Lesson 58: Evangelisation

Revision from previous lesson:
In the previous several lessons, we learned about the moral life that is expected of a Catholic who is called upon to love God and neighbour. However, we are not just to live as good Christians ourselves, but also to actively and intentionally witness this faith to other people in the world. In the next few lessons, we will discover more about our obligation to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to society, and this task is called "evangelisation". This particular lesson will focus on what evangelisation actually means.

Current lesson:

1. The word "Gospel" comes from the Greek word *evangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον) or the Latin word *evangelium*, which means Good News. To evangelise means to bring the Good News about God's saving work to other people. This is, in fact, the main task entrusted by Jesus to His Holy Catholic Church.

   Matthew 28:18-20: "Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'"

2. All Christian people, by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation, have a mandate to participate in the mission of the Church by evangelising the world. We evangelise by introducing Christ to society and its individual members.

   CCC 905: "Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, 'that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life.'"

   Evangelisation implies that we have to penetrate every human situation with the Good News of Jesus, seeking to draw individuals and society closer to the Kingdom of God by the divine power of the Gospel. In essence, evangelisation proclaims salvation in the Person of Jesus Christ and makes known that personal response is necessary; both of these are works of the Holy Spirit. Evangelisation must be directly connected to Jesus Christ and His Lordship.

   Evangelii Nuntiandi, 22: "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed."

3. As society started modernising in terms of scientific and economic development, the challenge of evangelising the world became more and more complex. Because of this, Pope Saint Paul VI popularised a term in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, to describe this new challenge: "new evangelisation". Later on, Pope Saint John Paul II frequently used it as well, especially in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* which presents teachings about the Church's mission to evangelise in modern times.

4. The new evangelisation does not mean presenting a "new message" to the world. The content of the Church's message of salvation cannot be new, since it is always about communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world. Rather, the new evangelisation is about communicating the ancient message with renewed enthusiasm, new methods and new expressions. What is new about it is that it presents the message of the Gospel in a way that people today can understand and connect with because the message penetrates into their culture, language, and mindset.

5. For the reason that evangelisation is the most important task entrusted to the Church, our popes have given much emphasis to it. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation. In 2013, Pope Francis released his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel") to further emphasise the Church's very important mission to evangelise in this modern world. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Holy Father called for "the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1).

6. When we consider what is happening in the West now, namely, in Western Europe and North America where people are increasingly becoming irreligious, we can say that the culture of society becoming more and more secular there has not been matched with corresponding efforts by the members of the Church there to evangelise. This is precisely why the Church in the West is becoming increasingly weaker in her numbers, her faith, her fidelity, as well as her influence in society.

7. This utmost duty to focus on the new evangelisation, to participate in the mission of the Church in the world, is not just a privilege but also an obligation for all Christians.

   In the past, people used to think that evangelisation was the responsibility of a few "chosen people" in the Church, such as the clergy and the religious. At that time, the term "lay missionary" was not even heard of before. It was as if evangelising was a specialised job. It must therefore be clarified that this call to participate in the mission of the Church is for all the People of God.

   Redemptoris Missio, 2: "…there is a new awareness that missionary activity is a matter for all Christians, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations."

   Redemptoris Missio, 3: "God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes* ["to the nations"]. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples."

   Redemptoris Missio, 71: "The mission *ad gentes* is incumbent upon the entire People of God. Whereas the foundation of a new church requires the Eucharist and hence the priestly ministry, missionary activity, which is carried out in a wide variety of ways, is the task of all the Christian faithful."

   This mandate from the Holy Catholic Church means that every member needs to hear it, understand it, embrace it, and live it! It would seem that the call to evangelisation is not

heard frequently enough in the Church. And even where it is heard, the meaning of evangelisation is not defined clearly enough so that people can understand what is expected of them.

8. Many Catholics (both clergy and laity) have made the mistake of defining the work of the Church either in hierarchical, liturgical, or pastoral terms, but seldom in evangelical terms. And yet, evangelisation is supposed to be an activity that is intrinsic to the identity of the Church; to be the Church is to evangelise, and for every member within it to participate in this mandate as a way of life.

   Evangelii Nuntiandi, 14: "'We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.' It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize..."

9. Pope Saint John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, instructs us that every person in the Church, based on his particular vocation, has a significant role in participating in the call to evangelise. Based on these various vocations, there are differences in their respective ways of participation in the Church's mission:

   A) **Bishop**s, who are headed by the Successor of Peter (the Pope), are primarily responsible for the work of evangelisation which is to be directed at those who are already converted but also to non-Christians (*Redemptoris Missio*, 63).
   B) **Priests**, as "co-workers of the bishops", are required to be "open to the needs of the Church and the world", and even for the "non-Christian groups in their own area" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 67).
   C) **(Permanent) Deacons** were called by Pope Saint John Paul II as "active apostles of the new evangelisation" (at the Jubilee with Permanent Deacons in Rome, 18-20 February 2000). This is because on the one hand, they are engaged in works of charity, preaching and teaching, as well as prayer and the liturgy of the Church, and on the other hand, they are engaged with the world through their secular work.
   D) **Religious** "have an obligation to play a special part in missionary activity, in a manner appropriate to their Institute" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 69). If they are living contemplative lives, their presence must "bear glorious witness among non-Christians to the majesty and love of God". If they are living active lives, they should "broaden their action in order to extend God's kingdom…in a total gift of self to God and in complete readiness to serve humanity and society after the example of Christ".
   E) **Laity**, "because of their secular character… are called 'to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering these in accordance with the will of God'" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 71). "The sphere in which lay people are present and active as missionaries is very extensive. 'Their own field...is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics...' on the local, national and international levels. Within the Church, there are various types of services, functions, ministries and ways of promoting the Christian life. I call to mind, as a new development occurring in many churches in recent times, the rapid growth of 'ecclesial movements' filled with missionary dynamism" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 72).

10. Evangelisation involves proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

    Redemptoris Missio, 44: "The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the 'Good News' about their being loved and saved by God. 'Evangelization will always contain – as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy.'"

    Proclaiming Jesus Christ means that evangelisation involves more than just teaching doctrine to people. It requires facilitating for people personal and profound encounters with the Person of Jesus. This is a very important reminder for us. As an ancient Church, there is frequently a temptation to focus on the intelligence and depth of our intellectual teachings on apostolic succession, the Church Fathers, liturgy, and other aspects of our faith. However, if these aspects of our faith are not communicated in ways that draw people to encounter Christ, then we have not effectively evangelised.

11. Evangelisation requires for us to be mindful of what is going on in the Church as well as in the world. All around the world, there are three different kinds of situations in which evangelisation is to be undertaken (*Redemptoris Missio*, 33, 34):

    A) Places where the **Gospel is not known**. In such places, we are "to preach the Gospel and to establish new churches among peoples or communities where they do not yet exist";
    B) Places where the **Church is already present** and there are healthy and mature Christians living robust Catholic lives, and where the Church provides pastoral care;
    C) Places where "entire groups of the baptized have **lost a living sense of the faith**, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel", and where "re-evangelisation" is needed.

12. Evangelisation requires for the Church to insert herself into the culture of the people in particular places. This lengthy process of the Church's insertion into peoples' cultures is called "inculturation" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 52).

    The Church needs to insert herself into peoples' cultures so that she is not rejected by people as an "alien" entity by people who are not familiar with the Gospel. She "makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures" so that the Gospel can be accepted by those within that culture, who eventually are introduced into the community of the Church (*Redemptoris Missio*, 52). To put it across clearly, the Church retains the message of the Gospel but seeks to adapt and communicate it in a way that people can understand and connect with. In this way, a living exchange takes place between the Church and the people to whom she communicates the Gospel.

13. Since the early days of the Church, when she experienced a shift from Jewish culture to the culture of the Greek (Gentile) world, the Church has inserted herself into many cultures and civilisations. In the 20th century, with the onset of globalisation in the modern world,

cultural encounters became increasingly complex. With unprecedented scientific development, capitalistic economies, urbanisation, and industrialisation, the Church is once again confronted with the challenge of inculturation.

The Second Vatican Council discussed this in *Gaudium et Spes* ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World"). Pope Saint John Paul II said, "The synthesis between culture and faith is not only a requirement of culture, but also of faith…Faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, nor entirely reflected upon, or faithfully experienced" (Speech to the participants of the national congress of the Movimento Ecclesiale di Impegno Culturale, 16 January 1982).

14. However, the Church must also be prudent in the practice of inculturation. The culture in which the Church is attempting to insert itself must not be allowed to transform the essence of her Gospel and Apostolic Tradition. Just because we should honour what is true and holy in any culture does not mean that we must ignore the elements of those cultures that may potentially compromise or distort the message of the Gospel. This means that there is a limit to how far inculturation should be undertaken, and that no culture should be considered absolute. When the message of the Gospel is allowed to mutate according to the dictates of culture and no longer preserves its authentic essence, this is called "syncretism" (International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation*, 1988).

    We need to also remember that no matter how comprehensible the Gospel has become to a particular culture, there is no guarantee that its authentic message will not be found repulsive by the people receiving it. After all, the Gospel was once a "scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

15. To summarise the point on inculturation, the Gospel must be expressed in a way that is natural to the culture of the people. However, in aspects of the people's culture that are incompatible with the Gospel, it is the Gospel that must transform culture rather than it being distorted by culture. This is precisely why the Church teaches that inculturation is a process that must take place as a "slow journey" and not be artificially rushed or dictated by a self-appointed "elite" within the community of faith and imposed onto others.

    Redemptoris Missio, 54: "…there is a risk of passing uncritically from a form of alienation from culture to an overestimation of culture. Since culture is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be 'healed, ennobled and perfected.'"

    Redemptoris Missio, 54: "This kind of process needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community's Christian experience…inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei* which must never be lost sight of. Inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research."

16. Evangelisation does not stop just because people have received the Gospel and the Sacraments of Initiation. The Sacraments alone, without proper faith instruction, are insufficient for the Catholic life. It was Jesus' mandate to His Apostles to not only "…make

disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", but also to "teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, even those who have received these Sacraments need to be continually immersed into the Christian life so that they develop the Catholic mind in their way of life. This means that lifelong catechetical instruction on the Catholic faith needs to be provided for all the faithful. This ministry of teaching and forming has traditionally been referred to as "catechesis".

General Directory for Catechesis, 105: "Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways."

Through catechesis, the Church is called to "put people in communion with Jesus Christ" (CCC 426). More than merely communicating religious knowledge, catechesis involves helping believers to encounter Jesus Christ and be transformed by Him continually. It turns believers into disciples. Without proper catechesis, the Church would witness only an increase in membership of numbers but not an increase in disciples. To a great extent, we have this problem existing today, an army of sacramentalised but unevangelised members of the Church.

17. There is obviously so much work to be done, and it seems like we are far from completing this task. But yet, why does there seem to be such a lack of enthusiasm among many members of the Church to fulfil this task?

    Redemptoris Missio, 36: "…one of the most serious reasons for the lack of interest in the missionary task is a widespread indifferentism, which, sad to say, is found also among Christians. It is based on incorrect theological perspectives and is characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that 'one religion is as good as another.'"

    It is important that that leaders of the Church, catechists, and parents re-examine the way we embody the mission of the Church through the various ministries and apostolates in which we serve. There has to be clearly communicated signals through our way of life, to all the People of God, and especially to the young, that we take heed of the obligation to be missionaries in this world, first of all, by being concerned for the state of human society, and then by taking proactive measures to concretely participate in transforming human society with the power of the Gospel. As it is, we are perhaps more often transformed by the world than transforming the world with the Gospel.

18. We are called to be missionaries! This means finding our life in Christ, and then making Christ known through our way of life, in word and deed. This necessitates for us to be in an intimate relationship with Christ and His Church, and docile to the Holy Spirit's influence upon our lives each day. This journey of fidelity towards Christ and the Gospel enables it to permeate our lives and transform us, so that we can also introduce it to others that they too may be encountered and transformed by it. In other words, a requisite for being a missionary is holiness. This is because without a desire to be holy, accompanied by ongoing efforts and continuous transformation of our lives, we will not be able to be credible witnesses of the Gospel. Hence, the call to be holy and the call to be missionaries are both sides of the same coin.

Redemptoris Missio, 90: "The call to mission derives, of its nature, from the call to holiness. A missionary is really such only if he commits himself to the way of holiness: 'Holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church.'…The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission…The Church's missionary spirituality is a journey toward holiness."

Redemptoris Missio, 91: "The missionary is a person of the Beatitudes…By living the Beatitudes, the missionary experiences and shows concretely that the kingdom of God has already come, and that he has accepted it. The characteristic of every authentic missionary life is the inner joy that comes from faith. In a world tormented and oppressed by so many problems, a world tempted to pessimism, the one who proclaims the 'Good News' must be a person who has found true hope in Christ."

19. The mission of the Church should not culminate in the emergence of lethargic Catholics. From the missionary efforts of the Church should spring forth disciples who are enthusiastic about bringing the Gospel to the ends of the earth in various creative ways. We are each endowed with special abilities that can be used to participate in the mission *ad gentes*, and we are expected to do so with utmost diligence and enthusiasm.

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