



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 12 April 2023

[Multimedia]

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer. 9. *Witnesses: Saint Paul. 2*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

After having seen Saint Paul's personal zeal for the Gospel, two weeks ago, we can now reflect more deeply on evangelical zeal as he himself speaks of it and describes it in some of his letters.

By virtue of his own experience, Paul is not unaware of the danger of a misguided zeal, oriented in the wrong direction. He himself had fallen into this danger before the providential fall on the road to Damascus. Sometimes we have to deal with a misdirected zeal, doggedly persistent in the observance of purely human and obsolete norms for the Christian community. "They make much of you," writes the Apostle, "but for no good purpose" (*Gal 4:17*). We cannot ignore the solicitude with which some devote themselves to the wrong pursuits even within the Christian community itself; one can boast of a false evangelical zeal while actually pursuing vainglory or one's own convictions or a little bit of love of self.

For this reason, we ask ourselves, what are the characteristics of true evangelical zeal according to Paul? The text we heard at the beginning seems useful for this, a list of "weapons" that the Apostle indicates for spiritual battle. Among these is *readiness to spread the Gospel*, translated by some as "zeal" — this person is zealous in carrying forward these ideas, these things — and

referred to as a “shoe”. Why? How is zeal for the Gospel related to what is worn on one’s feet? This metaphor picks up on a text from the prophet Isaiah, who says this: “How beautiful upon the mountains / are the feet of him who brings good tidings, / who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, / who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (52:7).

Here too, we find reference to the feet of a herald of good news. Why? Because those who go to proclaim must move; they must walk! But we also note that in this text, Paul speaks of footwear as part of a suit of armour, following the analogy of the equipment of a soldier going into battle: in combat it was essential to have stability of footing in order to avoid the pitfalls of the terrain — because the adversary often littered the battlefield with traps — and to have the strength to run and move in the right direction. So the footwear is for running and avoiding all these things of the adversary.

Evangelical zeal is the support on which proclamation is based, and heralds are somewhat like the feet of the body of Christ that is the Church. There is no proclamation without movement, without ‘going out’, without initiative. This means there is no Christian if not on the move; no Christian if the Christian does not go out of him- or herself in order to set out on the journey and bear the proclamation. There is no proclamation without movement, without walking. One does not proclaim the Gospel by standing still, locked in an office, at one’s desk or at one’s computer, arguing like ‘keyboard warriors’ and replacing the creativity of proclamation with copy-and-paste ideas taken from here and there. The Gospel is proclaimed by moving, by walking, by going.

The term used by Paul to denote the footwear of those who bear the Gospel is a Greek word denoting readiness, preparation, alacrity. It is the opposite of being “slovenly”, which is incompatible with love. In fact, elsewhere Paul says: “Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord” (*Rom* 12:11). This attitude was the one required in the Book of Exodus to celebrate the sacrifice of the Passover deliverance: “In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord’s Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night” (12:11-12a).

A herald is ready to go, and knows that the Lord passes by in a surprising way. He or she must therefore be free from schemes and prepared for an unexpected and new action: prepared for surprises. One who proclaims the Gospel cannot be fossilised in cages of plausibility or the idea that “it has always been done this way”, but is ready to follow a wisdom that is not of this world, as Paul says when speaking of himself: “my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (*1 Cor* 2:4-5).

Brothers and sisters, it is important to have this readiness for the newness of the Gospel, this attitude that involves momentum, taking the initiative, going first. It means not letting pass by the opportunities to promulgate the proclamation of the Gospel of peace, that peace that Christ knows

how to give more and better than the world gives.

And this is why I exhort you to be evangelizers who are on the move, without fear, who go forward, in order to bring the beauty of Jesus, to bring the newness of Jesus who changes everything.

“Yes, Father, he changes the calendar, because now we count the years before Jesus...” But he also changes hearts. And are you willing to let Jesus change your heart? Or are you a lukewarm Christian, who is not on the move? Think about it: Are you an enthusiast of Jesus, are you going forward? Think about it a bit.

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, Switzerland, Canada and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless all of you!

Next Sunday, we will celebrate God’s Mercy, it will be Divine Mercy Sunday. The Lord never ceases to be merciful. Let us think about the mercy of God, that always welcomes us, accompanies us and never leaves us alone.

Lastly, as usual, I turn my thoughts to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds. I invite you to live this time of Easter with a gaze turned to the Risen Christ who sacrificed himself for us and for our salvation.

And let us persevere in our prayers for battered Ukraine. Let us pray to ease the great suffering of Ukraine.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

APPEAL

Yesterday marked the 60th anniversary of the Encyclical *Pacem in terris*, which Saint John XXIII addressed to the Church and to the world at the height of the tension between the two opposing blocs in the so-called Cold War. The Pope opened before everyone the broad horizon in which to speak of peace and to build peace: God’s plan for the world and the human family. That Encyclical was a true blessing, like a glimpse of serenity in the midst of dark clouds. Its message is very timely. Suffice it to quote this passage: “relations between States, as between individuals, must be

regulated not by armed force, but in accordance with the principles of right reason: the principles, that is, of truth, justice and vigorous and sincere co-operation.” (n. 114). I invite the faithful and men and women of good will to read *Pacem in terris*, and I pray that the Heads of Nations may be inspired by it in their plans and decisions.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we have been reflecting on the example of the Apostle Paul. From his earlier experience as a persecutor of the Church, Paul was well aware of the danger of misguided zeal, or a zeal motivated not by love of Christ but by vanity or self-assertion. Authentic zeal for the Gospel is instead, Paul teaches, completely centred on Christ and the power of his resurrection. In his Letters, Paul uses the imagery of putting on the “armour of God” and exhorts his listeners to have their “feet shod” in readiness to proclaim the Gospel of peace (cf. *Eph* 6:13). The image is eloquent, since the feet of an evangelist must be solidly planted yet constantly in movement, ever ready to confront new situations in the effort to proclaim the Good News with creativity and conviction. May each of us, in the circumstances of our daily lives, prove zealous in discerning when and how best to proclaim the risen Jesus and his promise of the fullness of life and peace.
