



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING SPONSORED BY THE
PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING NEW EVANGELIZATION**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Friday, 19 September 2014*

Video

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good afternoon,

I am pleased to take part in your work and I thank Archbishop Rino Fisichella for his introduction. I am also grateful for this setting of “life”: this is life! Thank you.

You work in the pastoral care of diverse Churches in the world, and you are meeting to reflect together on the pastoral project of the *Evangelii Gaudium*. In fact, I myself wrote that this document has a “programmatically significant and important consequences” (n. 25). And it cannot be otherwise when dealing with the principal mission of the Church, that is, evangelization! There are times, however, in which this mission becomes more urgent and our sense of responsibility needs to be rekindled.

What comes to mind, first of all, are the words of the Gospel according to Matthew, where it is said that when Jesus “saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). How many people, in the existential peripheries of our time, are “tired and exhausted” and await the Church, they are waiting for us! How can they be reached? How can the experience of faith, the love of God, the encounter with Jesus be shared with them? This is the responsibility of our communities and of our pastoral care.

The Pope does not have the task of offering “a detailed and complete analysis of contemporary reality” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 51), but to invite all the Church to scrutinize the signs of the times

that the Lord offers us unceasingly. So many signs are present in our communities, and the Lord places so many opportunities before us in order to recognize his presence in the world today! Amid negative situations, which as always, make more noise, we also see many signs which instill hope and give courage. These signs, as *Gaudium et Spes* states, must be scrutinized in the light of the Gospel (cf. nn. 4, 44): this is the “acceptable time” (cf. 2 Cor 6:2), it is the moment of firm commitment, it is the context in which we are called to labour in order to cultivate the Kingdom of God (cf. Jn 4:35-36). Unfortunately, we see so much poverty and loneliness in today’s world! So many people live in great suffering and ask the Church to be a sign of the closeness, of the goodness, of the solidarity and of the mercy of the Lord. This is a task which pertains in a special way to all those who have the responsibility of pastoral care: from the bishop in his diocese to the priest in his parish, from the deacons in service to charity to the men and women catechists in their ministry of spreading the faith.... Clearly, all those occupied in the various spheres of pastoral care are called to recognize and interpret these signs of the times in order to provide a wise and generous response. In the face of so many pastoral exigencies, before the people’s many requests, we run the risk of becoming frightened and withdrawing into ourselves in a fearful and defensive attitude. And this gives rise to the temptation of self-sufficiency and of clericalism, that codification of the faith in rules and regulations, as the scribes, the Pharisees, the doctors of the law did in the time of Jesus. To us, everything will be clear and set in order, but the faithful and those in search will still hunger and thirst for God. I have also said several times that the Church seems to me to be a field hospital: so many wounded people who ask us for closeness, who ask us for what they asked of Jesus: closeness, warmth. And with this attitude of the scribes, of the doctors of the law and of the Pharisees, we will never give a witness of closeness.

There is a second word which causes me to reflect. When Jesus tells the episode of the vineyard owner who, in need of workers, left the house at various times of the day to call labourers to come to his vineyard (cf. Mt 20:1-16). He did not go out only once. In the parable, Jesus says that he went out at least five times: at dawn, at 9:00, at midday, at 3:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon — maybe he will still come to us! —. There was much work to do in the vineyard and this landlord spent almost all his time going down the streets and to the town squares to seek workers. Think of those of the last hour: no one had called them; who knows how they must have felt, because at the end of the day they would have brought nothing home to feed their children. Thus, all those in charge of pastoral care can take this parable as a good example. To go out at various times of day to go and meet the many who are in search of the Lord. To reach the weakest and the poorest in order to give them the support of feeling useful in the Lord’s vineyard, were it even for only an hour.

Another aspect: please, let us not pursue the voice of the sirens who call us to perform pastoral care in a disjointed series of initiatives, without managing to grasp the essential commitment of evangelization. At times it seems that we are more concerned with redoubling activities than with being attentive to the people and their encounter with God. Pastoral care which does not pay attention to this becomes, little by little, sterile. Let us not forget to do as Jesus did with his

disciples: after they had gone into the villages to spread the message of the Gospel, they returned happy about their success; but Jesus took them aside, to a lonely place to stay with them for a while (cf. Mk 6:31). Pastoral care without prayer and contemplation can never reach the heart of the people. It will stop at the surface without allowing the Word of God to take root, to sprout, to grow and bear fruit (cf. Mt 13:1-23).

I know that all of you work hard, and for this I want to leave you with a last important word: patience. Patience and perseverance. The Word of God entered with “patience” at the moment of the Incarnation, and was constant until death on the Cross. Patience and perseverance. We do not have a “magic wand” for everything, but we trust in the Lord who accompanies us and who never abandons us. In the difficulties as in disappointments which are present, not infrequently, in our pastoral work, we must never fail to have faith in the Lord and in prayer which sustains us. In any case, let us not forget that help is given to us, in the first place, precisely by the many whom we have drawn close to and supported. Let us do good, but without expecting a reward. Let us sow and bear witness. Testimony is the beginning of an evangelization which touches the heart and transforms it. Words without testimony do not work, they are useless! Testimony is what brings and validates the word.

Thank you for your commitment! I bless you and, please, do not forget to pray for me, because I must speak often and bear a bit of the Christian witness! Thank you.

Let us pray to Our Lady, the Mother of Evangelization: *Hail Mary*....