



From A Bishop's Journal (631)

Pastoral Orientation Congress for a New Evangelisation (3)

As we near the date of our Pastoral Orientation Congress I would like to stress that the mission of evangelisation is the chief reason for the congress. We must of course be realistic about the actual situation of our Church, our needs and resources, but we must first of all fully understand the mission which Christ gave to his Church and which still affects us today: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!” (Mt. 28:19).

Springtime of the Church

In December, 1990, Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical which I consider as one of the most beautiful of his pontificate, *The Mission of Christ the Redeemer*. From the very onset we are given a feeling of what it is all about: “The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion... An overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God... There is a new awareness that missionary activity is a matter for all Christians... Missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others! It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelisation of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support... Christ the Redeemer fully reveals man to himself... The Redemption that took place through the cross has definitely resorted to man his dignity and given back meaning to his life in the world.”

“New Evangelisation”

It was Pope John Paul II himself who first used this expression. It was on the occasion of a pastoral visit to Santo Domingo, March 9, 1983. Since then, the Holy Father has stressed for more than twenty years the need for a new evangelisation, “new in its zeal, in its methods, and its expression.” How is this happening at home, in our diocese? Do we have the same zeal as in years past? Has it increased or diminished, over the years? What methods do we use to reach out to others, youth and adults, the ‘practising’ and the distant, the poor and the needy, the labourers and the unemployed? What creativeness does the Christian community show, to the community as a whole? What is the

quality of our language in our catechetical teaching, our celebrations, our communicating? Pope John Paul II has called us to undertake this exercise by asking that we evaluate our zeal, our methods, and our ways of evangelising.

Benedict XVI

Upon his election as pope, His Holiness Benedict XVI came back to the same themes and reaffirmed the youth and vitality of the Church, and he concluded with words similar to those of his predecessor: “Do not be afraid of Christ: he takes away nothing and he gives everything. Whoever gives himself to him receives a hundredfold. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ, and you will find true life.”

Evangelisation Campaign

Among the sixty-odd recommendations in the working paper, there is one especially which was expressed by the preparatory committee: having an evangelisation campaign as soon as the major financial campaign was concluded. As much efficiency and professionalism would be given this campaign of evangelisation as was given to the financial campaign, and it would be addressed to our population as a whole. What will be decided at the Congress, regarding this issue? Will the people show as much enthusiasm for it as the preparatory committee had? Will there be similar consensus? What would this campaign be all about, realistically? These are as many questions that all who attend the Pastoral Orientation Congress will have, when they meet together in March.

Four Missionary Directives

In his encyclical on the Redeemer’s mission, Pope John Paul II reveals four elements which are basic to a missionary spirituality: letting oneself be led by the Spirit, living the mystery of Christ who was “sent”, loving the Church and humankind as Jesus loved them, and becoming saints. This spirituality is expressed first and foremost by living in total surrender to the Spirit, a docility which allows one to be interiorly formed by him, so as to be always more in the image of Christ. We cannot witness to Christ without showing forth his image made flesh in us through grace and the action of the Spirit. Just as the Spirit transformed the apostles into Christ’s courageous witnesses and enlightened preachers of his Word, so can he transform us and lead us along difficult and new mission paths. Today as yesterday, the mission is both difficult and complex; today as yesterday, it requires courage and the light of the Spirit. We can neither understand nor live the mission without referring to Christ as to the one who was sent to evangelise: the mission follows the same path as Christ’s.

Zeal for One’s Brothers and Sisters

The “missionary” is urged on by zeal for his brothers and sisters, zeal which is inspired by Christ’s charity, filled with concern, kindness, compassion, welcome, availability, and interest in the problems of others. The missionary is the man of charity to proclaim to each of his brothers and sisters that God loves them and that, therefore, they can love in return. They must be charitable to all, giving their lives for their neighbour. They must love the Church as Christ who gave his life for her. Only a deep love of the Church can sustain the missionary’s zeal. His daily obsession is concern

for all the Churches. To every missionary, fidelity to Christ is inseparable from fidelity to his Church. By its very nature, the call to mission derives from the call to holiness. No one is a true missionary who is not committed to holiness, which is the basic foundation and an absolutely irreplaceable condition for carrying out the Church's mission of salvation.

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

02-08-06