

Living THE JOY OF THE Gospel

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis calls the Church to a new chapter of evangelization and invites every Christian to a life of missionary discipleship. The Holy Father writes that “the word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him ‘to go forth.’”¹ As those who have encountered Jesus, we are called to share the joy of the Gospel: “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.”²

Evangelii gaudium reflects on the example of Christ who himself knelt to wash the disciples’ feet. Like Jesus, an evangelizing community becomes involved in the lives of its people; “it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.”³ Parishes make manifest the presence of the Church in a local community and provide an environment to encounter God and grow in the Christian life. The parish is “a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach.”⁴

The foundation of all our missionary efforts is the truth “that every person is worthy of our giving... because they are God’s handiwork, his creation.”⁵ God created human beings in his image and likeness, and every person reflects God’s glory: “Every human being is the object of God’s infinite

tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives.”⁶

Therefore, every Christian is called to “be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and

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proclaim that love.”⁷ Pope Francis challenges the Church to be bold and creative in reassessing its approach to evangelization: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’.”⁸

Instead, the Holy Father proposes a culture of encounter and accompaniment, “standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.”⁹ With “patient expectation and apostolic endurance”¹⁰ the art of accompaniment “teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Ex* 3:5)”¹¹ and to show special preference for the poor, despised, and overlooked.

Pope Francis reminds us that “among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among

us.”¹² The defense of unborn life upholds “the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development.”¹³ Yet, the Holy Father acknowledges that the Church has often “done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations, where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish.”¹⁴

As members of the Church that “goes forth,” we are called to take the first step toward those in need—sharing in their lives, listening to their concerns, offering them both material and spiritual support. For “true faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.”¹⁵ And while we may feel unequipped for such a mission, the Holy Father reminds us that “whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.”¹⁶

Our mission as disciples of Christ Jesus “is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people.”¹⁷ For having received the love of Christ, how can we but share that love with others? “The joy of the



Gospel is such that it cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything (cf. *Jn* 16:22).”¹⁸ The evils of our world and challenges within the Church cannot diminish our commitment to missionary discipleship: “With the eyes of faith, we can see the light which the Holy Spirit always radiates in the midst of darkness.”¹⁹

The joy of the Gospel is for all people. May each of us seek to renew and deepen our relationship with God and strive “to meet every challenge as a leaven of Gospel witness.”²⁰

In response to Pope Francis’ call to share the joy of the Gospel, especially with those on the peripheries, the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities is inviting Catholics to walk in the shoes of local pregnant and parenting mothers in need. Through the initiative *Walking with Moms in Need*, parishes and dioceses are invited to join a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support to pregnant and parenting women facing difficulties. To learn more about this effort, visit walkingwithmoms.com.



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1 Pope Francis, <i>Evangelii gaudium</i> , (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 20.	3 <i>Ibid.</i> , 24.	7 <i>Ibid.</i> , 120.	11 <i>Ibid.</i> , 169.	15 <i>Ibid.</i> , 88.	19 <i>Ibid.</i>
2 <i>Ibid.</i>	4 <i>Ibid.</i> , 28.	8 <i>Ibid.</i> , 33.	12 <i>Ibid.</i> , 213.	16 <i>Ibid.</i> , 3.	20 <i>Ibid.</i> , 75.
	5 <i>Ibid.</i> , 274.	9 <i>Ibid.</i> , 24.	13 <i>Ibid.</i>	17 <i>Ibid.</i> , 268.	
	6 <i>Ibid.</i>	10 <i>Ibid.</i>	14 <i>Ibid.</i> , 214.	18 <i>Ibid.</i> , 84.	