



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 4 December 2024

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. The Spirit and the Bride. The Holy Spirit guides the people of God towards Jesus our hope *16. Proclaiming the Gospel in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit and evangelization*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

After having reflected on the sanctifying and charismatic action of the Spirit, we will dedicate this catechesis to another aspect: the *evangelizing work of the Holy Spirit*, that is, on the role of preaching in the Church.

The First Letter of Peter defines the apostles as “those who preached the good news to you [through] the holy Spirit” (cf. 1:12). In this expression we find the two constitutive elements of Christian preaching: its *content*, which is the Gospel, and its *means*, which is the Holy Spirit. Let’s say something about one and the other.

In the New Testament, the word “Gospel” has two principal meanings. It can indicate any one of the four canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and according to this definition the Gospel means the good news proclaimed *by* Jesus during His earthly life. After the Pasch, the word “Gospel” assumes its new meaning of good news *about* Jesus, that is, the Paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord. This is what the Apostle calls “Gospel” when he writes: “I

am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (*Rom 1:16*).

The preaching of Jesus and, subsequently, that of the Apostles, also contains all the moral duties that stem from the Gospel, starting from the ten commandments up to the “new” commandment of love. But if we do not want to relapse into the error denounced by the Apostle Paul of putting the law before grace and deeds before faith, it is necessary always to start anew from the proclamation of what Christ has done for us. Therefore, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangeli*
Gaudium insists a lot on the first of these two things, namely the *kerygma* or “proclamation”, on which every moral application depends.

Indeed, “in catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or *kerygma*, which needs to be at the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal. ... The first proclamation is called ‘first’ not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another through the process of catechesis, at every level and moment. ... We must not think that in catechesis the *kerygma* gives way to a supposedly more ‘solid’ formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation” (nos. 164-165), namely, the *kerygma*.

So far, we have seen the content of Christian preaching. We must however bear in mind also the *means* by which it is proclaimed. The Gospel must be preached “through the Holy Spirit” (*1 Pt 1:12*). The Church must do precisely what Jesus says at the beginning of His public ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor” (*Lk 4:18*). *Preaching with the anointing of the Holy Spirit* means transmitting, together with the ideas and the doctrine, the life and conviction of our faith. It means doing so “not with persuasive (words of) wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power” (*1 Cor 2:4*), as Saint Paul wrote.

It is easy to say, one might object, but how can it be put into practice if it does not depend on us, but on the coming of the Holy Spirit? In reality, there is one thing that does depend on us, or rather two, and I will briefly mention them. The first is *prayer*. The Holy Spirit comes to those who pray, because the heavenly Father – it is written – “give[s] the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (*Lk 11:13*), especially if we ask Him in order to proclaim the Gospel of His Son! Woe to those who preach without praying! They become those whom the Apostle defines as “a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal” (cf. *1 Cor 13:1*).

So, the first thing that depends on us is praying, so that the Holy Spirit may come. The second is *not wanting to preach ourselves, but Jesus the Lord* (cf. *2 Cor 4:5*). This relates to preaching. At times there are long sermons, twenty minutes, thirty minutes... But, please, preachers must preach an idea, a feeling and a call to action. Beyond eight minutes the preaching starts to fade, it

is not understood. And I say this to preachers [applause] – I can see that you like to hear this! At times we see men who, when the sermon starts, go outside to smoke a cigarette and then come back in. Please, the sermon must be an idea, a feeling and a call to action. And it must never exceed ten minutes. This is very important.

The second thing, I was saying, is not to want to preach ourselves, but the Lord. There is no need to dwell on this, because anyone engaged in evangelization knows what it means in practice not to preach oneself. I will limit myself to a particular application of this requirement. Not wanting to preach oneself also implies not always giving priority to pastoral initiatives promoted by us and linked to our own name, but willingly collaborating, if requested, in community initiatives, or entrusted to us by obedience.

May the Holy Spirit help us, accompany us and teach the Church how to preach the Gospel in this way to the men and women of this time! Thank you.

Special greetings:

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those coming from the Netherlands, Australia, Indonesia, the United States of America, Japan and Singapore. I pray that each of you, and your families, may experience a blessed Advent in preparation for the coming of the newborn Saviour at Christmas. God bless you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on the Holy Spirit, we now consider the Spirit's role in the Church's mission of evangelization. The First Letter of Peter describes the Apostles as those who "preached the Gospel through the Holy Spirit" (cf. 1 Pet 1:12). The Gospel, of course, is the joyful message of the coming of God's kingdom announced by Jesus and confirmed by the Apostles' preaching of his dying and rising to new life. This "good news" is the basis for all further catechesis and teaching, including the moral demands of Christian discipleship. The preaching of the Gospel takes place "through the Holy Spirit", who enables us to speak with conviction and to reflect the message that we preach by the way that we live. Let us pray that in our own day the Spirit will raise up ever more joyful, holy and convincing witnesses to the Risen Lord and the saving truth of his Gospel.
