

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

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IN ADELE'S WORDS – N° 5



Scene from “*Adèle, l'audace d'une missionnaire*”

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***“EVERY TIME IN HISTORY
NEEDS NEW PATHS.
CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO
FIND THIS PATH(...) TO GIVE AN
ACCOUNT OF THE HOPE
THAT IS IN US”.***

*“... but what **joy** to be working at the establishment of the reign of Jesus Christ.”* 396.5

Pope Francis was not yet born when our foundress wrote these words. They are truly a timeless communication. Adele’s joyful proclamation resonates with Pope Francis’ words of introduction in *Evangelii-Gaudium* (EG):

“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. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish 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 in years to come” EG 1

Is this not that what our foundress Adele lived? Every time in history needs new paths. Christians are called to find this path by following the guiding polaris - ‘North Star’ of Jesus Christ and his Good News. So it has been from the foundation of the Church to the present. In the seventeenth century, Europe gave birth to a great burst of optimism. Called the Age of Reason, the focus moved away from the authoritarianism of the church and put human progress at the center. Though it began with great enthusiasm and optimism, this dream gradually turned into a nightmare. Today, very few people still believe that science, technology, and reason alone will solve all our problems.

The French Revolution, with its evangelical values of *liberty, fraternity and equality*, became violent and oppressive. We know this history well through our founders. Later the two world wars brought destruction and divisions. Next came the hopeful age of the expansion of capitalism and the free market economy. The initial thought that the market would solve all our problems, brought hopefulness. Now, that bubble has also burst. It seems that there is nothing permanent. Despair is a great characteristic of our time. (Author Albert Nolan develops this in *Hope in an age of Despair*, Orbis 2009). We live in an age of despair. For centuries, we experienced hopefulness and optimism of one kind or another. Now, suddenly almost everyone has been plunged into a state of despair. This is our new context.

In our context today, as in every past time, Christians are called upon, in the words of the first letter of Saint Peter, “to give an account of the hope that is in us”. In the church today too, there is a growing feeling of despondency. However not everyone is in a state of despair. There are signs of hope. The shift from hope to hopelessness rather than being a disaster can be an opportunity for development of a genuine Christian hope. Some brief examples:

**ADELE FOUND HER
STRENGTH TO FACE
THE SIGNS OF HER
TIME THROUGH THE
HOLY SPIRIT THAT
SHE RECEIVED IN
THE SACRAMENT
OF CONFIRMATION.**

- ✓ In the face of increasing violence, the worldwide peace movement is increasing.
- ✓ The terrible suffering endured by many people from violent conflicts or natural catastrophes, also elicits huge waves of compassion.
- ✓ The reaction of so many Catholic to the sex abuse scandals has contributed to the awareness of how much the church needs to change.
- ✓ The destruction of our common home has awakened the awareness of many people who take initiatives to actively take care of the earth.

Our hope is in the Joy of the Gospel, in the coming of the Kingdom. Adele discovered this very early in life when she came back to France after the exile and faced the desolation in the countryside of her nation.

She was only 16 years old when she wrote to her friend Agatha.

“The Reign of God consists of the peace and joy which is given by the Holy Spirit.

My dear friend, if we want the Kingdom of God to be within us, we must keep our souls in peace. May a holy joy always possess us. Sadness is the sign of a troubled conscience. Let us serve the Lord in serenity”. 8.1-2

Adele found her strength to face the signs of her time through the Holy Spirit that she received in the Sacrament of Confirmation. She became aware of all the gifts she had received, and for this reason she gave importance to preparing for Pentecost. From this experience of the Spirit, she was strengthened to face the physical and spiritual destruction in her environment. The Spirit pushed her to be active in the changes of her time. And she invited her sisters to allow the Spirit to guide them in facing the difficult times.

Are we ready to face the context of our time and to be nurtured from the Word of God? Do we believe, like our Founder Adele, that the Gospel is just as valid today as it was two thousand years ago?

Let Pope Francis’ words from the beginning of his exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, encourage you.

I. A joy ever new, a joy which is shared.

2. The great 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. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.

3. I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.

**THE LORD DOES NOT
DISAPPOINT THOSE
WHO TAKE THIS RISK.
(POPE FRANCIS)**

In Adele's words:

For Adele, the proclamation of the Gospel has to be done in our daily life, guided by the Holy Spirit. This is what she lived.

“Have we really received this Spirit of fire and love? Our works must prove it to us. For you know, dear friend, that the Apostles who came out of the Cenacle were totally transformed men. They had been cowards and timid, but now they were eager and ready to confess the faith of Jesus Christ, even at the cost of their lives. Have we undergone a similar change, my dear Agathe? Has our lukewarmness been changed into fire? Our cowardice into fervor? Can we now say with St. Paul, “Who can separate me from the love of Jesus Christ? Will it be torments or death?” No, nothing can separate me from this adorable Master, to whom I have vowed eternal fidelity. Let us perform our good works with enthusiasm. The Apostles went out to preach and convert all nations. As for us, let us try by our example and our judicious advice to contribute to the salvation of souls. It is one of the objectives of our Society; it is a practice dear to Father Larribeau. How happy we should be if we could cooperate in the salvation of a soul that has been redeemed by the blood of a God!” (82.4-6)

“What a blessed commitment we made at our Baptism! Let us renew it wholeheartedly. Let us renew our pledge to love and serve the good Lord, and to march under the standard of the Cross. How good it is to love and serve such a liberal Master! What return can we make for the inestimable benefit of being called to his service? Let us give ourselves to him without reserve; let us not spare ourselves in his service; let us be his eternally!” (104.5.6)

“O my God, my heart is too small to love you, but it will see to it that you are loved by so many hearts that their love will compensate for the weakness of mine”. (125.4)

“Let us be very gentle and charitable to our neighbor, and be all to all so as to win them all to Jesus Christ. The idea and hope of winning a soul is a good stimulus, urging us to mollify our temperament and to render our character more pliable. Both our neighbor and ourselves will gain by it.” (172.2)

“So many of the feasts we celebrate are aids to revitalize our zeal, to purify it, and to enliven it, after the example of the apostles. You know, dear friend, that we must be “little apostles,” grouped into “small swarms.” It is our obligation to become worthy of this glorious vocation to which the Lord calls us in spite of our unworthiness.” (230.7-8)

“My dear friend, I wish you an abundance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the same to our dear associates. I invite you all to rendezvous in the Cenacle on the holy day of Pentecost, so that together we might receive the Holy Spirit. May he descend upon us in tongues of fire and give our tongues that fire that will inspire others with the love of God. May our tongues be used henceforth only to make him known and loved”. (326.10)

“What a satisfaction for me to know that your zeal has not flagged, and that you are working at the salvation of the souls that cost the Blood of our Savior. We must never let this type of enthusiasm die, for the purpose is so noble. We must be ready to exhaust ourselves and to sacrifice ourselves for the salvation of even a single soul”. (413.3)

“Besides the Sodality, we also gather poor women for instructions. There is an infinite possibility for doing good, for these poor souls are most ignorant. How sweet it is to reveal Jesus Christ to them! Some time ago two of these ladies, one sixty and the other forty years of age, made their first Communion. We encounter cases like these every day. As soon as your numbers warrant it, I would advise you to start this kind of work.



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ADELE DE BATZ



(Photo: E.F.C. Barcelona)

But remember that it remains distinct from the Sodality, for only exemplary persons are to be admitted into the Sodality. Nor should they be of the very poor, for it is the nature of the Sodality to carry on its own spiritual and corporal works of mercy; this would be hardly possible if the members came from the poorer class.

We would like our sodalists to become little Missionaries, if I may put it so, who could spread among their families and in their towns the seed we have sown in their hearts. That is the spirit of our Sodality groups. Let there be no misconception on that score. Many sodalists are engaged in good works: some teach the children in the country, others teach catechism to the prisoners, etc., etc.” (414. 10-11)

“Then, as a new swarm of apostles for the Lamb, having finished your retreat, go forth to the conquest of hearts, to snatch them from the devil and the world, to deliver them to Jesus. Go with the courage and determination of St. Peter; cast your nets of divine love into the waters Providence will show you; express no personal option, but go wherever the Lord calls you.” (618.5)

The word of God tells us...

Is 61,1

“The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, because Yahweh has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up broken hearts, to proclaim liberty to the captives, freedom to those languishing in prison...”

1Cor 2, 1-5

“When I came to reveal to you the mystery of God’s plan I did not count on eloquence or on a show of learning. I was determined not to know anything among you but Jesus, the Messiah, and a crucified Messiah. I myself came weak, fearful and trembling; my words and preaching were not brilliants or clever to win listeners. It was, rather, a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might be a matter, not of human wisdom, but of God’s power.”

1Cor 9,22

“To the weak I made myself weak, to win the weak. So I made myself all things to all people in order to save, by all possible means, some of them .”

Mt 28, 18-20

“Then Jesus approached them and said, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples from all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I am with you always , even to the end of this world.’”

Lc 4, 43

“I have to go to other towns to announce the good news of the Kingdom of God. That is what I was sent to do.”



SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Individually:

1. Ponder the readings given and note their common elements.
2. Pope Francis in his introduction to *Evangelii Gaudium* invites us “to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” (the Joy of the Gospel) and points “out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come”.
 - ✓ How I am experiencing this joy of the gospel in the midst of the ‘age of despair’ that our world often lives in?
 - ✓ What new path(s) am I discovering or perceiving for a new Evangelization?
3. “The Apostles went out to preach and convert all nations. As for us, let us try by our example and our judicious advice to contribute to the salvation of souls” Adele told her friend.
 - ✓ How am I an example for others? How do my words contribute to bringing joy and salvation to others? How can I grow in these dimensions?
4. In the light of these texts, ponder: How can I evangelize in my environment? (ie. What am I called to live in my workplace or ministry and in the place where I live?)

In community: Share with one another your key insights from your individual reflections.

Consider together the *Isaiah 61:1* text and a communal response. Who are the poor close to us today? What kind of liberation is needed? What can we contribute through our Gospel call?

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us conclude with the final prayer found in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

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.

Filled with Christ’s presence,
 you brought joy to John the Baptist,
 making him exult in the womb of his mother.
 Brimming over with joy,
 you sang of the great things done by God.
 Standing at the foot of the cross
 with unyielding faith, you received the joyful com-
 fort of the resurrection, and

joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit
 so that the evangelizing Church might be born.

Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,
 that we may bring to all the Gospel of life
 which triumphs over death.
 Give us a holy courage to seek new paths
 that the gift of unfading beauty
 may reach every man and woman.

Virgin of listening and contemplation,
 Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
 pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
 that she may never be closed in on herself
 or lose her passion for establishing God’s kingdom.

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.

