



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
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[Multimedia]

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer 7. The Second Vatican Council. 2. Being apostles in an apostolic Church

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Let us continue the catechesis on the passion of evangelizing: not only on “evangelizing”, but on the *passion* for evangelizing and, in accordance with Vatican Council II, let us try to understand better what it means to be “apostles” today. The word “apostle” reminds us of the group of the Twelve disciples chosen by Jesus. At times we refer to some saint, or more generally the bishops, as “apostles”: they are apostles, because they go in the name of Jesus. But are we aware that being apostles concerns every Christian? Are we aware that it concerns each one of us? Indeed, we are called *to be apostles* — that is, envoys — *in a Church* that, in the Creed, we profess as *apostolic*.

So, what does it mean to be apostles? It means being *sent for a mission*. The event in which the Risen Christ sends his apostles into the world, passing on to them the power he himself received from the Father and giving them his Spirit, is exemplary and foundational. We read in the Gospel of John: “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (20:21-22).

Another fundamental aspect of being an apostle is the *vocation*, that is, the calling. It has been thus ever since the beginning, when the Lord Jesus “called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him” (*Mk* 3:13). He constituted them as a group, attributing to them the title of “apostle”, so they would be with him and to send them on mission (cf. *Mk* 3:14; *Mt* 10:1-42). Saint Paul, in his letters, presents himself as “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle”, that is, an envoy (*1 Cor* 1:1), and again, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle” (*Rm* 1:1). And he insists on the fact that he is “an apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (*Gal* 1:1); God called him from his mother’s womb to proclaim the gospel among the nations (cf. *Gal* 1:15-16).

The experience of the Twelve apostles and the testimony of Paul also challenges us today. They invite us to verify our attitudes, to verify our choices, our decisions, on the basis of these fixed points: everything depends on a gratuitous call from God; God also chooses us for services that at times seem to exceed our capacities or do not correspond with our expectations; the call received as a gratuitous gift must be answered gratuitously.

The Council says: “the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate” (Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* [AA], 2). It is a calling that is common, just as “a common dignity [is shared] as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity” (*Lumen gentium*, 32).

It is a call that concerns both those who have received the sacrament of Orders, consecrated persons, and all lay faithful, man or woman: it is a call to all. You, the treasure you have received with your Christian vocation, are obliged to give it: it is the dynamic nature of the vocation, the dynamic nature of life. It is a call that empowers them to actively and creatively perform their apostolic task, within a Church in which “there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission. Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. The laity likewise — all of you, the majority of you are laypeople — share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world” (AA, 2).

In this framework, what does the Council mean by the collaboration of the laity with the hierarchy? How does it envisage this? Is it a mere strategic adaptation to new situations that arise? Not at all, not at all: there is something more, that exceeds the contingencies of the moment and which maintains its own value for us too. The Church is like this. She is apostolic.

Within the framework of the unity of the mission, the diversity of charisms and ministries must not give rise, within the ecclesial body, to privileged categories: here there is no promotion, and when you conceive of Christian life as a promotion, that the one who is above commands all the others because he has succeeded in climbing, this is not Christianity. This is pure paganism. The

Christian vocation is not a promotion, so as to rise, no! It is something else. It is a great thing because, although “by the will of Christ some are” in an important position, perhaps doctors and “pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ”. (LG, 32). Who has more dignity in the Church: the bishop, the priest? No, we are all Christians in the service of others. Who is more important in the Church: the religious sister or the common person, the baptized, the child, the bishop...? They are all equal, we are equal and, when one of the parties thinks they are more important than the others, somewhat turning up their nose, they are making a mistake. That is not the vocation of Jesus. The vocation that Jesus gives, to everyone, but also to those who seem to be in the highest places, is service, serving others, humbling oneself. If you find a person in the Church who has a higher vocation and you see them as vain, you will say, “Poor soul”; pray for him, because he has not understood what God’s vocation is. God’s vocation is adoration of the Father, love for the community, and service. This is what being apostles is, this is the witness of apostles.

The matter of equality in dignity asks us to rethink many aspects of our relations, which are decisive for evangelization. For example, are we aware of the fact that with our words we can undermine the dignity of people, thus ruining relationships within the Church? While we try to engage in dialogue with the world, do we also know how to dialogue among ourselves as believers? Or in the parish, one person goes against another, one speaks badly of another in order to climb up further? Do we know how to listen to understand another person’s reasons, or do we impose ourselves, perhaps even with appeasing words? To listen, to be humble, to be at the service of others: this is *serving*, this is being Christian, this is being an apostle.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not be afraid to ask these questions. Let us shun vanity, the vanity of positions. These words can help us to confirm how we live our baptismal vocation, how we live our way of being apostles in an apostolic Church that is at the service of others. Thank you.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from Sweden and the United States of America. With prayerful good wishes that this Lent will be a time of grace and spiritual renewal for you and your families, I invoke upon all of you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am close to the people of Malawi who have been struck recently by a powerful cyclone. I pray for the deceased, the wounded and the displaced. May the Lord sustain the families and communities that have been most gravely affected by this calamity.

I am also thinking about the Orthodox nuns of the Lavra in Kiev. I call on the parties at war to respect religious places. Consecrated sisters, people consecrated to prayer, from any Confession, are a support to the People of God.

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds. I exhort everyone to continue their commitment in the Lenten journey, entrusting yourselves to the constant protection of Mary. To her, Consoler of the afflicted and Queen of Peace, let us also entrust the battered people of Ukraine.

I offer my blessing to all.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on missionary zeal, we now consider the apostolic dimension of evangelization. In the Creed, we profess that the Church is “apostolic”. An “apostle” is literally one who is “sent”. In the Scriptures, we read that Jesus chose the twelve Apostles, called them to himself and then sent them forth to proclaim the Gospel. After his resurrection, he appeared to the Twelve and said: “As the Father has sent me, so now I send you”, breathing upon them the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins (*Jn 20:21-22*). Within the diversity of ministries and charisms in the Body of Christ, all the baptized are called and sent forth to advance the Church’s apostolate. Those who are ordained have received the mission of teaching, governing and sanctifying in Jesus’ name and authority, yet all the members of the faithful, as sharers in the Lord’s priestly, prophetic and regal office, are called to be missionary disciples, “apostles in an apostolic Church”. May the recognition of our common dignity and equality inspire us to ever greater unity and cooperation in proclaiming, by word and example, the good news of our salvation in Christ.