



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 22 February 2023

[Multimedia]

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer. 6. *The protagonist of the proclamation: the Holy Spirit*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

In our catechetical itinerary on the passion for evangelizing, today we start from the words of Jesus that we have heard: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*Mt 28:19*). “Go”, says the Risen One, not to indoctrinate, not to make proselytes, no, but *to make disciples*, that is, to give everyone the opportunity to come into contact with Jesus, to know and love Him freely. Go and *baptise*: to baptise means to immerse; and therefore, before indicating a liturgical action, it expresses a vital action: to immerse one’s life in the Father, in the Son, in the Holy Spirit; to experience every day the joy of the presence of God who is close to us as Father, as Brother, as Spirit acting in us, in our very spirit. To baptise is to immerse oneself in the Trinity.

When Jesus says to His disciples — and also to us — “Go!”, He is not just communicating a word. No. He simultaneously communicates *the Holy Spirit*, because it is only thanks to Him, thanks to the Holy Spirit, that one can receive Christ’s mission and carry it out (cf. *Jn 20:21-22*). The Apostles, in fact, out of fear, remain closed up in the Upper Room until the day of Pentecost arrives and the Holy Spirit descends upon them (cf. *Acts 2:1-13*). And in that moment the fear leaves them, and, with His power, those fishermen, mostly unlettered, will change the world. “But if

they can't speak...". But it is the word of the Spirit, the strength of the Spirit that bears them onward to change the world. The proclamation of the Gospel, therefore, is only realized in the power of the Spirit, who precedes the missionaries and prepares hearts: He is "the engine of evangelisation".

We discover this in the Acts of the Apostles, where on every page we see that *the protagonist of the proclamation* is not Peter, Paul, Stephen, or Philip, but is *the Holy Spirit*. In the Book of Acts, too, a crucial moment in the beginning of the Church is recounted, which can also say a lot to us. Then, as now, tribulations were not lacking among consolations — beautiful moments and not so beautiful moments — joys were accompanied by worries, both things. One [worry] in particular: how to deal with the pagans who came to the faith, with those who did not belong to the Jewish people, for example. Were they or were they not bound to observe the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law? This was no small matter for those people. Two groups were thus formed, between those who considered the observance of the Law indispensable and those who did not. In order to discern, the Apostles gathered in what came to be called the 'Council of Jerusalem', the first in history. How to resolve the dilemma? They might have sought a good compromise between tradition and innovation: some rules are observed, and others are left aside. Yet the Apostles do not follow this human wisdom to seek a diplomatic balance between the one and the other; they don't follow this, but they adapt to the work of the Spirit, who had anticipated them by descending upon the pagans as He had upon them.

And so, removing almost every obligation related to the Law, they communicate the final decisions, made — and this is what they write — by the Holy Spirit and by us (cf. *Acts 15:28*), this went out, "the Holy Spirit with us" — the Apostles always act in this way. Together, without being divided, despite having different sensitivities and opinions, they listen to the Spirit. And He teaches one thing, which is also valid today: every religious tradition is useful if it facilitates the encounter with Jesus. Every religious tradition is useful if it facilitates the encounter with Jesus. We could say that the historic decision of the first Council, from which we also benefit, was motivated by a principle, *the principle of proclamation* : everything in the Church must be conformed to the requirements of the proclamation of the Gospel; not to the opinions of the conservatives or the progressives, but to the fact that Jesus reaches people's lives. Therefore, every choice, every usage, every structure, and every tradition is to be evaluated on the basis of whether they favour the proclamation of Christ. When decisions are found in the Church — for example ideological divisions: "I am conservative because..." "I am progressive because...". But where is the Holy Spirit? Be careful, for the Gospel is not an idea; the Gospel is not an ideology. The Gospel is a proclamation that touches the heart and makes you change your heart, but if you take refuge in an idea, in an ideology, whether right or left or centre, you are making the Gospel a political party, an ideology, a club of people. The Gospel always gives you this freedom of the Spirit that acts within you and carries you forward. And how necessary it is today that we take hold of the freedom of the Gospel and allow ourselves to be carried forward by the Spirit.

In this way the Spirit sheds light on the path of the Church, always. In fact, He is not only the light of hearts; He is the light that orients the Church: He brings clarity, helps to distinguish, helps to discern. This is why it is necessary to invoke Him often; let us also do so today, at the beginning of Lent. Because, as Church, we can have well-defined times and spaces, well-organised communities, institutes and movements, but without the Spirit, everything remains soulless. The organization is not enough; it is the Spirit that gives life to the Church. The Church, if she does not pray to Him and invoke Him, she closes in on herself, in sterile and exhausting debates, in wearisome polarisations, while the flame of the mission is extinguished. It is very sad to see the Church as if she were nothing more than a parliament. No. The Church is something else. The Church is the community of men and women who believe and proclaim Jesus Christ, but moved by the Holy Spirit, not by their own reason. Yes, you use your reason, but the Spirit comes to enlighten and move it. The Spirit makes us go forth, propels us to proclaim the faith in order to confirm ourselves in the faith, pushes us to go on mission to rediscover who we are. That is why the Apostle Paul recommends: “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19). Do not quench the Spirit. Let us pray to the Spirit often, let us invoke him, let us ask him every day to kindle his light in us. Let us do this before each encounter, to become apostles of Jesus with the people we find. Don’t quench the Spirit, either in the Christian communities or in each one of us.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us start, and start anew, as Church, from the Holy Spirit. “It is undoubtedly important that in our pastoral planning we start from sociological surveys, analyses, the list of difficulties, the list of expectations and even complaints. However, it is far more important to start from the *experiences of the Spirit*: that is the real departure. And it is therefore necessary to seek them out, list them, study them, interpret them. It is a fundamental principle that, in the spiritual life, is called the *primacy of consolation over desolation*. First there is the Spirit who consoles, revives, enlightens, moves; then there will also be desolation, suffering, darkness, but the principle for adjusting in the darkness is *the light of the Spirit*” (C. M. Martini, *Evangelising in the Consolation of the Spirit*, 25 September 1997). This is the principle to guide ourselves in things we do not understand, in confusions, even in so much darkness — it is important. Let us try to ask ourselves if we open ourselves up to this light, if we give it space: do I invoke the Spirit? Each of us can answer within ourselves. How many of us pray to the Spirit? “No, Father, I pray to Our Lady, I pray to the Saints, I pray to Jesus, but sometimes I pray the Our Father, I pray to the Father...”. “And the Holy Spirit? Don’t you pray to the Holy Spirit, who is the one who moves your heart, who carries you forth, who brings you consolation, who brings you the desire to evangelize, undertake mission?”. I leave you with this question: Do I pray to the Holy Spirit? Do I let myself be guided by Him, who invites me not to close in on myself but to bear Jesus, to bear witness to the primacy of God’s consolation over the desolation of the world? May our Lady, who has understood this well, help us to understand it.

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from the Netherlands, the Philippines and the United States of America. May the Lenten journey we begin today bring us to Easter with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Upon you and your families I invoke joy and peace in Christ our Redeemer.

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds*. Today is the beginning of Lent, a privileged time of conversion and penance for our spirit. I would like to ask all of you, during this period, to intensify your prayers, meditation on the word of God and service to your brothers and sisters.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

APPEAL

Dear brothers and sisters,

The day after tomorrow, on 24 February, it will be one year since the invasion of Ukraine, since the beginning of this absurd and cruel war. A sad anniversary! The toll of dead, wounded, refugees and displaced persons, destruction, economic and social damage speaks for itself. May the Lord forgive so many crimes and so much violence. He is the God of peace. Let us remain close to the tormented Ukrainian people, who continue to suffer, and let us ask ourselves: has everything possible been done to stop the war? I appeal to those who have authority over nations to make a concrete commitment to end the conflict, to achieve a cease-fire and to start peace negotiations. What is built on rubble will never be a true victory!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, the burning desire to share the joy of the Gospel, we now turn to the role of the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus on the day of Pentecost to inaugurate the mission of the Apostles to make disciples of all nations. In the early Church's great missionary outreach, the Holy Spirit appears as the driving force, preparing hearts to receive the Gospel and confirming the Apostles in their witness to the risen Lord. The momentous decision of the Council of Jerusalem not to require converts to observe the Mosaic law was the fruit of prayerful discernment and communicated with the formula, "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (*Acts 15:28*). In every age, the Spirit illumines and guides the Church's proclamation of the Gospel. Today, Ash Wednesday, invites us to invoke the light of the

Spirit upon our individual lives as followers of Christ and on the Church's mission of bringing the consolation of Jesus to the desolation of a world that thirsts for the justice, peace and reconciled unity which are the fruit of the Lord's passover from death to life at Easter.