



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 6 December 2023

[Multimedia]

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer. 29. *The proclamation is in the Holy Spirit*

Dear brothers and sisters,

In the last catecheses, we saw that the proclamation of the Gospel is *joy*, it is *for everyone*, and it is addressed to *today*. Now let us discover a final essential characteristic: it is necessary that the proclamation take place *in the Holy Spirit*. Indeed, to “communicate God”, the joyful credibility of the testimony, the universality of the proclamation and the timeliness of the message are not enough. Without the Holy Spirit, all zeal is vain and falsely apostolic — it would only be our own and would not bear fruit.

In *Evangelii gaudium* I recalled that “Jesus is the first and greatest evangelizer”; that “in every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God”, who has “called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit” (no. 12). Here is the primacy of the Holy Spirit! Thus, the Lord compares the dynamism of the Kingdom of God to “a man [who scatters] seed upon the ground and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how” (*Mk* 4:26-27). The Spirit is the protagonist; he always precedes the missionaries and makes the fruit grow. This knowledge comforts us a great deal! And it helps us to specify another, equally decisive: namely, that in her apostolic zeal the Church does not announce herself, but a grace, a gift, and the Holy Spirit is precisely the Gift of God, as Jesus said to the

Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn* 4:10).

The primacy of the Spirit should not, however, induce us to indolence. Confidence does not justify disengagement. The vitality of the seed that grows by itself does not authorize farmers to neglect the field. In giving his last recommendations before ascending to heaven, Jesus said: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses... to the end of the earth” (*Acts* 1:8).

The Lord has not left us theological lecture notes or a pastoral manual to apply, but the Holy Spirit who inspires the mission. And the courageous initiative that the Spirit instils in us leads us to imitate his style, which always has two characteristics: *creativity* and *simplicity*.

Creativity, to proclaim Jesus with joy, to everyone and today. In this age of ours, which does not help us have a religious outlook on life, and in which the proclamation has become in various places more difficult, arduous, apparently fruitless, the temptation to desist from pastoral service may arise. Perhaps one takes refuge in safety zones, like the habitual repetition of things one always does, or in the alluring calls of an “intimist” spirituality, or even in a misunderstood sense of the centrality of the liturgy. They are temptations that disguise themselves as fidelity to tradition, but often, rather than responses to the Spirit, they are reactions to personal dissatisfactions. Instead, pastoral creativity, being bold in the Spirit, ardent in his missionary zeal, is the proof of fidelity to him. Therefore, I wrote that “Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him, and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world” (*Evangeli* *gaudium*, 11).

Creativity, therefore; and then *simplicity*, precisely because the Spirit takes us to the source, to the “first proclamation”. Indeed, it is “the fire of the Spirit [... that] leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father’s infinite mercy” (*ibid.*, n. 164). This is the *first proclamation*, which must “be the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal”; to say over and over, “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” (*ibid.*).

Brothers and sisters, let us allow ourselves to be drawn by the Spirit and invoke him every day; may he be the source of our being and our work; may he be at the origin of every activity, encounter, meeting and proclamation. He enlivens and rejuvenates the Church: with him we must not fear, because he, who is *harmony*, always keeps creativity and simplicity together, inspires communion and sends out in mission, opens to diversity and leads back to unity. He is our strength, the breath of our proclamation, the source of apostolic zeal. Come, Holy Spirit!

Special Greetings

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims, particularly the groups from Malta, Australia, Japan, Indonesia and the United States of America. Upon all of you and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly, my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to the sick, to newlyweds and to *young people*, with a special thought for the students of the Leonardo da Vinci Institute respectively in Santa Maria Capua Vetere and Milazzo, Italy. We are now close to the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Mary “believed” in God’s love and responded with her “yes”. From her, learn how to have full trust in the Lord, in order to testify everywhere the good and the love of the Gospel.

And let us not forget to pray for those who suffer from the tragedy of war, particularly the peoples of Ukraine, Israel, and Palestine. War is always a defeat. No one gains, everyone loses. Only the arms manufacturers gain.

I offer my blessing to all of you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we now reflect on how the preaching of the Gospel always takes place *in the power of the Holy Spirit*. As *the Gift of God* (cf. *Jn* 4:10), the Spirit prepares, sustains and fosters growth and new life in the Church. Yet, in every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God the Father, who sent his Son among us and bestowed the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. In our witness to the Risen Christ, we are called to imitate the creativity and simplicity that are the hallmark of the Spirit’s work. May the fire of the Holy Spirit continue to burn within us, strengthen us in unity and missionary zeal, as we strive to be joyful witnesses of our salvation in Christ, even to the ends of the earth.