

Light of Jesus Kerygma Grand Feast

Broadway Church

30 September 2017

Dear brother priests and brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

Introduction

What a great pleasure it is for me this evening to join all of you in this Kerygma Grand Feast of the Light of Jesus Family here in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. What a splendid gathering of the faithful! And I look forward to learning so much from you.

I am especially grateful to Edwin Cruz of St. Mary's Parish for his kind invitation to share a few thoughts with you at this event. I especially welcome Bo Sanchez, the founder of the Light of Jesus Family and thank him for his decades-long work as a missionary disciple spreading the love of God the Father, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the healing power of Jesus Christ around the world; and Brother Pio Español, the Director of the Life of Jesus Family. Your ministry, brothers, especially among the Filipino community, is inspiring.

May I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Deacon Greg Barcelon and in his ministry as Director of Filipino Ministry here in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. His work of coordinating the various Associations and ensuring that they work zealously within the different parish communities where the faithful gather to be nourished by the Eucharist is proving invaluable. May all the gifts and charisms which the Holy Spirit is kindling in our midst always work together for the greater

glory of God and the building up of his Church on earth! It is by praising the good Lord together that we can ensure that our young people stay close to Jesus.

Unleashing the Power of the Gospel

Tonight I want to say something about our call to unleash the power of the Gospel in the parishes of the Archdiocese of Vancouver – your parishes, where you live your faith.

Pentecost

Let me begin with the first great unleashing of the Holy Spirit on the Church by reading briefly the account of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles:

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim (Acts 2:1-4).

Jesus Christ is keeping his promise of making all things new! He himself is at work to renew his Church in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. He is pouring out his Holy Spirit anew so that each parishioner, every

member of the Church, will be formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple, into our families and communities.

Just as in the Upper Room at Pentecost, it is the Holy Spirit who transforms us from ordinary people into Spirit-filled evangelizers. Before the coming of the Spirit, the first disciples were not a particularly impressive group of people. They had good reason to be filled with fears, concerns, and feelings of inadequacy as they contemplated the awesome task Jesus had given them: to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. They were still struggling to understand the events of recent days: Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven.

But when the Spirit fell upon them, their hearts were set ablaze with the fire of God's love and they could no longer keep the good news of Christ to themselves. They went out from the Upper Room overflowing with the joy of the Gospel.¹ Through their witness, the

¹ The transformation caused by the Spirit was most visible in the apostle Peter. Before Pentecost, Peter had left everything to follow Jesus and was earnestly seeking to live by his teaching. But his ability to fulfill his apostolic mission was compromised by his own fears and failings. He vehemently resisted Jesus' prediction of his passion, which seemed senseless to human reasoning. Then after boasting of his loyalty to the Master, he came face to face with his own weakness and cowardice. But after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter was filled with an unshakable inner conviction of the truth of the Gospel and a love that compelled him to share that good news with all who would listen.¹⁶ Even under persecution, his evangelical boldness and joy were uncontainable (Acts 4:12-13; 5:40-42). It was because of such a transformation in Peter and all the members of the Church that "The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly" (Acts 6:7).

Gospel was unleashed in Jerusalem and from there throughout the ancient world, right down to here in Vancouver in our own day.

Today no less than two millennia ago, there is no limit to what the Lord can do in our midst. His part is to clothe his Church with “power from on high” (cf. Luke 24:49) for the accomplishment of her mission. Our part is to give him our wholehearted “yes”: to let ourselves be transformed, guided, and sent forth by the Holy Spirit, who is the “principal agent of evangelization.”²

A Missionary Conversion of Our Archdiocese

It is my conviction – as I pray that it is yours – that the Church in the Archdiocese of Vancouver must obey the Holy Spirit and be made by him into a band of joyful missionary disciples.³

This means that our local Church, following the call of Pope Francis, must undergo a “missionary conversion,” so that every person, through their personal encounter with Jesus Christ, will embrace his or her identity as a son or daughter of God and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, will be formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple. For everyone in the Archdiocese it entails making one’s relationship with Jesus and alignment with his will the central guiding principle of every

² Blessed Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75.

³ Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

aspect of life.

This missionary conversion entails a countercultural way of living grounded in prayer – at home, in the parish, in the various movements and associations – in the Word of God Scripture, in the sacraments; in welcoming those on the fringes; in the capacity to include those on the margins of society; and with joyful confidence in the providence of God even in difficult and stressful times.

The missionary conversion to which the Lord calls us is new, yet it is also a return to the roots of our identity as the Church of Jesus Christ, manifested to the world on the day of Pentecost. It is the Church becoming young again! It is a reawakening to our foundational calling, applied in a new way to the specific circumstances and challenges of our time.

The Missionary Nature of the Church

The very last words Jesus spoke to his disciples before he ascended into heaven were the commission to evangelize all people: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). This mandate is for the Church of every age, for the Church in Vancouver today. In an address just days after his election as Pope, Francis emphasized the importance of responding “faithfully to the Church’s perennial mission: to bring Jesus Christ to mankind and to lead mankind to an encounter with Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the

Life.”⁴ The Church “exists in order to evangelize.”⁵ Evangelizing is therefore the responsibility of every Catholic Christian, of everyone here tonight.

Evangelization is, very simply, proclaiming the good news of Jesus to those around us. This proclamation is to be both in word and in deed. If we share the good news of Christ’s love in words only, not living what we preach, people will rightly accuse us of hypocrisy, and we may even give Christianity a bad name. On the other hand, if we share the good news in deeds only, people will not learn of the One who is the source of the joy and divine love we carry within us.

Those around us are thirsting for the Gospel, the words of eternal life, even if they do not realize it. How can we fail to share generously what we have freely received?

The term “new evangelization,” a phrase coined by Pope St. John Paul II, takes account of the fact that today many of the baptized have ceased the practice of the faith and so we are being called to a renewed effort that is “new in its ardour, methods and expression.”⁶ This new evangelization is directed to those around us in our own society, where

⁴ Francis, Address to the College of Cardinals (15 March 2013).

⁵ Blessed Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

⁶ St. John Paul II, Address to CELAM, Haiti (9 May 1983).

40% of those in the Lower Mainland claim to have no religion. Pope Benedict XVI said that “The real problem at this moment of our history is that God is disappearing from the human horizon, and, with the dimming of the light which comes from God, humanity is losing its bearings.”⁷ Furthermore, in our Archdiocese more than 50% of baptized Catholics no longer share in the Church’s sacramental life. The new “mission territory” is, therefore, our own neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, and even our own homes.

Proposing Jesus Christ

The task of evangelizing is to propose – always, everywhere and to everyone – Jesus Christ as the Saviour whom God the Father offers to every human being. The new evangelization is not a membership drive, nor is it an effort to shore up a code of conduct. Rather, it is a love affair. All are invited to encounter Jesus and let their hearts be captured by him. Pope Francis is convinced that all genuine renewal in the Church begins with the Christian having “a vital, personal, authentic and solid relationship with Christ.”⁸

Evangelizing aims to lead others to life-changing encounters with Jesus, with the result that he becomes the Lord of one’s life. An

⁷ Benedict XVI, Letter to the Society of St. Pius X (10 March 2009).

⁸ Francis, Address to the Roman Curia (22 December 2014).

encounter is a person-centered form of contemplation; it is two people being present to each other with no utilitarian purpose. For some people the encounter with Christ is an earth-shaking “Damascus road” kind of experience; for others – probably most of us – this coming to know Jesus personally is a more gradual process. In either case, encountering Jesus is like meeting the person you are going to marry: you are overwhelmed by this encounter and cannot imagine going forward in life without that person.

Moreover, you want others to share that joy of knowing him and feel impelled to make him known. As the the Holy Father has said, “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’.”⁹ Remember that the kerygma can be proclaimed effectively only by a firsthand witness, one who has met the Lord personally and can speak of what he is doing in one’s own life

How to Pass on the Encounter as Missionary Disciples

But how do we pass on our experience to others? I have four hints

⁹ Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

that might help you out.

1. Don't Be Ashamed of Your Own Weakness

A big stumbling block for many people is their sense of their own unworthiness, perhaps even of being a little hypocritical, in talking to others about Jesus when they are aware of their own sinfulness. Pope Francis offers us some good advice on this score:

Our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing. The witness of faith that each Christian is called to offer leads us to say with Saint Paul: “Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil 3:12-13).¹⁰

2. Keep It Simple

First of all, keep it simple. Always remember the heart of Jesus' message, the *kerygma*, the core of the Gospel, which is the “proclamation of God's love, mercy and forgiveness, revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹¹ Tell others who are

¹⁰ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 121.

¹¹ Francis, Homily (12 October 2014). In a 2010 interview, he said: “the most important thing about a sermon is the message of Jesus Christ, which in theology is known as the *kerygma*. It summarizes the core Christian tenets: that God is in Jesus, He made Himself man in order to save us, He lived in the world like one of us, He suffered,

wounded and may not even know what or for whom they are searching “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”¹²

Why this simplicity? Because “at times we lose people because they don’t understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity”¹³ and we use terms that are foreign to people.

3. Don’t Start with Moral Teaching

Second, don’t first bring up the so-called “hot button moral questions. These are important, but they make sense only in light of what is truly primary: the person’s encounter with the mercy of the living Christ.

The Pope regrets that, because of the media attention given to a handful of moral questions, the heart of the Gospel risks becoming

He died, He was buried, and He came back to life. This is the *kerygma*, the message of Christ” (Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin, eds., *Pope Francis: Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio* (New York: New American Library, 2014), 103; cf. Cf. Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 53: “As a Jesuit priest and provincial, and later as cardinal, bishop, and now pope, Bergoglio always insisted that the Church should offer people what he called this ‘primary proclamation’ – the experience of God’s merciful love – prior to (in the sense both of precedence and importance) the rest of Christian teaching.”

¹² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 164.

¹³ Francis, Address to the Bishops of Brazil, Aparecida (28 July 2013).

obscured. What happens, he says, is that “certain issues which are part of the Church’s moral teaching are taken out of the context which gives them their meaning. . . . [rather] the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary.”¹⁴ Before someone can understand and live the Church’s moral teachings, that person must first grasp that he or she is gazed upon and loved by a merciful God.

4. Talk As a Friend to Friend

The invitation to believe in the Gospel is always personal: it is not first of all a program for moral improvement or a happy life but the offer of communion with a person, Jesus. “Heart speaks to heart,” as Cardinal John Henry Newman put it. Your invitation will be effective if you are a joyful disciple. The evangelist presents the challenges of the Gospel not as the word of a superior to an inferior, but of a friend to a friend. Relationships are key to this whole process. Prepare the ground by first establishing trust, and then offer accompaniment to the person along the challenging road to life in Christ.¹⁵

¹⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 34, 35; cf. 128; Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis,” *America*, vol. 209:8 (30 September 2013).

¹⁵Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:5-42) is a paradigm of evangelization. When the woman came to the well for her daily task of drawing water, Jesus engaged her in conversation, showing that he cared for her as a

Good Habits of Missionary Disciples

In conclusion, I want to suggest some tips that might help you to be effective missionary disciples. I call these the “good habits” that we should develop to be the Lord’s good servants. We all need to take on certain dispositions of mind and heart if we are to become the mission-oriented Church which God wants. The following good habits are particularly crucial to the cultural change we are seeking to effect in the Archdiocese.

1. Meditation of Scripture

Listening and responding to God’s word in the Sacred Scriptures must be at the heart of our efforts to live and spread the Gospel. One

person. He spoke to her of “living water” that would quench her deepest thirst. As the conversation went on, he exposed areas of sin and woundedness in her life, implicitly calling her to repentance: “you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.” Yet looking into his eyes, she saw no condemnation, only a love and mercy she had never experienced before. By the end of their encounter she forgot all about her bucket, because she had now drunk of the living water—that water that is the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:37-39). Because of that encounter the woman herself became an evangelist. She ran back to her village, exclaiming to everyone who would listen, “Come see a man who told me everything I have done! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” Her message was neither eloquent nor complete, yet it was spectacularly effective. The joy of her new life was evident to all who saw her. This formerly isolated, outcast person was now forgiven, healed and reconciled to God. So powerful was her testimony that, as a result, the entire town came to faith in Jesus (Jn 4:39). Personal testimony has an indispensable role in evangelization. Testimony has a unique power to touch hearts, since it is almost impossible to ignore the witness of someone who has encountered Jesus personally and whose life has been transformed by him. The townspeople of the Samaritan woman at the well came to faith in Jesus because of her testimony, which eventually led them to encounter him themselves (Jn 4:39, 42).

who is in love desires to know more and more about the beloved. Since all Scripture speaks of Christ, immersing ourselves in the Word is a way to deepen our initial encounter and grow in our relationship with him. God's word is "living and active" (Heb 4:12); it renews our minds and changes us. The more grounded we are in Scripture, the more we are able to understand God's marvellous plan and to see the events in our lives with the eyes of faith.

Through Scripture we learn to hear God speaking to us personally: "In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them."¹⁶ As God's word is dynamic, so must our response be: we take the word to heart and apply it to our lives.

2. Eucharist

In the Holy Eucharist we reach the summit of our participation in the victory of Christ over sin and death: the triumph we proclaim in the new evangelization. In this Most Blessed Sacrament we have the source of our zeal and strength to unleash the power of the Gospel.¹⁷

Our evangelizing activity leads ourselves and others to the Eucharist, since the Eucharist is the fullness of communion with Jesus and his whole Church. On the other hand, the Eucharist leads us to

¹⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dei Verbum*, 21.

¹⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 84-87.

evangelize, since our ability to announce the Gospel springs from the Passion and Resurrection of Christ which is made present anew in the Eucharist.

At every Mass the Church – that is, all her members – are newly empowered and sent forth to bring Christ into the world. Through the Eucharist we are nourished with Christ’s own self-giving love so that we can reproduce that love in our own lives. Thus the goal of the liturgy is never just to receive the sacrament and go home; it is to become a living tabernacle through which Christ is made present to others.¹⁸

3. Docility to the Spirit

First, be docile to the Spirit. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles it is evident that the Holy Spirit was the initiator, guide, and driving force of the Church’s evangelizing mission (cf. Acts 4:31; 8:26-29, 39-40; 10:19; 13:1-13; 15:28; 16:6-10).

After giving his disciples the Great Commission, Jesus told them to “stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk

¹⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 84: “The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God’s love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him. The Eucharist is thus the source and summit not only of the Church’s life, but also of her mission: ‘an authentically eucharistic Church is a missionary Church.’ We too must be able to tell our brothers and sisters with conviction: ‘That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us’ (1 Jn 1:3).”

24:49). As the first evangelization could not have taken place without the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, so the new evangelization cannot be accomplished without a new Pentecost.

So today the new evangelization can only be carried out through a radical openness to the leading of the Spirit: preceding every initiative with prayer for his guidance, constantly allowing ourselves to be led by him, and obeying his promptings and inspirations.

4. Apostolic Boldness

A second quality that stood out among the early Christians was their boldness in proclaiming the Gospel, even in the face of hostility and persecution (cf. Acts 4:29, 31; 28:31). They did not hesitate to proclaim Jesus as the one Saviour whom God offers to the whole human race, and to call their listeners to repentance and conversion. Their boldness was not a human personality trait, but a result of their intimate union with Christ (cf. Acts 4:13).

5. Spirit of Innovation

A third habit to acquire is understanding that the rapidly changing cultural situation in which we find ourselves requires that we think in new and creative ways. We need to be willing to let go of some old structures that no longer work and to experiment with new ones. As St. Paul tried different missionary strategies in different settings (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23), so we need to be innovative, flexible, adaptable, unafraid to

make mistakes, and willing to learn from the good ideas of others.

6. Spirit of Cooperation

Fourth, we must accept that there can be no competition in the Body of Christ – not between or within movements and parishes – because we have one Lord and we have one united purpose (Eph 4:1-6): to share God’s loving mercy and bring others to Jesus. Let’s always remember that any victory for one is a victory for all. As Christ’s Apostles had to put aside rivalry and learn to work as a team (Lk 9:46-48), so we are called to a spirit of generous cooperation and sharing of resources.

7. Confidence in God

Lastly, we must hand over all our our plans and initiatives with utter confidence in God. We give the Lord the best of our effort, but it is he who will bring about the increase. We can trust in him, for the missionary renewal of the Archdiocese of Vancouver is not our doing but his divine work in which we are cooperating. “Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth” (1 Cor 3:7).

Conclusion

The book of Acts ends in chapter 28 with the Apostle Paul under house arrest in Rome, still boldly preaching the Gospel. St. Luke ends without finishing the story because the story of the Church’s mission

continues in every age. We are living the 29th chapter of Acts! The power unleashed by the Holy Spirit evident in the ancient world is still at work in the Church of Vancouver today. “Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization.”¹⁹ Enkindled by the fire of the Spirit, go and become missionary disciples to the world around you!

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¹⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.