



6th Sunday of Easter Year A - Mission, the primary task  
Homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: Sirach 15:15-20; Ps 119; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Matthew 5:  
17-37

*'Always have your answer ready for people who ask you for the reason for the hope that you have.'*

There is some talk that Pope Leo will shortly encourage us to return to and focus on the most important document of Pope Francis' reign. I refer to *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Joy of the Gospel, the Apostolic Exhortation that put Mission back at the top of the Church's agenda. It was new mainly in its style but harked back to that monumental document of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which Pope Francis described as 'the greatest pastoral document written to date'.

Both of these documents owe much to the other unacknowledged authors. In Francis' case it was in some ways co-authored by Benedict. In Paul's case it drew heavily on the work of one Cardinal Wojtyła, later John Paul II.

Both of these documents are essential reading for all post-conciliar Catholics for, without this call to the essential task of the Church – her mission - the whole Conciliar project, an attempt to reach out to the world with the Gospel, becomes merely an exercise in the

documentation of decline, endless pointless meetings and countless forests of wasted paper.

Sadly, 'Evangelism' is all too often a dirty word in Catholic circles. Western Catholics don't use the word but substitute 'evangelisation' as an alternative, preferring to speak of the task of informing the culture rather than converting the individual. We frequently excuse ourselves of this primary duty by quoting St Francis famous call to 'Preach the Gospel. Use words if necessary.' – as an invitation to silent witness.

There are two things wrong with that.

One is that St Francis never said it. It is a comfortable invention of late 20th century theologians, embarrassed by the history of mission in correcting and converting local cultures. After *Nostra Aetate*, the Council document on other faiths, the flight from traditional mission was Gadarene.

The second is that, if we don't introduce people to Jesus then they are left to find their way home simply by admiring the glorious glow of our righteousness and seeking to emulate it. You see the difficulty.

This approach is, at best, self-deluding, at worst a complacent exercise in vanity and ludicrous, if unintentional, self-regard.

Of course there are problems with the Evangelicals' approach, I know. There is what I call 'hit and run evangelism'. That is where the aim of a mission is to whip up an emotional storm, get people to announce their conversion to Jesus and then the circus moves on. One of the evangelicals' problems is that they love Jesus but don't know His Church. Thus the newly converted may fail to find a place in the congregation. The preacher, meanwhile, puts another notch on his belt as another soul is registered, come what may, in the guest book of Heaven when the time comes.

But this is extreme. Usually there is follow up to such events but, of course, no guarantee of orthodox teaching, valid sacraments or spiritual nurture.

Whatever its shortcomings, it does, however, enjoy the merit of individual commitment and a memorable moment of decision which all good

evangelism provokes, from the challenge of Joshua ('Who is on the Lord's side?') to the humbling of St Paul on the Damascus Road.

When I first became a Catholic over twenty years ago now, I remember standing outside a room full of clergy with an excellent young woman speaker who was going to talk to them about 'Evangelism'.

She was very nervous.

I reassured her that the clergy would be much more nervous than her. First because they were not used to being instructed by an educated and competent woman but secondly because she was talking to them on a key issue where, for the most part, they themselves had failed.

We prayed. She went in and twenty years later is a longstanding powerful speaker at international evangelistic conferences.

Two things are required of us if we are to evangelise.

The first is a straightforward love of Jesus.

If we do not want to love Him or enjoy His love, nothing will happen.

When we are in love we want to tell the world.

Second, we must understand that it is urgent. A dear evangelical and utterly committed pastor friend of mine put it bluntly thus.

'It moves my heart, when simply walking along the street, to see all these people, whom Jesus died for, ignorant of His love and going to Hell.'

This is very shocking, I know but it is the uncomfortable and unvarnished truth. If we simply subscribe to a lazy 'universalism' (everyone is going to Heaven), then The Cross is emptied of its meaning and Jesus' sacrifice was in vain. The Church has no point or purpose. We might as well have a 'lie-in' every Sunday.

It also goes further, effectively branding Jesus as a liar for He, more than the rest of the Holy Scriptures put together, bangs on about Hell and the consequences of non-belief.

This modern Western mindset has been at the root of the Church's failure in my lifetime and in my culture. Karl Rahner's promulgation of the 'anonymous Christian' – that is the claim that everyone doing good is, effectively, a Christian. Apart from being immensely patronising to non-believers, it has proved a poisonous sedative to the Mission of the Church. In its wake we have largely substituted 'good works' for Gospel

imperative. Good works are a product of our belief not an alternative. They are important – see Matthew 25 and the Last Judgement or the story of Dives and Lazarus. But you don't need to be a believer to do good works.

The Gospel is predicated upon the Fall of Man, his loss of Paradise, his expulsion from Eden, his sin of disobedience which has left him exiled and mortal. The Gospel is God's response of love to the tragedy of Man. The Gospel is prefaced by the Call to Repentance. Mission which avoids these uncomfortable truths is dishonest and culpable.

But these are not proclamations of misery but rather an essential encounter with reality and an experience of liberation and restoration, of reconciliation, healing and renewal. The Gospel is Good News. It brings joy.

So, how do we go about it? A little exercise for us all this week....

St Peter exhorts us to always have our answer ready and be able to give account of the reasons for our hope in Christ.

Find a quiet hour in the week. Lock yourself away. Pray and then reflect on your own journey. Why and how did you set out? How did and how do you encounter Christ? Have there been moments of the mountaintop with Jesus? What did Christ do for you in the times of darkness or difficulty? What has kept you faithful and hopeful and loving of the Lord and with a heart for the salvation of Mankind?

Write them down. This is your testimony.

Know it. Rehearse it. Re-live it.

Share it when the times come. Every time the time comes.

Pray for those opportunities and to be aware of them and to have the courage to speak of these deep things of the heart.

AND.... Leave a copy of that account with your Will and the details of your Requiem Mass so that there will be a final and inescapable witness to your family and those you love.

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( Documents referred to = EVANGELII NUNTIANDII & EVANGELII GAUDIUM)

Every time we witness to Jesus, it is a seed sown.

We may have a few moments of initial embarrassment in sharing our testimony, a few bruises if rebuffed.

We will have an eternity to regret our silence.