



THE DESERT CHRONICLE

Monastery of the Ascension

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POPE FRANCIS: THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL



INTRODUCTION

"The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness" (par. 1). Pope Francis' purpose is "to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey to come" (1). By contrast, "the greatest danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. That is no way to lead a dignified and fulfilled life" (2). Pope Francis summons all the baptized to "a definite style of evangelization *which I ask you to adopt in every activity which you undertake*" (18). He develops seven themes that spell out how this evangelization within and beyond the community of the baptized should take place. What follows summarizes these themes and formulates a question raised by each of them for all of us.

Editor's NOTE:

This issue of the Desert Chronicle is devoted to a single topic: Pope Francis' exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel." ("Evangelii gaudium," November 24, 2013). It is a roadmap for the Catholic Church today and tomorrow, inspired by what Pope Francis' calls Jesus' gospel of joy, the Church's preferential option for the poor, and the missionary imperative shared by every Christian. This issue will lay out Pope Francis' vision and invite readers and others to respond. Next issue we will print some of those responses. I hope that readers who are not Catholic will find something of interest in the Pope's vision.

While much of America has had plenty of snow, in much of southern Idaho this winter the snow pack has been around 50% of normal. In February we have had considerable rain and snow, so the crisis seems alleviated. The photographs in this issue (by oblates Pete Espil and Marypat Fields) are from the area around Fairfield, Idaho, where the drought has been particularly pronounced. They show an earth hungry for precipitation, analogous to Francis' vision of a world hungry for the good news of Christ.



1 The Reform of the Church in her Missionary Outreach

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.... I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structure can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than her self-preservation” (27).

Thinking about how this might play out, Francis says that for us to be missionary requires that we stand by people patiently, caring for the grain and not pulling up the weeds too soon, and remembering that many factors can lessen responsibility (44). The parish is not an outdated institution, but a primary place of evangelization. In Church law, for episcopal conferences a juridical status “which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates Church’s life and her missionary outreach” (32).

Pope Francis several times emphasizes, “Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed... The message has to concentrate on the essentials.... In this

basic core, what shines forth is the beauty and saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.... No truth may be denied; ... each truth is better understood when related to the harmonious totality of the Christian message; in this context all of the truths are important and illumine one another” (39).

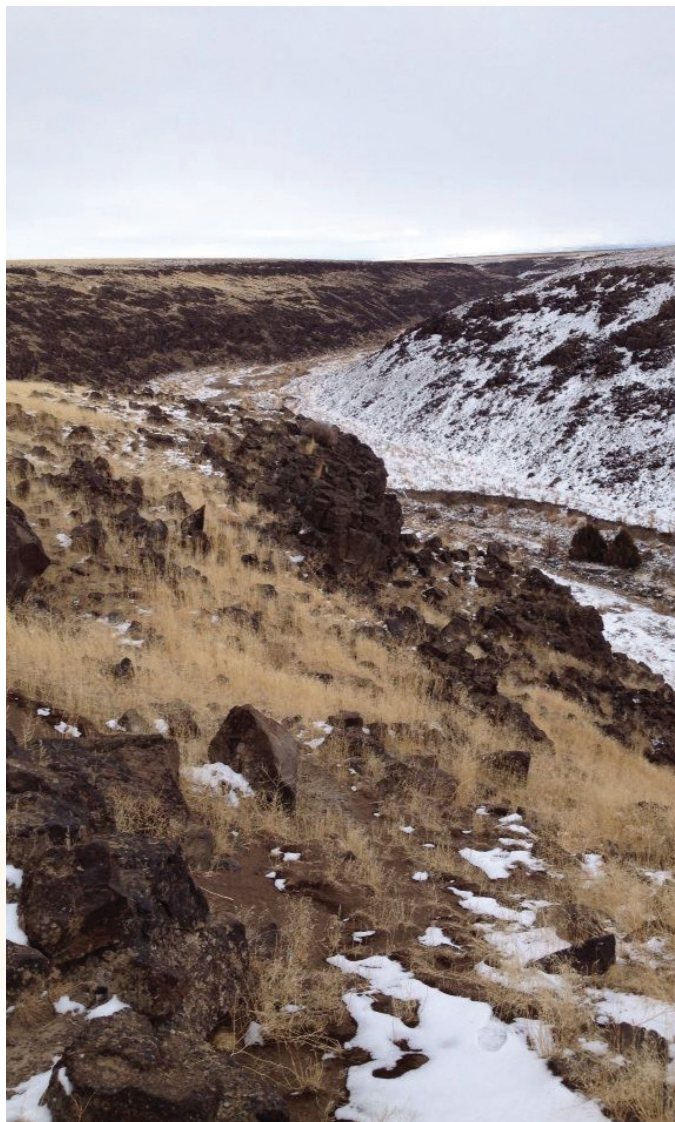
“Differing currents of thought in philosophy, theology and pastoral practice, if open to being reconciled by the Spirit in respect and love, can enable the Church to grow, since all of them help to express more clearly the immense riches of God’s word. For those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion... (40) Today’s vast and rapid ways of communication, require us to express unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness” (41). Both the Church and the church building should be open.

“To whom should she [the Church] go first? When we read the Gospel we find a clear indication: not so much our friends and wealthy neighbors, but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked, ‘those who cannot repay you’” (48).



How do I/we “discern the path that the Lord points out... to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel”?





2 Challenges Facing Pastoral Workers

Challenges from today's world.

(i) An economy of exclusion, where in spite of wonderful advances in health care, education and communication, “everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded” (53). (ii) “In the prevailing culture, priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional. What is real gives way to appearances. In many countries globalization has meant a hastened deterioration of their own cultural roots and the invasion of ways of thinking and acting proper to other cultures which are economically advanced but ethically debilitated” (62). (iii) This creates a challenge to efforts to inculturate

Christianity in cultures, even those with a Christian substrate.

(iv) Increasing urbanization requires that the Church imagine innovative spaces and possibilities for communion in city settings.

Challenges from our spiritual deficiencies.

Pastoral workers are challenged by a threefold temptation: “heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervor” (78). Pastoral workers must not (i) escape into the privacy of a few friends or (ii) to a purely spiritual Christ, who asks nothing, or (iii) flee from face-to-face encounter. (iv) The ordained are at the service of the laity, who need formation and room to speak and act not just for lay ministry but to bring Christian values to social, political, and economic sectors.

The need for community in mission

“We need to help others to realize that the only way [to build a solid Christian life] is to learn how to encounter others with the right attitude, which is to accept and esteem them as companions along the way, without interior resistance. Better yet, it means learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas. And learning to suffer in the embrace of the crucified Jesus whenever we are unjustly attacked or meet with ingratitude, never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity” (91). We find true healing in “a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbor, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others just as their heavenly Father does... Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community” (92). Incompatible with this vision of community and service is a purely subjective faith that imprisons us in our own feelings; self-absorbed reliance on ourselves; authoritarian elitism that criticizes instead of evangelizes, ostentatious preoccupation with liturgy, doctrine; and warring among ourselves



What are the spiritual deficiencies that create the greatest challenges to my/our share in the missionary outreach of the church?





3 The Entire People of God Proclaims the Good News

Every member of the people of God is an evangelizer (111). All are welcomed in the Church (112-114), which is a people of many of cultures, which it enriches and by which it is enriched. (115-116). One Spirit brings and unites many gifts (117). Person to person evangelization begins with personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares joys, hopes, and concerns. Then the believer can bring up God's message—the personal love of God who became a human being—and perhaps end with a prayer. We all need to mature; for that, let others evangelize us (121). Although popular devotions should not be central and individualism and sentimentality need to be avoided, nevertheless, there is great evangelizing power in popular piety.



Whom can I evangelize in a person-to-person way? How?

4 The Homily

The homily is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as it is an occasion for dialogue between God and his people, leading to sacramental communion. The preacher must know the heart of his people. A homily is an offering from the Father and a mediation of grace, centered on the Lord (137-138). The presentation should be close, warm, unpretentious, and joyful. Images like those Christ used are powerful. The homily should be a synthesis and not detached ideas (139-144). Preparing the homily requires prolonged time of study, prayer, reflection and pastoral creativity. Here is a way to do it: (1) Pray to Holy Spirit (145-46). (2) Focus your entire attention reverently on the text, in humble, awe-filled veneration. (3) Be sure you understand what the words mean. Concentrate on vocabulary and structure; role of characters, in order to get the central message and the effect that the author wished to produce (147). (4) Relate it to the entire Bible as handed on by the Church (which recognizes development in revelation) (148). (5) In preparation let the Word penetrate your heart (149-151). (6) Speak to the people in their language and to their situation what the Lord wants to say to them (154-156). (7) The presentation should be clear, simple, direct, organized, well adapted, and positive.

Mystagogy and catechesis are at the service of Christian growth. Catechesis should be Trinitarian: the Spirit leads us to Christ, who communicates the Father's mercy. This truth always remains the principal and center and should be presented in a joyful and lively and balanced way that appeals to freedom (160-162)

Accompaniment is an important element in the process of Christian growth (169-173). [As Dr. Paul Farmer told some graduates at Harvard "to accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end... I'll go with you and support you on your journey wherever it leads. I'll keep you company and share your fate" until you deem the task finished.]



Homily, catechesis, mystagogy, accompaniment, study of the Scriptures—which do I/we need? Which can and should I/we do for others?





5 The Inclusion of the Poor in Society

To believe in God who loves all people means to believe that each person has dignity and is enfolded in God's heart. "As you did to one of these... The measure you give... Be merciful as... Do not judge... Forgive..." (178–179). This loving response is not just isolated personal gestures or a way to ease our conscience; authentic faith always involves a deep desire to change the human family and the earth its common home (180–187).

Christ became poor; he was close to the poor. Every Christian and Christian community is called to do the same. The destination of goods of creation for the good of all is prior to private property. Private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good. Our obligation is not just to assure dignified sustenance for all, but also education, health care, and employment. The current problems of the poor are made worse by a generalized practice of wastefulness (188–197).

For the Church, the preferential option for the poor is a theological category, not a cultural, or political one. The poor know the suffering Christ and so can evangelize the rest of us (198). Living the option for the poor begins with loving attentiveness, which sees the beauty of the other (199). The poor should have preferential option in religious care (#200).

As the word indicates, economy is the art of achieving a fitting management of our common home, the whole world (206). "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 the markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found.... Inequality is the root of social ills" (202). "Business is a vocation and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all" (203). Politics is also a lofty vocation inasmuch as it seeks the common good. We need politicians who will aim at healing the deepest roots of the evils in our world, who are disturbed by the state of society and the poor, who work to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare. (205),

"I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned ... migrants ... human trafficking ... women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence ... unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us ...

creation as a whole.... Small yet strong in the love of God, like Saint Francis of Assisi, all of us as Christians are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live and all its peoples" (209–216).



How do will I/we express a preferential option for the poor?"



6

Peace and Dialogue within Society

Peace is not something to be enjoyed by a contended minority, while the poor are pacified. Nor is it the absence of war based on balance of power. Genuine peace comes from justice and integral development (218–221). Progress in building peace depends on four principles:

- *Time before place:* Initiate and patiently work for progress in the long run, rather than try to hold everything together as it is,
- *Unity prevails over conflict.* Face conflict and seek resolution on a higher plane that preserves what is valid and useful on both sides. Christ is our peace; if we have his peace, we can work for reconciled diversity in situations of conflict (226–230).
- *Realities are more important than ideas.* Don't live in a world of words and rhetoric alone. Ideas are at the service of communication, understanding, and praxis. The word needs to be made flesh (231–233).
- *The whole is greater than the part.* The appropriate model for the church and for society is not a sphere, but a polyhedron with its convergence of parts, each preserving its distinctiveness (234–237).

“It is the responsibility of the State to safeguard and promote the common good of society. Based on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, and fully committed to political dialogue and consensus building, it plays a fundamental role, one that cannot be delegated, in working for the integral development of all. This role, at present, calls for profound social humility” (#240).

In religious dialogue, “True openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity, while at the same time being open to understanding those of the other party and knowing that dialogue can enrich each side” (251). “A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precinct of churches ...” (255).



How can the Christian communities to which I/we belong, attain, retain, or regain peace?





7 Spiritual Motivation for Evangelization

The Holy Spirit gives courage for an evangelization that is full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, and boundless love. Personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus is the primary reason for evangelization. The best incentive for sharing Gospel is contemplating it with love. The Gospel corresponds to a human being's deepest needs. In union with Jesus we seek what he seeks: the glory of the Father.

Like Jesus we must go to the heart of the people and be with them in their lives and needs, in their wounds and misery. Each is baptized for mission. Every person is worthy of our giving. We

need hope. Christ will help us. Every day beauty is born anew, values are rediscovered, goodness re-emerges; but also, new difficulties constantly surface. No pessimism or excuses are allowed. None of our acts of love will be lost, though how God will use them we can't usually know.

Jesus left us his mother to be our mother, and to enable us in our own way to bring forth Christ.



*How is contemplating the Gospel with love
an incentive to share it?*





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Contact Joanne Draper: joanned23@gmail.com
208-539-5474

April 4–5, 2014: “We Remember Them: The Grief Journey.”

Retreat by Sr. Barbara Glodowski, OSB
Contact: Anita Koehn: anita_koehn@q.com; 208-324-8094

Road Scholar Programs, 2014

May 26–June 1: Floods, Fossils, and Fissures—Geology of the Snake River Plain

June 9–15: Quilting at the Monastery of the Ascension

June 30–July 6: Ancient Rome: Life, History, Literature and the Spread of Christianity



July 7–July 13: Religion and the Settling of the West

July 21–July 27: Ireland: History, Myth, Saints and Culture

August 4–10: Poetry in Paradise: Reading Dante’s “The Divine Comedy” at a Benedictine Monastery

September 1–7: Hiking Amid Nature and History of the Snake River Plain

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