

The New Evangelisation

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Human life cannot be realized by itself. Our life is an open question, an incomplete project, still to be brought to fruition and realized. Each man's fundamental question is: How will this be realized -- becoming man? How does one learn the art of living? Which is the path toward happiness?

To evangelise means: to show this path -- to teach the art of living. At the beginning of his public life Jesus says: I have come to evangelise the poor (Luke 4:18); this means: I have the response to your fundamental question; I will show you the path of life, the path toward happiness -- rather: I am that path.

The deepest poverty is the inability of joy, the tediousness of a life considered absurd and contradictory. This poverty is widespread today, in very different forms in the materially rich as well as the poor countries. The inability of joy presupposes and produces the inability to love, produces jealousy, avarice -- all defects that devastate the life of individuals and of the world.

This is why we are in need of a new evangelisation -- if the art of living remains an unknown, nothing else works. But this art is not the object of a science -- this art can only be communicated by [one] who has life -- he who is the Gospel personified.

Before speaking about the fundamental contents of new evangelisation, I would like to say a few words about its structure and on the correct method.

The Church always evangelises and has never interrupted the path of evangelisation. She celebrates the eucharistic mystery every day, administers the sacraments, proclaims the word of life -- the Word of God, and commits herself to the causes of justice and charity. And this evangelisation bears fruit: It gives light and joy, it gives the path of life to many people; many others live, often unknowingly, of the light and the warmth that radiate from this permanent evangelisation.

However, we can see a progressive process of de-Christianisation and a loss of the essential human values, which is worrisome. A large part of today's humanity does not find the Gospel in the permanent evangelisation of the Church: That is to say, the convincing response to the question: How to live?

This is why we are searching for, along with permanent and uninterrupted and never to be interrupted evangelisation, a new evangelisation, capable of being heard by that world that does not find access to "classic" evangelisation. Everyone needs the Gospel; the Gospel is destined to all and not only to a specific circle and this is why we are obliged to look for new ways of bringing the Gospel to all.

Yet another temptation lies hidden beneath this -- the temptation of impatience, the temptation of immediately finding the great success, in finding large numbers. But this is not God's way. For the Kingdom of God as well as for evangelisation, the instrument and vehicle of the Kingdom of God, the parable of the grain of mustard seed is always valid (see Mark 4:31-32).

The Kingdom of God always starts anew under this sign. New evangelisation cannot mean: immediately attracting the large masses that have distanced themselves from the Church by using

new and more refined methods. No -- this is not what new evangelisation promises.

New evangelisation means: never being satisfied with the fact that from the grain of mustard seed, the great tree of the Universal Church grew; never thinking that the fact that different birds may find place among its branches can suffice -- rather, it means to dare, once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow (Mark 4:26-29).

Large things always begin from the small seed, and the mass movements are always ephemeral. In his vision of the evolutionary process, Teilhard de Chardin mentions the "white of the origins" (le blanc des origines): The beginning of a new species is invisible and cannot be found by scientific research. The sources are hidden -- they are too small. In other words: The large realities begin in humility.

Let us put to one side whether Teilhard is right in his evolutionary theories; the law on invisible origins does say a truth -- a truth present in the very actions of God in history: "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you." God says [this] to the People of Israel in the Old Testament and thus expresses the fundamental paradox of the history of salvation: certainly, God does not count in large numbers; exterior power is not the sign of his presence.

Most of Jesus' parables indicate this structure of divine intervention and thus answer the disciples' worries, who were expecting other kinds of success and signs from the Messiah -- successes of the kind offered by Satan to the Lord: All these -- the kingdoms of the world -- I will give to you ... (Matt hew 4:9).

Of course, at the end of his life Paul believed that he had proclaimed the Gospel to the very ends of the earth, but the Christians were small communities dispersed throughout the world, insignificant according to the secular criteria. In reality, they were the leaven that penetrates the meal from within and they carried within themselves the future of the world (see Matt hew 13:33).

An old proverb says: "Success is not one of the names of God." New evangelisation must surrender to the mystery of the grain of mustard seed and not be so pretentious as to believe to immediately produce a large tree. We either live too much in the security of the already existing large tree or in the impatience of having a greater, more vital tree -- instead we must accept the mystery that the Church is at the same time a large tree and a very small grain. In the history of salvation it is always Good Friday and Easter Sunday at the same time