

**ADDRESS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
MISSOURI CATHOLIC CONFERENCE  
CATHEDRAL OF SAINT JOSEPH, JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI  
OCTOBER 7, 2017**

Your Excellencies, Fathers, Deacons, Beloved Religious, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am pleased to be with you as the Missouri Catholic Conference celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. I greet Archbishop Carlson, the Metropolitan Archbishop of St. Louis, as well as the bishops of the Province, and thank Bishop Gaydos for hosting this event here at the cathedral in Jefferson City. I also thank Mr. Michael Hoey, Executive Director of the Missouri Catholic Conference, for his gracious invitation. As the personal representative of the Holy Father to this country, I want to assure you of his heartfelt greetings, paternal affection, and spiritual closeness on this momentous occasion and to offer you the following message which I received:

*His Holiness Pope Francis asks you kindly to convey his cordial greetings and good wishes to all assembled for the celebrations marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Missouri Catholic Conference. His Holiness prays that this anniversary will be the occasion not only of gratitude for the blessings and accomplishments of the past half century, but also of a renewed effort to favor the pastoral effectiveness of the Church's mission in the State of Missouri amid the challenges and the opportunities of the present time. To the members and to all associated with the work of the Conference, the Holy Father cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.*

*Cardinal Pietro Parolin  
Secretary of State*

*A Synodal Church and the Task of Evangelization*

Pope Francis has expressed his desire for a synodal church, saying that the path of *synodality* is what “God expects of the Church of the third millennium”, adding that synodality was a “constitutive element of the Church.” It is “nothing other than the ‘journeying together’ of God’s flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord.” (POPE FRANCIS, “ADDRESS DURING THE CEREMONY COMMEMORATING THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS,” OCTOBER 17, 2015)

This synodal way of being a church involves walking together and speaking and listening to each other humbly, open to the voice of Christ and the Holy Spirit. When people hear “synod”, they may think of the Synod of Bishops or a diocesan synod, but the Pope envisions the exercise of synodality at the level of ecclesiastical provinces, regions, particular councils, and episcopal conferences, seeing in them an expression of “intermediary instances of collegiality.”

This is what the Missouri Catholic Conference has been doing for fifty years – building up the Kingdom of God by living and acting in a collegial way, journeying together as a province, as particular churches, and as the People of God. You have sought to collaborate with one another, appreciating one another’s gifts, talents, and leadership and accepting co-responsibility for

evangelization and mission. Reading the history of the Missouri Catholic Conference, one cannot help but marvel at how the Spirit of God has been at work in you in the defense of Catholic school students, marriage and family life, in protecting the unborn, disabled and vulnerable members of society, and in your genuine concern for the poor and migrants. Today is a day to give thanks to God, but it is also a time to reflect on the future of your journey together.

At the level of the universal Church, one key to understanding synodality is Pope Francis's Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which is concerned with the *missionary* dimension of the Church. There Pope Francis states:

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends up by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 49)

*Evangelii Gaudium* is a call for the Church to be a Church that goes forth to evangelize. The recent Popes have spoken of Evangelization and the New Evangelization. The need for a missionary spirit is becoming more urgent as challenges in transmitting the faith are increasing, especially in those regions in which the Faith was once strong.

At the Convocation of Catholic Leaders, held in Orlando in July, Hosffman Ospino noted that there have not only been demographic and geographical changes in the church, but also “the last half a century has seen the emergence of major cultural patterns that are seriously impacting the practice of religion in our country.” (HOSFFMAN OSPINO, “KEYNOTE AT THE CONVOCATION OF CATHOLIC LEADERS,” 1 JULY 2017, IN *ORIGINS* 47/11, JULY 20, 2017, 163-166, AT 165). Ospino identified four major factors contributing to the changing landscape in which evangelization must occur: the reconfiguration of family life in terms of roles, expectations and practices; the erosion of communal life in favor of individualism (including in religious practice and Mass attendance); the culture wars, which have led to the demonization of those with whom we disagree; and, finally, increasing secularization which has led to the rise of the “nones”, that is, those who self-identify as having no religious affiliation – which represents twenty-five percent of Americans and roughly half of baptized Catholics under age 30.

The challenges are great, but not insurmountable. Last June, as the bishops gathered in Indianapolis, I reflected on the challenges the Church in Mexico faced ten years ago, when I arrived there as Nuncio. At that time, the bishops of Latin America confronted rapid secularization and proposed a pastoral strategy to respond to the situation in what became known as the Aparecida document. The Latin American bishops recognized that they were living in an era of dramatic change:

Our cultural traditions are no longer handed on from one generation to the next with the same ease as in the past. This even affects that deepest core of each culture, constituted by religious experience, which is now likewise difficult to hand on through education and the beauty of cultural expressions. It even reaches into the family itself, which, as a place of dialogue and intergenerational solidarity, had

been one of the most important vehicles for handing on the faith. (V CONFERENCIA GENERAL DEL EPISCOPADO LATINOAMERICANO Y DEL CARIBE, DOCUMENTO CONCLUSIVO, CELAM, APARECIDA 2007, N. 37.)

The Aparecida document in attempting to address this strongly emphasized:

- the person of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life *and* the need to encounter Him;
- the need for a greater sense of discipleship as a way of living this encounter with Him in the Church;
- the call to be a missionary disciple – continuing to be a disciple while exercising the prophetic task of forming new disciples through ongoing pastoral activity, conversion, and joyful proclamation of the Gospel even at the peripheries;
- the need to be a Church that goes forth – in a permanent state of mission, building a world with more justice, reconciliation, and solidarity – a world which values and affirms the dignity of every person, and furthers a genuine culture of encounter; and

It is no secret that after the election of Pope Francis, his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* attempted to bring this approach to evangelization to the universal Church. In light *Evangelii Gaudium*, we are invited to discern how its approach might be incarnated in our cultural and religious context, right here in Missouri.

Despite the challenges, we are not without hope. Today is the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, which commemorates the victory of Don Juan at the Battle of Lepanto, during which an outnumbered and outmanned Christian fleet stopped the Ottoman assault on Europe. Pope Pius V had asked Catholics to pray the Rosary for the success of the mission. In the context of our mission of evangelization, I would like to offer reflections in light of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary.

#### *The First Joyful Mystery: The Annunciation*

The mission of evangelization demands sharing the joyful message of the Gospel, but one cannot undertake the mission, at least not in a credible way, without first committing oneself to holiness. This requires taking time to be silent before God and listening for his voice, deepening our awareness of what it means to be a disciple.

Committing oneself to holiness means accepting God's will in our life and acting upon it. This is precisely what Mary did at the Annunciation, saying, "*I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your Word.*" In doing so, she conceived the Savior of the World.

Mary is a model of discipleship and evangelization. Firstly, she recognizes that she is the disciple – the lowly handmaiden – not the Master. As a disciple, she is an attentive listener. It is difficult to listen amidst the noise of our world, not only for those who are not active in their faith, but even for practicing Catholics engaged in ministry. Amid cacophony, we need silence to hear God's voice and to reflect.

At the Annunciation, Gabriel finds Mary in silence and greets her. While many translations say, "Hail Mary, full of grace," in Greek, the Angel says, "*Rejoice, full of grace.*" Hearing these

words, Mary must have immediately thought of the words of Zephaniah (3:14-17): *Rejoice, daughter of Zion; shout for joy, Israel ... the King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.*"

What was spoken once to a whole people was now uttered to her! It is interesting that in Greek, the words joy (*chará*) and grace (*charis*) go together. In her would be fulfilled the promise of the long-expected Messiah – the one who brings joy and grace to the world!

Unlike Zechariah, she did not refuse to believe, nor did she ask whether this will happen or become upset that it would happen; rather, she inquired how it would happen. She received God's Word and tried to understand its meaning for her life. Mary is a model for us of faith. She thought about how God's plan might come about and asked: "*How shall this be?*" (Luke 1:34).

Her faith had grown over the years through an attentive listening to God, which allowed her to entrust herself to His plans for her life. She listened to the Word of God in order to abandon herself to His Word. We learn from Mary that we find true joy in obedience to God's Word – according to His plan and in His time. As disciples, at times, we want our vocation on our terms. Mary teaches us that everything must be surrendered to God. This lesson – which really involves our conversion – is best learned in silence and contemplation.

The angel understood Mary's question and told her: *Do not be afraid.*" One must imagine the burden, which she had to face in silence, knowing that she would carry God within her! Mary could say "*Let it be done to me according to Your Word*" because she knew that God would be carry her – support her, strength her. She would be willing to do whatever God told her; she freely and willingly surrendered herself, her will, to Him. She gave her consent. She said Yes to God – a Yes which changed the world.

In accepting the mission of evangelization, we commit ourselves to being humbly receptive to Christ and the Holy Spirit. Commitment to holiness means surrendering ourselves to God and His plan. After all, it is *His* Gospel which we must joyfully announce!

### *The Second Joyful Mystery: The Visitation*

Missionary discipleship moves from listening and prayer to active engagement in the world. Mary, having received the joyful message of the angel and having conceived by the Holy Spirit, could not keep her joy to herself. Similarly, we cannot keep the joy of Christ to ourselves. The mystery of the Visitation points to an aspect of missionary discipleship: building a culture of encounter.

Last year, the Pope sent a video message to the American bishops, saying:

"Our great challenge is to create a culture of encounter, which encourages individuals and groups to share the richness of our traditions and experiences, to break down walls and to build bridges. The Church in America, as elsewhere, is called to 'go out' from its comfort zone and to be a leaven of communion. Communion among ourselves, with our fellow Christians, and with all who seek a future of hope. We need to become ever more fully a community of missionary disciples, filled with love of the Lord Jesus and enthusiasm for the spread of the Gospel." (VIDEO MESSAGE TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE USCCB, 14-17 NOVEMBER 2016)

This idea of “going out” and being a missionary disciple is seen concretely in the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She went forth, with her Child in the womb, to encounter her cousin Elizabeth. What was the result of this encounter? Joy! The Mother of God and Her Son bring joy to our world and deepen our communion.

How did Mary arrive at her decision to visit Elizabeth? The Scriptures say she went “with haste.” (Luke 1:39) American society is marked by mobility and a hectic pace of life. Everything moves so quickly. While Mary went in haste, she did not *live* in haste. In silence and stillness, she had received Gabriel’s joyful greeting. Later, Luke says that she “pondered all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:51)

Mary arrived at her decision to *go forth* to visit Elizabeth, by taking her time and thinking things through. It is this type of careful reflection and dialogue, marked with prudence, that can lead the Missouri Catholic Conference to take effective pastoral action. Commenting on the Visitation, Pope Francis says:

“It is difficult in life to take decisions. We often tend to put them off, to let others decide instead. We frequently prefer to let ourselves be dragged along by events, to follow the current fashion; at times, we know what we ought to do but do not have the courage to do it, or it seems too difficult because it means swimming against the tide. In the Annunciation, in the Visitation ... Mary goes against the tide; she listens to God, she reflects and seeks to understand reality and decides to entrust herself totally to God. Although she is with child, she decides to visit her elderly relative and she decides to entrust herself to her Son with insistence so as to preserve the joy of the wedding feast.” (ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER, 31 MAY 2013)

Mary gives us good example of listening and reflecting, so that we may reach a decision to take *prophetic* action. How necessary this is for the Church today – to be prophetic – in welcoming the gift of life, in welcoming the stranger, in building a culture of encounter!

*Without vision the people perish.* (Proverbs 29:18) To have prophetic vision is to be attentive to the “signs of the times” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4); to engage reality; and, to look forward in hope to an encounter with the Lord of History. Having prophetic vision requires seeing people and their situations for what they truly are and, having developed “a heart that sees”, responding in action.

The Missouri Catholic Conference has given prophetic witness on the major issues regarding human life and the family and continues even now to be prophetic on the issue of migrants and refugees through its recent statements in the *Messenger Online*. Nevertheless, at times bureaucratic processes hinder evangelization. In other words, God calls us to be prophets, not bureaucrats!

Our Holy Father calls us to be a Church that prophetically goes forth! Mary went forth with a prophetic spirit and a sense of urgency, bearing the Savior within her. There are some things in life which simply cannot be put off – forgiving others, receiving healing, being reconciled. There are some things which are pressing – caring for the poor, the sick, and the elderly or advocating for someone facing imminent execution.

We must go forth to visit others. What was the response to the encounter with Mary and her Child? The Scriptures say that John the Baptist leapt for *joy* in the womb. Joy is the fruit of a culture of encounter built by missionary disciples.

*The Third Joyful Mystery: The Birth of the Savior*

In his first encyclical letter, Pope Benedict XVI wrote:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. (BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *DEUS CARITAS EST*, 25 DECEMBER 2005, 1)

Our faith is the fruit of an encounter which gives direction to our lives. In the Nativity, Mary presents Christ, the Savior, to the whole world. She models what missionary disciples do: propose Christ to give life its decisive direction! Interestingly, the initial appearance of the Child is not to the wealthy and powerful people of the world; rather, it is to those at the peripheries – the shepherds.

Prior to his election as Pope, Cardinal Bergoglio said:

“The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.”

What are those peripheries in Missouri – where the Prince of Peace can bring joy and light? At the Convocation of Catholic Leaders, Archbishop Gomez described them this way:

The peripheries are the parts of our cities and the rural areas that we never visit. The other side of the tracks. They are where the poor live. They are the prisons and the “tent cities” in our public spaces. The peripheries are the bitter fruits of neglect, exploitation and injustice. They are all the places our society is ashamed of and would rather forget about. ... They are places where poverty is not only material, but also spiritual.

There are “existential peripheries” — places where people are wounded and feel their life has no meaning and makes no difference. In the existential peripheries, men and women are caught in the webs of sin and addiction, in many kinds of slavery and self-deception. (ARCHBISHOP JOSÉ GOMEZ, “KEYNOTE ADDRESS,” CONVOCATION OF CATHOLIC LEADERS, 3 JULY 2017, IN *ORIGINS* 47/11, 170)

The Nativity transformed the world. The shepherds, and, later, the Magi, were filled with joy, at seeing the Child. The mission of evangelization means presenting Christ, with all the newness and hope that He brings, to those in darkness who are at the point of despair. Does our presentation of Christ – in our catechesis, preaching, and pastoral programs – bring that newness? Remember, it is the *encounter* with Christ at the peripheries – not routine programming –that opens new horizons!

How is Christ present in prisons and jails or even on death row? Your conference has been prophetic in showing compassion for victims of violence, while, at the same time, defending the life and dignity of the person, even someone found guilty of a capital crime! When women,

facing difficult choices about pregnancy, find themselves alone and despairing, you help them discover the path that leads to life – for themselves and their unborn children. That path – that way – is Jesus.

A popular Christmas song in the English-speaking world is “Joy to the World!” This sums up who Christ can be for us and for those at the peripheries. It captures what our mission is: to bring joy to the world!

*The Fourth Joyful Mystery: The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*

There are two dimensions of this mystery that I wish to examine. The first is a sad, rather than joyful one. Mary is told that her heart will be pierced by a sword. (Luke 2:35) The devotion to the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin emerges from this verse; immediately one thinks of the slaughter of the Holy Innocents and the Flight into Egypt.

Pope Francis writes that the “defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving problems.” (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 213) It is not “progressive” to try to resolve problems by eliminating human life!

One of the great sorrows of the world and of this country is the attack on the innocent. Your conference has been prophetic in this regard; nevertheless, the mission of combatting the throwaway culture and creating communities and conditions in which every life and all of creation is valued continues.

Pope Francis is also concerned for the welfare of the weak and vulnerable “at every stage of human development.” In this regard, the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church (CF. FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *AMORIS LAETITIA*, 19 MARCH 2016, 31). He understands the “reality of the family with all its complexity, with its lights and shadows” and recognizes the threats posed by cultural changes, extreme individualism, the cultural of the ephemeral, and the problem of migration – a problem faced by the Holy Family.

On this point, the Holy Father challenges the whole Church, writing:

“Forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty, and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes that often put life at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families. In accompanying families, the Church needs a specific pastoral program addressed not only to families that migrate but also to those families who remain behind.” (*AMORIS LAETITIA*, 46)

Without descending into fatalism, the Holy Father sees the challenges to family life as opportunities for growth, noting that “the life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead it can improve, settle, and mature the wine of their union.” (*AMORIS LAETITIA*, 232)

The mystery of the Presentation is not one of sorrows but one of joy. During it, Simeon declares: “*My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people – a light to reveal you to the nations; and, the glory of your people Israel.*” (Luke 2:31-32)

This is what the Church, in presenting and proposing Jesus Christ, offers to the world: salvation! The candle-lit processions that take place on the Feast of the Presentation are a useful image for a missionary Church.

In the past, the Church was described as a lighthouse amid the fog, winds, and storms of the world, providing security, direction, and refuge. But what about those who struggle to make it to the lighthouse or who simply cannot make it there, because they are too hurt or wounded?

The image of a “Church that goes forth” in procession with candles or torches is an important one. Here the members of the Church are carrying light in the darkness to find those who are lost and to bring them light in the darkness. This light is the person of Jesus Christ and the mercy he offers. In the light emanating from Christ, the Church finds and accompanies those in darkness on their journey. The Church must go forth to meet people unafraid of encountering those families facing difficulty.

In the light of faith, the Church goes forth, carrying out works of mercy. Pope Francis calls the Church to be in a permanent state of mission. The mission is about handing on a legacy of faith; it is essentially about witness. To transmit the legacy of faith, one must hand it on *personally* – touching the hearts of the one who will inherit the legacy. As Paul VI said, today “people prefer to listen to witnesses: they ‘thirst for authenticity’ and ‘call for evangelizers to speak of a God whom they themselves know.’” (PAUL VI, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI*, 150) The authenticity of our witness will be critical to evangelizing the “nones.”

#### *The Fifth Joyful Mystery: The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple*

I began by speaking of a synodal church that journeys together. *Synodia* describes a caravan such as the pilgrimage of those returning from Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph. (Luke 2:41-44) On return, they lost sight of the child and began to search for him. When eventually Mary found Jesus, she asked Him about all of this. He responded, “*Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*” (Luke 2:49)

The Second Vatican Council describes the People of God as a “pilgrim Church”, journeying toward the Father’s house:

“In the earthly liturgy, by the way of foretaste, we share in that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, and in which Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle.” (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY *SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM*, 8)

Our journey together is about gathering God’s children together in the Father’s house. The Church, in a permanent state of mission, is always evangelizing, trying to draw more people into the joy of being in the Father’s house. Paul VI said:

“Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace...” (POPE PAUL VI, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI*, 8 DECEMBER 1975, 14)

To be a channel of God’s grace means excluding no one from God’s Mercy. Certainly, this merciful embrace involves the call to repentance and conversion. It is sometimes easy to

understand this in the context of the sacrament of reconciliation, but what about in daily life? Or in the economy? Or in our parishes? Do our parishes and dioceses reflect the joyful experience of being in the Father's house?

If not, perhaps, these structures need renewal. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes:

“The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and, in this way, elicit a positive response from those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 27)

In this regard, the Missouri Catholic Conference and those gathered here might reflect more deeply upon how to inspire others to meet the Lord. How can our structures be more inclusive, particularly in welcoming the stranger?

Let me say a word about the problem of migration. In addressing the Diplomatic Corps in 2015, the Holy Father noted that migrants “at times are not searching for a better future, but simply a future, since to remain in their own country would mean certain death.” (ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, 12 JANUARY 2015)

It is imperative that we seek not only what is in our best interest but what is in their interests – creating an “open community in which there is space for all, poor and rich, those near and afar.” (ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, 12 JANUARY 2014) To keep others out, especially by building walls, thereby remaining closed in on oneself, is an affront to human dignity. The Pope rejects this attitude, saying: “Where there is a wall, there is a closed heart. We need bridges, not walls!” (ANGELUS ADDRESS, 9 NOVEMBER 2015)

These words are addressed to the Church and the world. They are a timely reminder that politics and authority are for service to the people; they are not for serving oneself or for excluding whole groups of people. For this reason, it is important for the state to be open to the role of faith in public life, not only for the benefit resulting from the dialogue between faith and reason but also because it gives rise to a politics that serves the common people and is respectful of their values and beliefs, which enrich the culture. This is why the work of the Missouri Catholic Conference is so important – to promote the common good!

This promotion of the common good involves serious consideration of the preferential option for the poor, which is not a call to mere social activism but to loving attentiveness – “the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good.” (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 199)

Jesus loves the poor. The Pope encourages us “to find Christ in the poor, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom the God wishes to share with us through them.” (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 198)

However, Pope Francis complains:

“I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the

faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship. ...”  
(*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 200)

Jesus, responding to Mary, when she found him in the Temple said that he *must* be in His Father’s house. How many others desire to be in the Father’s house and to find in the Church a true home on earth, while journeying to heaven? This is why we are in a permanent state of mission – in proclaiming the Good News.

### *Conclusion*

We have been meditating on the Joyful Mysteries so that we might better understand our mission as a Church and so that the Missouri Catholic Conference might more deeply reflect on how, working together, the Gospel might have a greater impact on the life and structures of individuals, the Church, and the world in a rapidly changing environment, marked by secularization, individualism, and isolation.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites “the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization”, marked by the “joy of the Gospel.” (cf. *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 1)

This is the joy of the Gospel: to encounter Jesus and to say *Yes* to the Life He offers. If we are to propose God’s Word to the World, and the Holy Father reminds us that “no one is to be excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”, then we must do so positively – with the joyful *Yes* of our whole life! This is exactly what the Blessed Virgin Mary, the model missionary disciple, did with her life.

I conclude, with the words of the Holy Father, exhorting you to be joyful missionary disciples in the midst of the flock, making his words your own:

I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am in the world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 273)

For fifty years, the Missouri Catholic Conference has boldly embraced its responsibility and mission. For that, we give thanks to God, and, we ask for His assistance, as you journey forward in a permanent state of mission. Thank you.