



From A Bishop's Journal (633)

Pastoral Orientation Congress for a New Evangelisation (5)

As we near the Pastoral Orientation Congress for a New Evangelisation, some sixty recommendations are being studied in several parishes. They deal mostly with ways the diocese could adopt, if the community deems them more appropriate. In this context, it is interesting to recall the teaching of Pope Paul VI regarding the proper means to true evangelisation.

Witness of a Christian Life

For the Church, the first means of evangelisation is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal. Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.

Well-Adapted Preaching

Secondly, it is not superfluous to emphasize the importance and necessity of preaching. "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? So faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. This law once laid down by the Apostle Paul maintains its full force today. Preaching, the verbal proclamation of a message, is indeed always indispensable. The fatigue produced these days by so much empty talk and the relevance of many other forms of communication must not however diminish the permanent power of the word, or cause a loss of confidence in it. The word remains ever relevant, especially when it is the bearer of the power of God.

Liturgy of the Word

This evangelising preaching takes on many forms, and zeal will inspire the reshaping of them almost indefinitely. In fact there are innumerable events in life and human situations which offer the opportunity for a discreet but incisive statement of what the Lord has to say in this or that particular circumstance. It suffices to have true spiritual sensitivity for reading God's message in events. But at a time when the liturgy renewed by the Council has given greatly increased value to the Liturgy of the Word, it would be a mistake not to see in the homily an important and very adaptable instrument of evangelisation. The faithful assembled as a Paschal Church, celebrating the feast of

the Lord present in their midst, expect much from this preaching, and will greatly benefit from it provided that it is simple, clear, direct, well-adapted, profoundly dependent on Gospel teaching and faithful to the magisterium, animated by a balanced apostolic ardor coming from its own characteristic nature, full of hope, fostering belief, and productive of peace and unity.

Catechetical Instruction

A means of evangelisation that must not be neglected is that of catechetical instruction. The intelligence, especially that of children and young people, needs to learn through systematic religious instruction the fundamental teachings, the living content of the truth which God has wished to convey to us. The methods must be adapted to the age, culture and aptitude of the persons concerned, they must seek always to fix in the memory, intelligence and heart the essential truths that must impregnate all of life. It is necessary above all to prepare good instructors- parochial catechists, teachers, parents- who are desirous of perfecting themselves in this superior art, which is indispensable and requires religious instruction.

Mass Media

Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, the first preaching and the first catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means. When they are put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people. The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims from the housetops the message of which she is the depositary.

Personal Contact

For this reason, side by side with the collective proclamation of the Gospel, the other form of transmission, the person-to-person one, remains valid and important. The Lord often used it. In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?

Sacramentalization

Yet, one can never sufficiently stress the fact that evangelisation does not consist only of the preaching and teaching of a doctrine. In a certain sense it is a mistake to make a contrast between evangelisation and sacramentalization, as is sometimes done. It is indeed true that a certain way of administering the sacraments, without the solid support of catechesis regarding these same sacraments and a global catechesis, could end up by depriving them of their effectiveness to a great extent. The role of evangelisation is precisely to educate people in the faith in such a way as to lead each individual Christian to live the sacraments as true sacraments of faith- and not to receive them passively or reluctantly.

Popular Piety

If it is well oriented, above all by a pedagogy of evangelisation, it is rich in values. It manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know. It makes people capable of generosity and

sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of manifesting belief. When it is well oriented, this popular religiosity can be more and more for multitudes of our people a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ.

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