

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

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The first teaching document mainly authored by Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, is a bold and thrilling bid to send the Catholic Church worldwide on mission. Energetic, direct, lyrical, its language and style model the evangelisation to which the Pope is calling Catholics. In sharp critiques and passionate prose it polarises the choices faced both by the Church and the world, gently but insistently inviting people to opt for mission – and to a journey of transformation and reform.

Weighing in at close to 300 pages, 'The Joy of the Gospel' is a hefty document (the Pope deals with seven questions over five chapters in "detail which some may find excessive"), packed with theology, social analysis, practical advice (on how to give a good homily, for example) and much 'holy wisdom' gained in a lifetime of shepherding the Catholic Church in Argentina, as head of the Jesuits and later as Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires. It is an 'apostolic exhortation', a form of papal teaching which is usually a response to a bishops' synod. But while *Evangelii Gaudium* takes account of the Synod on the New Evangelisation of October 2012, it is conspicuously not called a "post-synodal" apostolic exhortation. Apart from a handful of mentions, the document mostly ignores the term "new evangelisation", at least in terms of its conceptual formulation in the synod document. This partly reflects the discomfort that the Latin-American and other non-European bishops felt at a synod discussion that appeared to be framed in largely European terms – and that was criticised as inadequate for many other reasons. The synod is the pretext, rather than the reason, for *Evangelii Gaudium*.

In its depth and breadth it is in fact far more like an encyclical. It can be seen as an expansion of, and updating of, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* – also an apostolic exhortation, but considerably shorter — which profoundly marked Jorge Bergoglio, then Provincial of the Jesuits, when it came out in 1975. As well as *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the document makes frequent reference to the *Aparecida* document of the Latin-American bishops (CELAM) in 2007, which has become the programme of this pontificate, as well as to a previous CELAM meeting at Puebla in 1979. *Evangelii Gaudium*, in fact, is rich in Latin-American theological insights, especially in passages relating to missionary discipleship, the option for the poor and popular piety.

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

Francis acknowledges that he has “sought advice from a number of people” (prominent among his collaborators is his theological adviser, Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernández, Rector of the Catholic University in Buenos Aires, who was at his side in the drafting of *Aporecida*). But in many passages it is obviously and distinctively the work of Francis himself, distilling themes and phrases familiar from his days as archbishop and expanding on many ideas he has already expressed in his widely-reported interviews as pope. Perhaps most remarkably, it combines a charismatic spirituality – the Pope calls for “spirit-filled evangelizers” who have had a “personal encounter with Jesus Christ” – with a prophetic social denunciation of heartless contemporary capitalism reminiscent of the first great modern social encyclical, Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* of 1891.

The critiques of the “spiritual worldliness” of his fellow Catholics, and the need for reform in the Church, are almost as sharp, and will generate many of the headlines. There is much here for political and ecclesial conservatives, both in and outside the Church, to take offence at – whether in Francis’s call for Christian countries to welcome Muslim immigrants or his lashing out at self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy — yet ‘progressives’ will bristle at the robust defence of male-only priests, traditional marriage, and the rights of the unborn, which he equates with the rights of trafficked prostitutes. Francis sends some of his strongest signals yet about the importance of reforms decentralizing church governance, even as, paradoxically, he has boosted the reputation of the papacy around the world.

What follows is a guide to and summary of some of the most striking and newsworthy elements of the document gathered here under five sections (which do not equate to the five chapters of the document):

1. How the Church needs to change for mission;
2. Francis’s critique of contemporary society, culture and economy;
3. The call to dialogue and civic renewal;
4. The Latin-American theological contribution;
5. A summons to evangelise.

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

(NB numbers in brackets refer to paragraphs).

### 1. How the Church needs to change for mission

Some of the strongest and most compelling passages in the document take up the need for the Church – beginning with the papacy – to change in order to get fit for mission, for “missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity” (15). We should not be afraid, he says (43), to re-examine “certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots”.

The theme of collegiality and synodality (see earlier CV Comment for background) appears often. The papal magisterium, he says (16), should not be expected “to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world”; the Pope should not “take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory”. It is not the task of the Pope, he says later (51), “to offer a detailed and complete analysis of contemporary reality”.

Francis says he wants to promote a “sound decentralization” of church governance. Later (32) he quotes John Paul II’s call in *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) for help in finding new ways of exercising papal primacy, a call that was welcomed by Orthodox and Anglican Christians – who have traditionally objected to what they see as papal centralism – at the time. Yet “we have made little progress in this regard”, says Francis, who goes on to note that the juridical status of local bishops’ conferences – seen at Vatican II as key to more collegial governance – remains ambiguous. Later in the document (246) he cites dialogue with the Orthodox as “an opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality”. These are clearly areas where Francis is looking to bring about change.

The Pope goes on to consider (34-39) a theme he raised in the interview with Antonio Spadaro, that “pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed”. The way news and information nowadays circulate means that the Church’s moral teaching is often taken out of context; the message, he says,

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

has to re-focus on the essentials, and a balance restored. He notes (40) the importance of allowing different currents of thought to challenge the Church's proclamation, and critiques "those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance". The "greatest danger", he says, is seeking to "hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance".

Quoting (26) the Second Vatican Council's call for "continual reformation", he says renewal concerns not just individuals but "the whole Church". And he adds (27):

I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.

Calling for each diocese in the world "to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform" (30), he notes that the parish needs (28) constant contact with the lives of ordinary people if it is not to become "a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few"; and it must encourage and train its people to be evangelisers. He praises church movements and communities for bringing a "new evangelising fervour and a new capacity for dialogue" but calls for them to be integrated better with the parish. And he calls (47) for a Church of open doors, both literally and with regard to the Sacraments (in Buenos Aires he was appalled by priests who refused baptism to children born out of wedlock): his is a vision of an open, inclusive, welcoming community – a Church of the messy many rather than the pure few:

The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that is someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself the "door": baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.

Francis then calls (49) for the Church to go out firstly to the poor and sick, those who are despised and overlooked; and says that “if something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ”. And he expresses the hope that Catholics will be “moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: ‘Give them something to eat’ (Mk 6:37)”.

Among the temptations faced by pastoral workers (79-80), he critiques a “practical relativism” which “consists in acting as if God did not exist, as if the poor did not exist”, as well as an “attachment to financial security or to a desire for human power or glory at all cost”. He notes (81) how many lay people and priests “are obsessed with protecting their free time”, resisting the task of evangelization; or suffer from “pastoral acedia”, arising from an “obsession with immediate results”. Quoting Benedict XVI, he warns against a “grey pragmatism”, warning of a “tomb psychology” which “transforms Christians into mummies in a museum”.

Some of Francis's harshest words here (85) are directed against “querulous and disillusioned pessimists” afflicted by “the evil spirit of defeatism”, which is “the fruit of an anxious and self-centred lack of trust”. And he quotes (84) Pope John XXIII's famous words opening the Second Vatican Council criticising the “prophets of doom who are always forecasting disaster”.

Later (93-95) he critiques the “self-absorbed promethean neopalagianism” of self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy or traditional Catholicism who spend their time criticising fellow Catholics (“A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelising, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying"). He also criticises those who have "an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church's prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people".

Among "other ecclesial challenges" he lists the importance of giving proper responsibility to lay people (102) to evangelise professional and intellectual life, and the need (103) "to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church". Noting that the question of female ordination is "not a question open to discussion", he says priesthood must not be understood as a rank or power, but a form of service; and notes that "pastors and theologians" should consider the implications of this "with regard to the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church's life". Francis blames (107) the lack of vocations on "a lack of contagious apostolic fervour" and says that "wherever there is life, fervour and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise".

In a lengthy series of very practical passages on preaching (135-159), Francis calls for homilies to be brief, measured (so that Christ, not the preacher, is the centre of attention), maternal, and joyful. Preachers should speak direct to the heart (the homily, he says, is for "joining loving hearts, the hearts of the Lord and his people", and needs to be carefully prepared (145). He particularly recommends (154-155) the monastic tradition of prayerful reading of Scripture known as *lectio divina*, and gives advice on avoiding distractions while doing so. The preacher, he says, "has to contemplate his people" and speak to their needs and concerns: "we should never respond to questions that nobody asks". He should use images, and be simple, clear, and positive.

The Pope also has a series of passages on catechesis, and the importance of the 'primary proclamation' of God's love, or *kerygma*. He notes (168): "Rather than experts in dire predictions, dour judges bent on rooting out every threat and deviation, we should appear as joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of the goodness and beauty which shine forth in a life of fidelity to the Gospel".

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

### 2. Critique of contemporary society, culture and economy

A large part of *Evangelii Gaudium* is given over to a discernment of the signs of the times and a critique of the ills of contemporary culture and economy, reflecting Francis's view that prophetic denunciation is a key element of missionary proclamation. The fierceness and directness of his critiques are designed to unsettle, and to provoke searching self-questioning.

Among the "challenges of today's world" in Chapter Two he notes – as he often has in the past – that humanity is at a "turning-point" as a result of rapid technological change. "We are in an age of knowledge and information," he says (52), "which has led to new and often anonymous kinds of power". He deplores (53) "an economy of exclusion and inequality" in which it is news when the stock market drops a couple of points but not when an elderly homeless man dies on the street. And he condemns a system based on competition and survival of the fittest, in which "the powerful feed on the powerless" and "masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalised" in a 'disposable' (or 'throwaway') culture in which the excluded are not so much the exploited as 'the leftovers' (in Spanish, *los descartables*).

Francis lashes out at free-market "trickle-down" theories which trust the market to determine wages and conditions. Like Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, Francis deplores (54) "a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system". As result of a "globalization of indifference", we have become incapable of feeling compassion: "we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle – they fail to move us.

In language and style reminiscent of *Rerum Novarum*, he criticises the growing gap between rich and poor which he sees as the result of "ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace", creating "a new tyranny ... which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules". Behind this new idolatry Francis sees (57) "a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God", and he calls for "a vigorous change of approach on the part of political leaders" aimed at "a return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favours human beings."

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

Francis also deplores a “national security” ideology that seeks to counter violence by greater law enforcement and surveillance rather than by tackling social inequalities and exclusion which are “an evil embedded in the structures of a society”. The combination of unbridled consumerism and inequality “proves doubly damaging to the social fabric”, he notes (60). The Pope also critiques (61) the “indifference and relativism” which have flowed from the crisis of ideologies, and a reigning individualism which makes it hard for citizens to develop “a common plan which transcends individual gain and personal ambitions”. The prevailing culture prioritises (62) “the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional”, and shapes some “new religious movements” which “not without a certain shrewdness” fill “a vacuum left by secularist rationalism”. Secularisation reduces faith to the private and personal, and leads to “remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment”. And the Pope challenges contemporary secularism to see that the Church’s teaching is consistent in both the moral and social spheres:

Despite the tide of secularism which has swept our societies, in many countries – even those where Christians are a minority – the Catholic Church is considered a credible institution by public opinion, and trusted for her solidarity and concern for those in greatest need. Again and again, the Church has acted as a mediator in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defence of life, human and civil rights, and so forth. And how much good has been done by Catholic schools and universities around the world! This is a good thing. Yet we find it difficult to make people see that when we raise other questions less palatable to public opinion, we are doing so out of fidelity to precisely the same convictions about human dignity and the common good. [65]

Although he does not mention gay marriage and divorce specifically, Francis deplores (66) that “marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that be constructed in any way or modified at will”.

Francis returns to the social theme in Chapter Four, on the “social dimension of evangelisation”. The Gospel is not just about a personal relationship with God, but about His Kingdom – “it is about loving God who reigns in our world” (180).



## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

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He notes that “true Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological kingdom, always generates history”, and adds, lyrically:

We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home, and all of us are brothers and sisters. .... All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world. (183)

Francis picks out two issues for special attention: the inclusion of the poor, and peace and social dialogue.

In respect of the first, Francis states boldly (187) that “each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society.” This means (187-88) being attentive to the needs of the poor, working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty, and creating “a new mindset which thinks on terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few”. Reiterating a clear principle of Catholic social teaching, he notes that property has a social function and that the “universal destination of goods” – i.e. God’s will that all have access to the goods needed for a fulfilling life – comes before private property.

The option for the poor, he notes (193) is a constant, clear imperative of Scripture and the Fathers of the Church which created “a prophetic, counter-cultural resistance to the self-centred hedonism of paganism”. The message is “so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativise it” (194), he says, adding: “We may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards” (195). The option for the poor is “primarily a theological category” which reflects the way God came into the world – “Salvation came to us from the ‘yes’ uttered by a lowly maiden from a small town on the fringes of a great empire” (197) – which is why, says Francis, “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor”:

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelised by them. The new evangelisation is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them. (198)

This has implications, says Francis, for the Church's pastoral outreach. "Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care" (200).

After further critiques of market autonomy ("inequality is the root of social ills") in 202-205 he calls for "politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor!" It is essential, he says (210), to draw near to new forms of poverty – the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the abandoned elderly – and to be open to immigrants. "I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis," he says, adding later (253) that Christian countries should welcome newcomers from the Islamic world ("We Christians should embrace with affection and respect Muslim immigrants to our countries in the same way that we hope to be received and respected in countries of Islamic tradition").

Francis goes on to raise his voice in defence of the victims of human trafficking and to deplore the complicity of the powerful in clandestine warehouses, prostitution and the exploitation of undocumented migrants – an issue which he raised often as Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires. In a sharp critique of 'progressive' ideology, he links the defence of these groups of these vulnerable people to the Church's advocacy of the rights of the unborn.

Frequently, as a way of ridiculing the Church's effort to defend their lives, attempts are made to present her position as ideological, obscurantist and conservative. Yet this defence of unborn life is closely linked to the defence of every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

development ... Precisely because this involves the internal consistency of our message about the value of the human person, the Church cannot be expected to change her position on this question. I want to be completely honest in this regard. This is not something subject to alleged reforms or 'modernizations'. It is not 'progressive' to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life. (214)

But Francis goes on to acknowledge that "we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations" – he mentions extreme poverty and cases of rape – "where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish".

### 3. Call to dialogue and civic renewal

The section of *Evangelii Gaudium* that is most easily identified as personal to Francis is headed 'The Common Good and Peace in Society', in which he spells out principles needed to forge a new civic consensus in contemporary society. His thinking here about what he describes as a "peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter" was developed over many years in the organisation he created as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, the Pastoral Social, and the day-long conferences, or *jornadas*, which it continues to organize each year. The idea of the *jornadas* is to bring together civil, religious and political leaders in a dialogue that focuses on the common good.

The four principles in *Evangelii Gaudium* which Francis describes as guiding "the development of life in society and the building of a people where differences are harmonized within a shared pursuit" (221) underpinned the Buenos Aires *jornadas*, yet they long predate them: they are present in Fr Jorge Bergoglio's writings as a Jesuit, and he appears to have deduced them from different sources. He has stuck with the principles — 'time is greater than space', 'unity prevails over conflict', 'realities are more important than ideas', 'the whole is greater than the part' — over time because they have proved effective as criteria for discernment. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he explains them (222-237), and links them to the Gospel.

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

On the basis of these principles, he urges a “culture of encounter” in which the Church seeks an active dialogue with states, with culture and the sciences, and with other believers. Through such dialogue, says Francis, “it is time to devise a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society” (239), adding: “It is about agreeing to live together, a social and cultural pact”.

Francis goes on to discuss this dialogue, noting, in relation to science (253) that “Whenever the sciences – rigorously focused on their specific field of enquiry – arrive at a conclusion which reason cannot refute, faith does not contradict it. Neither can believers claim that a scientific opinion which is attractive but not sufficiently verified has the same weight as a dogma of the faith.” There are passages, too, on the dialogue with non-Catholic Churches, and interreligious dialogue, at which the Church in Buenos Aires, under his leadership, excelled.

### 4. The Latin-American theological contribution

*Evangelii Gaudium* is strongly influenced by key insights from Latin-American theology, especially the Argentine current of liberation theology known in Spanish as the *teología del pueblo*, or “theology of the people”. It was a theology developed in the 1960s-70s by Fr Lucio Gera, Fr Rafael Tello and Fr Juan Carlos Scannone SJ, and carried forward today by two Argentine theologians close to Francis, Archbishop Víctor Manuel Fernández and Fr Carlos Galli. Their thinking heavily influenced the 2007 *Aparecida* document, whose chief drafter was the then Archbishop of Buenos Aires.

The Theology of the People shared basic traits in common with Liberation Theology, not least the idea of liberation from cultural, economic and other forms of dependence, for example, and of course the option for the poor (which runs through *Evangelii Gaudium*, as discussed above). But there are sharp differences too. What made the Theology of the People different from 1970s Liberation Theology was its rejection of Marxist and rationalist elements, and its positive valuation of popular piety or popular religiosity. It also places great emphasis on the idea of the ‘People of God’ as cultural and historical carriers of the divine revelation – hence *el pueblo*, which in Spanish

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

carries connotations of 'nation', and which Francis has referred to in theological terms as the *santo pueblo fiel de Dios* – “the holy faithful People of God”.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis notes (67) how “the Christian substratum of certain peoples – most of all in the West – is a living reality”, adding: “The immense importance of a culture marked by faith cannot be overlooked; before the onslaught of contemporary secularism an evangelized culture, for all its limits, has many more resources than the mere sum total of all believers”. This means, he says, respecting a pre-existing authentic Christian faith in popular religious culture, rather than seeing it as alien to Catholicism. That does not mean, he adds (69) ignoring “deficiencies which need to be healed by the Gospel: machismo, alcoholism, domestic violence, low Mass attendance, fatalistic or superstitious notions” but that “popular piety itself can be the starting point for the healing and liberation from these deficiencies”.

Francis later (90) returns to this idea that “genuine forms of popular religiosity are incarnate, since they are born of the incarnation of Christian faith in popular culture”. And again (115) he notes that the concept of culture is valuable for “grasping the various expressions of the Christian life present in God’s people”, and that “cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity” (117). There is an implicit critique of certain European missionary attitudes when he notes that “it is not essential to impose a specific cultural form, no matter how beautiful or ancient it may be, together with the Gospel.”

Francis returns to the theme in 122-125: culture is “a dynamic reality which a people constantly recreates ... hence the importance of understanding evangelisation as inculturation”. Because a people “continuously evangelises itself” – he notes, quoting the Puebla document – “herein lies the importance of popular piety, a true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the People of God.” Underlying popular piety – veneration of Mary, visits to shrines, touching images, etc. – is “an active evangelising power which we must not underestimate”, says (126) Francis.

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

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### 5. A summons to evangelise

Evangelii Gaudium takes off in the final chapter, 'Spirit-filled evangelisers', in which Francis both spells out what evangelizers must be and invites us to embrace the mission. They must be people who "pray and work": "what is needed is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity". The Church, he says, "urgently needs the deep breath of prayer" (262), and a personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus.

The primary reason for evangelising is the love of Jesus which we have received the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence ... We need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others (264).

In the passages that follow, Francis invites us to be drawn closer to others: Jesus "takes us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity" (268). This means entering into the lives of others, as He did – and into their suffering:

Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people (270).

Coming closer to others brings us closer to Christ (272). "Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light

## Francis' Ode to the Joy of Evangelising: a summary and guide

---

of faith and of knowledge of God.” To grow in the spiritual life means becoming a missionary: “a committed missionary knows the joy of being a spring which spills over and refreshes others”. And later: “Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, desiring their happiness, can be a missionary.” And again: “We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in our own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than a slow suicide”.

Being a missionary, says Francis, is not a part-time activity.

My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an ‘extra’ or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others (273).

Francis goes on to write beautifully of the power of the Resurrection permeating all existence – “each day in our world, beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history” – and “all who evangelise are instruments of that power” (276). Yet the results of our efforts are often obscure: “It may be that the Lord uses our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world which we will never visit” (279). But there is no greater freedom than allowing ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, and interceding for others. “When evangelisers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open,” writes Francis. “Freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others” (282).

And the document ends with a tribute to Mary, “mother of evangelization”, who embodies the qualities and spirit of the missionary.

*Austen Ivereigh, Nov. 26<sup>th</sup> 2013 & posted on [www.cvcomment.org](http://www.cvcomment.org)*