

## **Sunday: 5 B**

### **University Mass**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

3 February 2018

Dear brother priests and deacons, dear administrators, faculty and students of the colleges and universities of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, and dear friends in Christ:

#### ***Obligation to Proclaim the Gospel***

To talk about “obligation” is not appealing, especially to a college-students. Nor does talk of “compulsion” gain a ready ear. Yet this is what we hear in this evening’s Readings. St. Paul speaks of “an obligation is laid on him” (cf. 2 Cor 9:16) and adds, “woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (2 Cor 9:16). And, in the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples of us his own sense of obligation when they query him: “Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do” (Mk 1:38).

In this evening’s Gospel passage from Mark, Jesus is hunted down by his companions (cf. Mk 1:36) when he went to a desert place just to be by himself and pray. There is nothing in this scene of the tranquility of the monastery or the classroom.

All is charged with a sense of urgency, of movement, and of activity. We feel – as Mark and Paul both intend us to – a strong sense of mission, of being compelled to act.

Paul is on the move; Jesus is on the move; the disciples are on the

move. Why this flurry of activity prompted by a sense of obligation? Quite simply because the proclamation of the Gospel, of the arrival of the Kingdom in Jesus, demands that the good news of liberation be taken to the highways and byways; it must be handed on to others.

The message of the fullness of life that Jesus came to bring (cf. Jn 10:10) must spread. It could not be limited to the small group of disciples lucky enough to be with Jesus in Palestine and hear his preaching first-hand. Like the other Apostles, Paul keenly felt the obligation, even the compulsion, to preach the Gospel revealed to him. He had no choice; he had to proclaim it. This preaching was laid upon him as an obligation. It required a lot more than taking some spare time away from making and repairing tents. Indeed, Paul felt he would be condemned, if he did not give himself wholeheartedly to the task. “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!” (2 Cor 9:16), he exclaimed.

### ***2000 Years Later on College Campuses***

All of us here, every single one of us, are beneficiaries of those fearless preachers who burst out of the Upper Room on Pentecost and were joined by others such as Paul. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for them. In order to believe we must hear the Word proclaimed. And to hear we need a preacher. We would not exist as a Christian community, if we had not received from others what they “handed on” to us. Our task – and yours as college and university students – is to take up the

responsibility of handing on our faith to others. “Now this proclamation is entrusted also to you, that it may resound with fresh power. The Church needs you, your enthusiasm, your creativity and the joy that is so characteristic of you.”<sup>1</sup> Keep in mind that the best way to evangelize college students is another student. This is the path for all of you to follow!

Do you feel the obligation, the inner compulsion, to be evangelizers like Jesus and the disciples? But how can you, as students, do this today in the Lower Mainland?

Let me offer you three tips about how to engage in this adventure, with the Lord by your side; and he *is* by your side in this journey.

***Step 1: Make Friends with Jesus***

The first step is the interior journey. It entails encountering Jesus the friend he is calling you to be. At the Last Supper, he called us to be exactly that: his friends (cf. Jn 15:15). Just as he first wanted his disciples to be with him, to “abide with him” before he sent them out in pairs to proclaim the Kingdom, so must we open ourselves to this most wonderful and rewarding of all friendships.

“Only one who is ‘with him [Jesus]’ comes to know him and can truly proclaim him. And anyone who has been with him cannot keep to

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, Homily, World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro (28 July 2013).

himself what he has found; instead, he has to pass it on.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, before proclaiming to others, we first have to let Jesus preach to us. “Do I let Jesus preach to me, or do I know it all? Do I take the time and find the space to listen to him? Ask yourself: on which social media platform does Jesus speak to you? I would say the answer is the Gospel! Seek the word of Jesus in the Gospel. Jesus preaches to me there. It is his Word. With the Gospel, he says what he wants me to hear.”<sup>3</sup>

This first step of being an evangelizer has been succinctly summed up by Pope Benedict who once wrote: “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him.”<sup>4</sup>

### ***Step 2: Do not be afraid!***

The second tip I offer you comes right from the oft-repeated refrain of St. John Paul II: “do not be afraid!”; do not be afraid to cast out into the deep, to leave the safety of the sandy shores and tread into

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, Marian Vespers with the Religious and Seminarians of Bavaria (11 September 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (8 February 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily at the Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome (24 April 2005).

unknown waters.

Some of you might think: “I have no particular preparation, how can I go and proclaim the Gospel?” Your fear are not so very different from that of Jeremiah when he was called by God to be a prophet. “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth”. God says the same thing to you as he said to Jeremiah: “Be not afraid . . . for I am with you to deliver you” (Jer 1:7,8). He is with you in this adventure!

When you proclaim Christ by the witness of the integrity of your life and in your conversations with your colleagues, it is he himself who goes before you and guides you. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised, “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20). And this is also true for you!<sup>5</sup>

This mission is of course challenging but with the guidance of the Holy Spirit it is an exciting one. We all experience our spiritual poverty and moral weakness in taking the precious treasure of the Gospel to the world. Remember, though, and repeat often St. Paul’s words: “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor 4:7). It is this that must always give you courage: knowing that the power to evangelize comes from

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily, World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro (28 July 2013).

God, that it is the work of his Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Step 3: Bear Witness and Converse Wisely***

I urge you, dear friends, not to be afraid to bear witness publicly to what you believe. I'm not suggesting showiness or ostentatious piety but a wordless witness. It can be very effective, giving rise to irresistible questions: Why are you that way? What makes you tick? Why don't you join in?

If you are no different, if you always "blend in," you might be living a hidden Christian life, but you would not be giving witness, bearing testimony to Jesus. Christians on campus are called to provoke questions, to be "signs of contradiction" (Lk 2:34), as Jesus was for the people of his day. Your hope in the face of hardship; your purity in the face of sensuality; your honesty in the face of cheating; your readiness to forgive in the face of suffering injury – all these, and many other traits that mark the Christian life, are ways of drawing others to the liberation offered to those who embrace the Gospel.

If there is a "time for silence," there is also "a time for speaking." Students converse with one another all the time. And questions which touch upon the meaning of life and morality often arise. You must be ready to give an intelligent and reasonable account of your faith. Others

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Francis, Address to the Pontifical Mission Societies (17 May 2013).

have the right to hear the Gospel from us. But do it wisely and prudently, following the example of St. Paul, who exhorted the Corinthian Christians: “To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (2 Cor 9:22).

To live and proclaim the Gospel on your campuses, in your homes, workplaces and communities is the obligation – but a beautiful and fulfilling one! – that the good Lord lays upon you. You can carry out this mandate because he is with you on your journey.

### ***Conclusion***

Let us pray at this Eucharist that God will renew the desire and enthusiasm of all of us share our faith with others so that we can be missionary disciples after the Lord’s own heart. And let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to help us respond generously as we take up this pressing and urgent challenge: “woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel” (2 Cor 9:16).

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