapted and made suitable for all age groups. Pastoral training centers are needed to refine and intensify the methods of training and learning for those involved in catechesis. The involvement of parents, godparents, and all relevant members of the Christian community in the preparation of children for the sacraments is essential.

The Church needs to reaffirm the irreplaceable role of catechists in the Church and to equip them with resources to make them efficient ministers of the New Evangelization. They need to be given adequate resources to sustain their families. The catechists must also seek to understand their role in the Church as not merely an occupation, but a vocation. At this great moment of renewal in proclaiming and transmitting the faith, taking the above actions would be seen as a strong support and resource in the new evangelization called for by the Church.

18 October, 2012

His Excellency, Most Rev. Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, CM, Metropolitan Archbishop of Addis Abeba, President of the Episcopal Conference of Ethiopia and Eritrea, President of the Council of the Ethiopian Church.

Small Christian communities, established as the most local presence of the Catholic and universal Church, share in this same mission. These Christian communities provide an ideal pastoral context to establish and develop lay ministries. One of the most significant differences between traditional Catholic associations and small Christian communities resides in the apostolic orientation of the latter.

Small Christian communities are not built only on the personal holiness of their members, but in their humble availability and fidelity to their apostolic mission. Personal holiness is a requirement and consequence of the mission, but not its only or final purpose. Small Christian communities have an essential apostolic spirituality oriented to mission. Without a sense of mission, the small Christian community and the universal Church would be unfaithful to its very fundamental vocation as a witness to the Gospel. This mission becomes a concrete reality with the establishment of lay ministries to be exercised for the building up of the community.

Lay Ministries therefore, are not to be seen as an accessory or optional activity of the small Christian community to relieve the work of the priest. They are part and parcel of its life and growth; when ministries decline, the whole life of the community is in decline. Experience has shown that religious associations centered only in prayer and devotion can become a kind of exclusive spiritual club for "holy members only" They can end up being more faithful to the minutiae written in the handbook of their founder than to the demands of Jesus in the Gospels.

The field is vast and open to pastoral creativity. However, in establishing new lay ministries, care must be taken that dialogue, consultation, and communion with the local Bishop is observed and that periodical evaluation of these ministries is made. Otherwise, there may arise a disparate variety of lay ministries without a common vision and focused pastoral guidelines. This, in turn, may result in creating confusion among the people of God.

Such is the main challenge of the new evangelization. Though a relevant re-education of our Christian people is necessary for effective lay ministries, it is not from the Christian community that objections and resistance to them will come. Christians are eager to participate in a more active way in the life and growth of the Church.

Most Rev. Cristoforo Palmieri, CM, Bishop of Rrëshen (Albania).

Evangelization is a first proclamation for those in Albania who were born and have grown up without ever knowing anything about God, other than seeing a hidden Christian gesture by the elderly, or evangelization of Muslim brothers who had and still have Christian roots. Many will show themselves to be open to the proclamation once revealed, and the need to do so is more urgent and serious than ever before.

Therefore, we expect from this Synod some stimulating suggestions and new methods in order to be supported and committed to preaching with love and sacrifice. This is required also due to various difficulties, including the poverty of the Albanian people, and their geographical dispersion of the population, which makes encounters and gatherings more difficult to hold.

The harvest is not meager and is in part ready, but to reap it, there is a lack of zealous and trained workers willing to sacrifice by drawing closer to the people, working for and with love and in line with other sister Churches. Only after 50 years since promulgation are the teachings of Vatican II finally being translated into the Albanian language so we can familiarize all with the teachings of this Council. Your support in prayer sustains us.

The blood of martyrs was spilled during the communist regime in Albania. The process of beatification for forty of them has already progressed to a good stage with the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. This reality is for us a reawakening of Christian life, the wish to deepen, illuminate and render more convincing the reasons for faith for the purpose of filling the void created during the years of dictatorship; it makes us missionaries to those near and far from us.

May the whole Church, including those most responsible before God for the proclamation of the Gospel, soon see the birth of a new humanity, a new man, beyond that which presumed to create the Communist dictatorship. May we as the Church in Albania be able to fully move beyond those terrible years of a humanity without God, without Church and therefore entirely inconsistent. May we become humanity created by God, called to live in justice and holiness.

16 October, 2012

Rev. F. Emmanuel Typamm, CM, *General Secretary of the "Confédération des Conférences des Supérieurs Majeurs d'Afrique et de Madagascar" - CO.S.M.A.M. (Cameroon).*

To transmit Christ to the world today, consecrated persons must re-read their lives. It is true that we already transmit, more or less faithfully, Christ and His Gospel. However, the new poverties of our globalized world oblige us to adopt new attitudes for transmitting Christ.

As members of the Conference of Major Superiors in Africa and Madagascar, the experience of living in an African context leads us to believe that to communicate the Christian faith with joy and build a civilization of love today, it is necessary for us religious to rediscover certain fundamental elements of our consecration. I would like to name seven.

1. The centrality of Christ in our lives as consecrated;
2. fraternal life in community;
3. a spirituality of inculturation;
4. the prophetic nature of consecrated life in the preferential option for the poor;
5. collaboration among consecrated persons;
6. unity in diversity and not in uniformity, and;
7. collaboration with the laity.

As some of the Founders of our religious institutes have noted, God's poor are our Lords and Masters. Should we not stop being fearful? And should we widely open the doors of our hearts to the Spirit of Pentecost and offer our lives to the poor of today to bring peace and justice to the world? An African proverb states, "We never empty the pot at night". This proverb shows us the attitude to have; namely that of organizing ourselves to always have something in reserve to give to the poor. Could this not be a witness to the true meaning of evangelization rather than giving nothing to a poor person who truly is needy and who reaches his hand out to us?

If the family is the privileged place for the proclamation of the Gospel, it is time to form ourselves, consecrated and laity, to put ourselves at the service of each other, each with our own talents; this would help us, the consecrated, to not fall into the temptation of thinking we are superior to others in the Church of Christ which is the family of the Church.