

# **Message to the People of God From the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops**

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Brothers and sisters,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7). Before returning to our particular Churches, we, Bishops coming from the whole world gathered by the invitation of the Bishop of Rome Pope Benedict XVI to reflect on “the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith”, wish to address you all in order to sustain and direct the preaching and teaching of the Gospel in the diverse contexts in which the Church finds herself today to give witness.

## **1. Like the Samaritan woman at the well**

Let us draw light from a Gospel passage: Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (cf. John 4:5-42). There is no man or woman who, in one's life, would not find oneself like the woman of Samaria beside a well with an empty bucket, with the hope of finding the fulfillment of the heart's most profound desire, that which alone could give full meaning to life. Today, many wells offer themselves to quench humanity's thirst, but we must discern in order to avoid polluted waters. We must orient the search properly, so as not to fall prey to disappointment, which can be damaging.

Like Jesus at the well of Sychar, the Church also feels obliged to sit beside today's men and women. She wants to render the Lord present in their lives so that they can encounter him because his Spirit alone is the water that gives true and eternal life. Only Jesus can read the depths of our heart and reveal the truth about ourselves: “He told me everything I have done”, the woman confesses to her fellow citizens. This word of proclamation is united to the question that opens up to faith: “Could he possibly be the Messiah?” It shows that whoever receives new life from encountering Jesus cannot but proclaim truth and hope to others. The sinner who was converted becomes a messenger of salvation and leads the whole city to Jesus. The people pass from welcoming her testimony to personally experiencing the encounter: “We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world”.

## **2. A new evangelization**

Leading the men and women of our time to Jesus, to the encounter with him is a necessity that touches all the regions of the world, those of the old and those of the recent evangelization. Everywhere indeed we feel the need to revive a faith that risks eclipse in cultural contexts that hinders its taking root in persons and its presence in society, the clarity of its content and the coherence of its fruits.

It is not a matter of starting again, but of entering into the long path of proclaiming the Gospel with the apostolic courage of Paul who would go so far as to say “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16). Throughout history, from the first centuries of the Christian era to the present, the Gospel has edified communities of believers in all parts of the world. Whether small or great, these are the fruit of the dedication of generations of witnesses to Jesus – missionaries and martyrs – whom we remember with gratitude.

The changed social, cultural, economic, civil and religious scenarios call us to something new: to live our communitarian experience of faith in a renewed way and to proclaim it through an evangelization that is “new in its ardor, in its methods, in its expressions” (John Paul II, Discourse to the XIX Assembly of CELAM, Port-au-Prince, 9 March 1983, n. 3) as John Paul II said. Benedict XVI recalled that it is an evangelization that is directed “principally at those who, though baptized, have drifted away from the Church and live without reference to the Christian life... to help these people encounter the Lord, who alone fills our existence with deep meaning and peace; and to favor the rediscovery of the faith, that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family and social life” (Benedict XVI, Homily for the Eucharistic celebration for the solemn inauguration of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, 7 October 2012).

### **3. The personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the Church**

Before saying anything about the forms that this new evangelization must assume, we feel the need to tell you with profound conviction that the faith determines everything in the relationship that we build with the person of Jesus who takes the initiative to encounter us. The work of the new evangelization consists in presenting once more the beauty and perennial newness of the encounter with Christ to the often distracted and confused heart and mind of the men and women of our time, above all to ourselves. We invite you all to contemplate the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, to enter the mystery of his life given for us on the cross, reconfirmed in his resurrection from the dead as the Father's gift and imparted to us through the Spirit. In the person of Jesus, the mystery of God the Father's love for the entire human family is revealed. He did not want us to remain in a false autonomy. Rather he reconciled us to himself in a renewed pact of love.

The Church is the space offered by Christ in history where we can encounter him, because he entrusted to her his Word, the Baptism that makes us God's children, his Body and his Blood, the grace of forgiveness of sins above all in the sacrament of Reconciliation, the experience of communion that reflects the very mystery of the Holy Trinity and the strength of the Spirit that generates charity towards all.

We must form welcoming communities in which all outcasts find a home, concrete experiences of communion which attract the disenchanted glance of contemporary humanity with the ardent force of love – “See how they love one another!” (Tertullian, Apology, 39, 7). The beauty of faith must particularly shine in the actions of the sacred Liturgy, above all in the Sunday Eucharist. It is precisely in liturgical celebrations that the Church reveals herself as God's work and makes the meaning of the Gospel visible in word and gesture.

It is up to us today to render experiences of the Church concretely accessible, to multiply the wells where thirsting men and women are invited to encounter Jesus, to offer oases in the deserts of life. Christian communities and, in them, every disciple of the Lord are responsible for this: an irreplaceable testimony has been entrusted to each one, so that the Gospel can enter the lives of all. This requires of us holiness of life.

### **4. The occasions of encountering Jesus and listening to the Scriptures**

Someone will ask how to do all this. We need not invent new strategies as if the Gospel were a product to be placed in the market of religions. We need to rediscover the ways in which Jesus approached persons and called them, in order to put these approaches into practice in today's circumstances.

We recall, for example, how Jesus engaged Peter, Andrew, James and John in the context of their work, how Zaccheus was able to pass from simple curiosity to the warmth of sharing a meal with the Master, how the Roman centurion asked him to heal a person dear to him, how the man born blind invoked him as liberator from his own marginalization, how Martha and Mary saw the hospitality of their house and of their heart rewarded by his presence. By going through the pages of the Gospels as well as the apostles' missionary experiences in the early Church, we can discover the various ways and circumstances in which persons' lives were opened to Christ's presence.

The frequent reading of the Sacred Scriptures – illuminated by the Tradition of the Church who hands them over to us and is their authentic interpreter – is not only necessary for knowing the very content of the Gospel, which is the person of Jesus in the context of salvation history. Reading the Scriptures also helps us to discover opportunities to encounter Jesus, truly evangelical approaches rooted in the fundamental dimensions of human life: the family, work, friendship, various forms of poverty and the trials of life, etc.

## **5. Evangelizing ourselves and opening ourselves to conversion**

We, however, should never think that the new evangelization does not concern us personally. In these days voices among the Bishops were raised to recall that the Church must first of all heed the Word before she can evangelize the world. The invitation to evangelize becomes a call to conversion.

We firmly believe that we must convert ourselves first to the power of Christ who alone can make all things new, above all our poor existence. With humility we must recognize that the poverty and weaknesses of Jesus' disciples, especially of his ministers, weigh on the credibility of the mission. We are certainly aware – we Bishops first of all – that we could never really be equal to the Lord's calling and mandate to proclaim his Gospel to the nations. We know that we must humbly recognize our vulnerability to the wounds of history and we do not hesitate to recognize our personal sins. We are, however, also convinced that the Lord's Spirit is capable of renewing his Church and rendering her garment resplendent if we let him mold us. This is demonstrated by the lives of the Saints, the remembrance and narration of which is a privileged means of the new evangelization.

If this renewal were up to us, there would be serious reasons to doubt. But conversion in the Church, just like evangelization, does not come about primarily through us poor mortals, but rather through the Spirit of the Lord. Here we find our strength and our certainty that evil will never have the last word whether in the Church or in history: “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (John 14:27), Jesus said to his disciples.

The work of the new evangelization rests on this serene certainty. We are confident in the inspiration and strength of the Spirit, who will teach us what we are to say and what we are to do even in the most difficult moments. It is our duty, therefore, to conquer fear through faith, discouragement through hope, indifference through love.

## **6. Seizing new opportunities for evangelization in the world today**

This serene courage also affects the way we look at the world today. We are not intimidated by the circumstances of the times in which we live. Our world is full of contradictions and challenges, but it remains God's creation. The world is wounded by evil, but God loves it still. It is his field in which the sowing of the Word can be renewed so that it would bear fruit once more.

There is no room for pessimism in the minds and hearts of those who know that their Lord has conquered death and that his Spirit works with might in history. We approach this world with humility, but also with determination. This comes from the certainty that the truth triumphs in the end. We choose to see in the world the Risen Christ's invitation to witness to his Name. Our Church is alive and faces the challenges that history brings with the courage of faith and the testimony of her many daughters and sons.

We know that we must face in this world a battle against the "principalities" and "powers", "the evil spirits" (Ephesians 6:12). We do not ignore the problems that such challenges bring, but they do not frighten us. This is true above all for the phenomena of globalization which must be for us opportunities to expand the presence of the Gospel. Despite the intense sufferings for which we welcome migrants as brothers and sisters, migrations have been and continue to be occasions to spread the faith and build communion in its various forms. Secularization – as well as the crisis brought about the dominance of politics and of the State – requires the Church to rethink its presence in society without however renouncing it. The many and ever new forms of poverty open new opportunities for charitable service: the proclamation of the Gospel binds the Church to be with the poor and to take on their sufferings like Jesus. Even in the most bitter forms of atheism and agnosticism, we can recognize – although in contradictory forms – not a void but a longing, an expectation that awaits an adequate response.

In the face of the questions that prevailing cultures pose to faith and to the Church, we renew our trust in the Lord, certain that even in these contexts the Gospel is the bearer of light and capable of healing every human weakness. It is not we who are to conduct the work of evangelization, but God, as the Pope reminded us: "The first word, the true initiative, the true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves in to the divine initiative, only by begging this divine initiative, will we too be able to become – with him and in him – evangelizers" (Benedict XVI, Meditation during the first general Congregation of the XIII General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, 8 October 2012).

## **7. Evangelization, the family and consecrated life**

Ever since the first evangelization, the transmission of the faith from one generation to the next found a natural home in the family where women play a very special role without diminishing the figure and responsibility of the father. In the context of the care that every family provides for the growth of its little ones, infants and children are introduced to the signs of faith, the communication of first truths, education in prayer, and the witness of the fruits of love. Despite the diversity of their geographical, cultural and social situations, all the Bishops of the Synod reconfirmed this essential role of the family in the transmission of the faith. A new evangelization is unthinkable without acknowledging a specific responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to families and to sustain them in their task of education.

We do not ignore the fact that today the family, established in the marriage of a man and of a woman which makes them "one flesh" (Matthew 19:6) open to life, is assaulted by crises everywhere. It is surrounded by models of life that penalize it and neglected by the politics of society of which it is also the fundamental cell. It is not always respected in its rhythms and sustained in its tasks by ecclesial communities. It is precisely this, however, that impels us to say that we must particularly take care of the family and its mission in society and in the Church, developing specific paths of accompaniment before and after matrimony. We also want to express our gratitude to the many Christian couples and families who, through their witness, show the world an experience of communion and of service which is the seed of a more loving and peaceful society.

Our thoughts also went to the many families and couples living together which do not reflect that image of unity and of lifelong love that the Lord entrusted to us. There are couples who live together without the sacramental bond of matrimony. More and more families in irregular situations are established after the failure of previous marriages. These are painful situations that affect the education of sons and daughters in the faith. To all of them we want to say that God's love does not abandon anyone, that the Church loves them, too, that the Church is a house that welcomes all, that they remain members of the Church even if they cannot receive sacramental absolution and the Eucharist. May our Catholic communities welcome all who live in such situations and support those who are in the path of conversion and reconciliation.

Family life is the first place in which the Gospel encounters the ordinary life and demonstrates its capacity to transform the fundamental conditions of existence in the horizon of love. But not less important for the witness of the Church is to show how this temporal existence has a fulfillment that goes beyond human history and attains to eternal communion with God. Jesus does not introduce himself to the Samaritan woman simply as the one who gives life, but as the one who gives “eternal life” (John 4:14). God's gift, which faith renders present, is not simply the promise of better conditions in this world. It is the proclamation that our life's ultimate meaning is beyond this world, in that full communion with God that we await at the end of time.

Of this supernatural horizon of the meaning of human existence, there are particular witnesses in the Church and in the world whom the Lord has called to consecrated life. Precisely because it is totally consecrated to him in the exercise of poverty, chastity and obedience, consecrated life is the sign of a future world that relativizes everything that is good in this world. May the gratitude of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops reach these our brothers and sisters for their fidelity to the Lord's calling and for the contribution that they have given and give to the Church's mission. We exhort them to hope in situations that are difficult even for them in these times of change. We invite them to establish themselves as witnesses and promoters of new evangelization in the various fields to which the charism of each of their institutes assigns them.

## **8. The ecclesial community and the many agents of evangelization**

No one person or group in the Church has exclusive right to the work of evangelization. It is the work of ecclesial communities as such, where one has access to all the means for encountering Jesus: the Word, the sacraments, fraternal communion, charitable service, mission.

In this perspective, the role of the parish emerges above all as the presence of the Church where men and women live, “the village fountain”, as John XXIII loved to call it, from which all can drink, finding in it the freshness of the Gospel. It cannot be abandoned, even though changes can require of it either to be made up of small Christian communities or to forge bonds of collaboration within larger pastoral contexts. We exhort our parishes to join the new forms of mission required by the new evangelization to the traditional pastoral care of God's people. These must also permeate the various important expressions of popular piety.

In the parish, the ministry of the priest – father and pastor of his people – remains crucial. To all priests, the Bishops of this Synodal Assembly express thanks and fraternal closeness for their difficult task. We invite them to strengthen the bonds of the diocesan presbyterium, to deepen their spiritual life, and to an ongoing formation that enables them to face the changes.

Alongside the priests, the presence of deacons is to be sustained, as well as the pastoral action of catechists and of many other ministers and animators in the fields of proclamation, catechesis, liturgical life, charitable service. The various forms of participation and co-responsibility of the faithful must also be promoted. We cannot thank enough our lay men and women for their

dedication in our communities' manifold services. We ask all of them, too, to place their presence and their service in the Church in the perspective of the new evangelization, taking care of their own human and Christian formation, their understanding of the faith and their sensitivity to contemporary cultural phenomena.

With regard to the laity, a special word goes to the various forms of old and new associations, together with the ecclesial movements and the new communities: All are an expression of the richness of the gifts that the Spirit bestows on the Church. We also thank these forms of life and of commitment in the Church, exhorting them to be faithful to their proper charism and to earnest ecclesial communion especially in the concrete context of the particular Churches.

Witnessing to the Gospel is not the privilege of one or of a few. We recognize with joy the presence of many men and women who with their lives become a sign of the Gospel in the midst of the world. We also recognize them in many of our Christian brothers and sisters with whom unity unfortunately is not yet full, but are nevertheless marked by the Lord's Baptism and proclaim it. In these days it was a moving experience for us to listen to the voices of many authorities of Churches and ecclesial communities who gave witness to their thirst for Christ and their dedication to the proclamation of the Gospel. They, too, are convinced that the world needs a new evangelization. We are grateful to the Lord for this unity in the necessity of the mission.

## **9. That the youth may encounter Christ**

The youth are particularly dear to us, because they, who are a significant part of humanity and the Church today, are also their future. With regard to them, the Bishops are far from being pessimistic. Concerned, yes; but not pessimistic. We are concerned because the most aggressive attacks of our times happen to converge precisely on them. We are not, however, pessimistic, above all because what moves in the depths of history is Christ's love, but also because we sense in our youth deep aspirations for authenticity, truth, freedom, generosity, to which we are convinced that the adequate response is Christ.

We want to support them in their search and we encourage our communities to listen to, dialogue with and respond boldly and without reservation to the difficult condition of the youth. We want our communities to harness, not to suppress, the power of their enthusiasm; to struggle for them against the fallacies and selfish ventures of worldly powers which, to their own advantage, dissipate the energies and waste the passion of the young, taking from them every grateful memory of the past and every profound vision of the future.

The world of the young is a demanding but also particularly promising field of the New Evangelization. This is demonstrated by many experiences, from those that draw many of them like the World Youth Days, to the most hidden – but nonetheless powerful – like the different experiences of spirituality, service and mission. Young people's active role in evangelizing first and foremost their world is to be recognized.

## **10. The Gospel in dialogue with human culture and experience and with religions**

The New Evangelization is centered on Christ and on care for the human person in order to give life to a real encounter with him. However, its horizons are as wide as the world and beyond any human experience. This means that it carefully cultivates the dialogue with cultures, confident that it can find in each of them the “seeds of the Word” about which the ancient Fathers spoke. In particular, the new evangelization needs a renewed alliance between faith and reason. We are convinced that faith has the capacity to welcome the fruits of sound thinking open to transcendence and the strength to heal the limits and contradictions into which reason can fall. Faith

does not close its eyes, not even before the excruciating questions arising from evil's presence in life and in history, in order to draw the light of hope from Christ's Paschal Mystery.

The encounter between faith and reason also nourishes the Christian community's commitment in the field of education and culture. The institutions of formation and of research – schools and universities – occupy a special place in this. Wherever human intelligence is developed and educated, the Church is pleased to bring her experience and contribution to the integral formation of the person. In this context particular care is to be reserved for catholic schools and for catholic universities, in which the openness to transcendence that belongs to every authentic cultural and educational course, must be fulfilled in paths of encounter with the event of Jesus Christ and of his Church. May the gratitude of the Bishops reach all who, in sometimes difficult conditions, are involved in this.

Evangelization requires that we pay much attention to the world of social communication, especially the new media, in which many lives, questions and expectations converge. It is the place where consciences are often formed, where people spend their time and live their lives. It is a new opportunity for touching the human heart.

A particular field of the encounter between faith and reason today is the dialogue with scientific knowledge. This is not at all far from faith, since it manifests the spiritual principle that God placed in his creatures. It allows us to see the rational structures on which creation is founded. When science and technology do not presume to imprison humanity and the world in a barren materialism, they become an invaluable ally in making life more humane. Our thanks also go to those who are involved in this sensitive field of knowledge.

We also want to thank men and women involved in another expression of the human genius, art in its various forms, from the most ancient to the most recent. We recognize in works of art a particularly meaningful way of expressing spirituality inasmuch as they strive to embody humanity's attraction to beauty. We are grateful when artists through their beautiful creations bring out the beauty of God's face and that of his creatures. The way of beauty is a particularly effective path of the new evangelization.

In addition to works of art, all of human activity draws our attention as an opportunity in which we cooperate in divine creation through work. We want to remind the world of economy and of labor of some matters arising from the Gospel: to redeem work from the conditions that often make it an unbearable burden and an uncertain future threatened by youth unemployment, to place the human person at the center of economic development, to think of this development as an occasion for humanity to grow in justice and unity. Humanity transforms the world through work. Nevertheless we are called to safeguard the integrity of creation out of a sense of responsibility towards future generations.

The Gospel also illuminates the suffering brought about by disease. Christians must help the sick feel that the Church is near to persons with illness or with disabilities. Christians are to thank all who take care of them professionally and humanely.

A field in which the light of the Gospel can and must shine in order to illuminate humanity's footsteps is politics. Politics requires a commitment of selfless and sincere care for the common good by fully respecting the dignity of the human person from conception to natural end, honoring the family founded by the marriage of a man and a woman, and protecting academic freedom; by removing the causes of injustice, inequality, discrimination, violence, racism, hunger and war. Christians are asked to give a clear witness to the precept of charity in the exercise of politics.

Finally, the Church considers the followers of religions as her natural partners in dialogue. One is evangelized because one is convinced of the truth of Christ, not because one is against another. The

Gospel of Jesus is peace and joy, and his disciples are happy to recognize whatever is true and good that humanity's religious spirit has been able to glimpse in the world created by God and that it has expressed in the various religions.

The dialogue among believers of various religions intends to be a contribution to peace. It rejects every fundamentalism and denounces every violence that is brought upon believers as serious violations of human rights. The Churches of the whole world are united in prayer and in fraternity to the suffering brothers and sisters and ask those who are responsible for the destinies of peoples to safeguard everyone's right to freely choose, profess and witness to one's faith.

## **11. Remembering the Second Vatican Council and referring to the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the Year of Faith**

In the path opened by the New Evangelization, we might also feel as if we were in a desert, in the midst of dangers and lacking points of reference. The Holy Father Benedict XVI, in his homily for the Mass opening the Year of Faith, spoke of a “spiritual 'desertification'” that has advanced in the last decades. But he also encouraged us by affirming that “it is in starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us, men and women. In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living” (Homily for the Eucharistic celebration for the opening of the Year of Faith, Rome, 11 October 2012). In the desert, like the Samaritan woman, we seek water and a well from which to drink: blessed is the one who encounters Christ there!

We thank the Holy Father for the gift of the Year of Faith, a precious gateway into the path of the new evangelization. We thank him also for having linked this Year to the grateful remembrance of the opening of the Second Vatican Council fifty years ago. Its fundamental magisterium for our time shines in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which is proposed once more as a sure reference of faith twenty years after its publication. These are important anniversaries, which allow us to reaffirm our close adherence to the Council's teaching and our firm commitment to carry on its implementation.

## **12. Contemplating the mystery and being at the side of the poor**

In this perspective we wish to indicate to all the faithful two expressions of the life of faith which seem particularly important to us for witnessing to it in the New Evangelization.

The first is constituted by the gift and experience of contemplation. A testimony that the world would consider credible can arise only from an adoring gaze at the mystery of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, only from the deep silence that receives the unique saving Word like a womb. Only this prayerful silence can prevent the word of salvation from being lost in the many noises that overrun the world.

We now address a word of gratitude to all men and women who dedicate their lives to prayer and contemplation in monasteries and hermitages. Moments of contemplation must interweave with people's ordinary lives: spaces in the soul, but also physical ones, that remind us of God; interior sanctuaries and temples of stone that, like crossroads, keep us from losing ourselves in a flood of experiences; opportunities in which all could feel accepted, even those who barely know what and whom to seek.

The other symbol of authenticity of the new evangelization has the face of the poor. Placing ourselves side by side with those who are wounded by life is not only a social exercise, but above all a spiritual act because it is Christ's face that shines in the face of the poor: “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).



We must recognize the privileged place of the poor in our communities, a place that does not exclude anyone, but wants to reflect how Jesus bound himself to them. The presence of the poor in our communities is mysteriously powerful: it changes persons more than a discourse does, it teaches fidelity, it makes us understand the fragility of life, it asks for prayer: in short, it brings us to Christ.

The gesture of charity, on the other hand, must also be accompanied by commitment to justice, with an appeal that concerns all, poor and rich. Hence, the social doctrine of the Church is integral to the pathways of the new evangelization, as well as the formation of Christians to dedicate themselves to serve the human community in social and political life.

### **13. To the Churches in the various regions of the world**

The vision of the Bishops gathered in the synodal assembly embraces all the ecclesial communities spread throughout the world. Their vision seeks to be comprehensive, because the call to encounter Christ is one, while keeping diversity in mind.

The Bishops gathered in the Synod gave special consideration, full of fraternal affection and gratitude, to you Christians of the Catholic Oriental Churches, those who are heirs of the first wave of evangelization – an experience preserved with love and faithfulness – and those present in Eastern Europe. Today the Gospel comes to you again in a new evangelization through liturgical life, catechesis, daily family prayer, fasting, solidarity among families, the participation of the laity in the life of communities and in dialogue with society. In many places your Churches are amidst trials and tribulation through which they witness to their participation in the sufferings of Christ. Some of the faithful are forced to emigrate. Keeping alive their oneness with their community of origin, they can contribute to the pastoral care and to the work of evangelization in the countries that have welcomed them. May the Lord continue to bless your faithfulness. May your future be marked by the serene confession and practice of your faith in peace and religious liberty.

We look to you Christians, men and women, who live in the countries of Africa and we express our gratitude for your witness to the Gospel often in difficult circumstances. We exhort you to revive the evangelization that you received in recent times, to build the Church as the family of God, to strengthen the identity of the family, to sustain the commitment of priests and catechists especially in the small Christian communities. We affirm the need to develop the encounter between the Gospel and old and new cultures. Great expectation and a strong appeal is addressed to the world of politics and to the governments of the various countries of Africa, so that, in collaboration with all people of good will, basic human rights may be promoted and the continent freed from violence and conflicts which still afflict it.

The Bishops of the synodal Assembly invite you, Christians of North America, to respond with joy to the call to a new evangelization, while they look with gratitude at how your young Christian communities have borne generous fruits of faith, charity and mission. You need to recognize the many expressions of the present culture in the countries of your world which are today far from the Gospel. Conversion is necessary, from which is born a commitment that does not bring you out of your cultures, but leaves you in their midst to offer to all the light of faith and the power of life. As you welcome in your generous lands new populations of immigrants and refugees, may you be willing to open the doors of your homes to the faith. Faithful to the commitments taken at the synodal Assembly for America, be united with Latin America in the ongoing evangelization of the continent you share.

The synodal assembly addressed the same sentiment of gratitude to the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean. Particularly striking throughout the ages is the development in your countries of

forms of popular piety still fixed in the hearts of many people, of charitable service and of dialogue with cultures. Now, in the face of many present challenges, first of all poverty and violence, the Church in Latin America and in the Caribbean is encouraged to live in an ongoing state of mission, announcing the Gospel with hope and joy, forming communities of true missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, showing in the commitment of its sons and daughters how the Gospel could be the source of a new, just and fraternal society. Religious pluralism also tests your Churches and requires a renewed proclamation of the Gospel. To you, Christians of Asia, we also offer a word of encouragement and of exhortation. As a small minority in the continent which houses almost two thirds of the world's population, your presence is a fruitful seed entrusted to the power of the Spirit, which grows in dialogue with the diverse cultures, with the ancient religions and with the countless poor. Although often outcast by society and in many places also persecuted, the Church of Asia, with its firm faith, is a valuable presence of Christ's Gospel which proclaims justice, life and harmony. Christians of Asia, feel the fraternal closeness of Christians of other countries of the world which cannot forget that in your continent – in the Holy Land – Jesus was born, lived, died and rose from the dead.

The Bishops address a word of gratitude and hope to the Churches of the European continent, in part marked today by a strong – sometimes even aggressive – secularization, and in part still wounded by many decades of regimes with ideologies hostile to God and to humanity. We look with gratitude towards the past, but also to the present, in which the Gospel has created in Europe particular expressions and experiences of faith – often overflowing with holiness – that have been decisive for the evangelization of the whole world: rich theological thought, various charismatic expressions, various forms of charitable service for the poor, profound contemplative experiences, the creation of a humanistic culture which has contributed to defining the dignity of the person and shaping the common good. May the present difficulties not pull you down, dear Christians of Europe: may you consider them instead as a challenge to be overcome and an occasion for a more joyful and vivid proclamation of Christ and of his Gospel of life.

Finally, the bishops of the synodal assembly greet the people of Oceania who live under the protection of the Southern Cross, they thank them for their witness to the Gospel of Jesus. Our prayer for you is that you might feel a profound thirst for new life, like the Samaritan Woman at the well, and that you might be able to hear the word of Jesus which says: “If you knew the gift of God” (John 4:10). May you more strongly feel the commitment to preach the Gospel and to make Jesus known in the world of today. We exhort you to encounter him in your daily life, to listen to him and to discover, through prayer and meditation, the grace to be able to say: “We know that this is truly the Savior of the World” (John 4:42).

#### **14. The star of Mary illumines the desert**

Arriving at the end of this experience of communion among Bishops of the entire world and of collaboration with the ministry of the Successor of Peter, we hear echoing in us the actual command of Jesus to his apostles: “Go and make disciples of all nations [...] and behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19,20). The mission of the Church is not addressed to one geographic area only, but goes to the very hidden depths of the hearts of our contemporaries to draw them back to an encounter with Jesus, the Living One who makes himself present in our communities.

This presence fills our hearts with joy. Grateful for the gifts received from him in these days, we raise to him the hymn of praise: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord [...] The Mighty One has done great things for me” (Luke 1:46,49). We make Mary's words our own: the Lord has indeed done great things for his Church throughout the ages in various parts of the world and we

magnify him, certain that he will not fail to look on our poverty in order to show the strength of his arm in our days and to sustain us in the path of the new evangelization.

The figure of Mary guides us on our way. Our journey, as Pope Benedict XVI told us, can seem like a path across the desert; we know that we must take it, bringing with us what is essential: the gift of the Spirit, the company of Jesus, the truth of his word, the eucharistic bread which nourishes us, the fellowship of ecclesial communion, the impetus of charity. It is the water of the well that makes the desert bloom. As stars shine more brightly at night in the desert, so the light of Mary, the Star of the new evangelization, brightly shines in heaven on our way. To her we confidently entrust ourselves.

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