



## Third Sunday of Advent December 15, 2013 A

### Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation Part 2: Some Excerpts

In last week's column, I introduced to you Pope Francis' 48,000-word Exhortation on The Joy of the Gospel. This week, I'm sharing with you more excerpts from that powerful message on the gospel of love.

In paragraph 171, Francis very beautifully speaks about the *power of listening*: "Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Only through respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of growth."

#### **Inclusion of the poor in society**

Paragraphs 186-216 deal with the Christian's call to care for the poor. Some excerpts:

*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 demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid.... With due respect for the autonomy and culture of every nation, we must never forget that the planet belongs to all mankind and is meant for all mankind; the mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity. It must be reiterated that "the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others." To speak properly of our own rights, we need to broaden our perspective and to hear the plea of other peoples and other regions than those of our own country. We need to grow in a solidarity which "would allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny," since "every person is called to self-fulfillment." (Para 196)*

*None of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice. (Para 201)*

**A call for structural change.** *The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic reason of its urgency for the good*

*order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises. Welfare projects, which meet certain urgent needs, should be considered merely temporary responses. As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills. (Para 202)*

When it comes to the poor in the work place, Francis calls for "an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality. I am far from proposing an irresponsible populism, but the economy can no longer turn to remedies that are a new poison, such as attempting to increase profits by reducing the work force and thereby adding to the ranks of the excluded."

Francis prays for politicians who truly care for the common good. *I ask God to give us more politicians capable of sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots—and not simply the appearances—of the evils in our world! Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good. I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor! It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare. Why not turn to God and ask him to inspire their plans? I am firmly convinced that openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset which would help to break down the wall of separation between the economy and the common good of society. (Para 205)*

**Condemnation of human trafficking.** *I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: "Where is your brother?" Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day*

*in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor. Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity. (Para 211)*

*Doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights. Even so, we constantly witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families. (Para 212)*

**The unborn.** *Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. ... I want to be completely honest in this regard. This is not something subject to alleged reforms of "modernizations." It is not "progressive" to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life. On the other hand, it is also true that we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations, where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish, especially when the life developing within them is the result of rape or a situation of extreme poverty. Who can remain unmoved before such painful situations? (Paras 213-214)*

#### **Promoting peace in our world (paras 217-241)**

Francis introduces his reflections on Peace with these words.

*Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their lifestyle while others have to make do as they can. Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised. (Para 218)*

**Ecumenical dialogue.** *We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means we must have a sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face. (Para 244) True openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in dialogue can enrich each side. What is not helpful is a diplomatic openness which says "yes" to everything in order to avoid problems, for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others. Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another. (Para 259)*

#### **Chapter Five: Spirit-filled evangelizers**

In the final chapter, Francis tells us how he longs for a "new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction," and how only the power of the Holy Spirit can bring this about (para 261). Hence, all of us should often pray to the Holy Spirit to light a fire in every Catholic, indeed in every Christian, for sharing the Gospel with others.

Francis stresses the importance of frequent prayer when it comes to keeping our spiritual batteries charged for the work of evangelization. *Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer, and to my great joy groups devoted to prayer and intercession, the prayerful reading of God's word and the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist are growing at every level of ecclesial life (para 262).*

*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. ... The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to 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. (Para 264)*

## Jesus our model

*Jesus himself is the model of this method of evangelization which brings us to the very heart of his people. How good it is for us to contemplate the closeness which he shows to everyone! If he speaks to someone, he looks into their eyes with deep love and concern: "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him" (Mk 10:21). We see how accessible he is, as he draws near the blind man (Mk 10:46-52) and eats and drinks with sinners (Mk 2:16) without worrying about being thought a glutton and a drunkard himself (Mt 11:19). We see his sensitivity in allowing a sinful woman to anoint his feet (Lk 7:36-50) and in receiving Nicodemus by night (Jn 3:1-15). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is nothing else than the culmination of the way he lived his entire life. Moved by his example, we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But we do so not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings us joy and gives meaning to our lives. (Para 269)*

## Being missionaries for Jesus is not an option

*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. But once we separate our work from our private lives, everything turns grey and we will always be seeking recognition or asserting our needs. We stop being a people. (Para 273)*

**Missionary power of intercessory prayer.** Francis stresses the importance of accompanying our evangelization efforts with prayer. *When evangelizers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open; freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others (para 282).*

## Mary, Star of the New Evangelization

Francis concludes his *Apostolic Exhortation* with several very beautiful reflections on Mary's role in the work of evangelization (paras 284-288).

*Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love. She is the handmaid of the Father who sings his praises. She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice. She is the missionary who draws near to us and accompanies us throughout life, opening our hearts to faith by her maternal love. As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God's love. Through her many titles, often linked to her shrines, Mary shares the history of each people which has received the Gospel and she becomes a part of their historic identity. (Para 286)*

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,  
welcomed the word of life  
in the depths of your humble faith:  
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,  
help us to say our own "yes"  
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,  
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.*

*Star of the new evangelization,  
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of our world.*

*Mother of the living Gospel,  
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,  
pray for us.  
Amen. Alleluia!*

Have a blessed week,

*Le Saran*