

KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
“THE DREAM OF POPE FRANCIS: A MISSIONARY CHURCH”
ASSEMBLY ON EVANGELIZATION AND V ENCUESTRO, DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN
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As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States of America, I want to express the warm greetings, spiritual closeness and paternal affection of Pope Francis to all gathered here today as you examine the theme “Put Out Into the Deep”, concluding the Diocesan Evangelization and Renewal Plan and celebrating the Diocesan Encuentro; these are important milestones in the life of this local Church of Brooklyn. I am grateful to Bishop DiMarzio, Bishop Massa, and Mr. Theodore Musco, the Secretary for Evangelization and Catechesis, for their kind invitation. It is an honor to be here with you: to encounter the Lord and to encounter our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In preparation for the Fifth Encuentro, Pope Francis said to the American bishops:

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)

Today, I want to speak to you about the dream Pope Francis has for the Church, a dream which we are invited to share. In the Bible, God often manifests Himself or His will in dreams as he did for Joseph in the Old Testament (Gen 37:1-11) and for Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus, in the New Testament, when he asked him to take Mary as his wife and to name the child Jesus. God too manifested His will in a dream to Peter in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10:10-16), inviting Peter to baptize the whole household of Cornelius, opening the gate of salvation to the Gentiles. Paul also had a dream, articulated in Ephesians (2:11-22), in which Jews and Gentiles would be reconciled and be truly one Body in Christ. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dreamed of having one flock, ruled by one shepherd (John 10: 11-18).

Pope Francis too has a dream for Christ’s Church – that it would be a missionary Church. He writes:

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 structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 27)

Pope Francis dreams of a poor Church for the poor, a Church close to the abandoned and forgotten, a Church which conveys the tenderness of God. He wants an evangelical Church, called to measure itself constantly against the breadth and richness of the Gospel. He wants a Church willing to go forth from its comfort zone (cf. *EG*, 20) – a Church willing to put out into the deep for a great catch!

The Primacy of God among the People of God

Pope Francis dreams of a Church that lives as the People of God – the holy, faithful People of God. This notion of the Church as the People of God was an important idea from the Second Vatican Council. In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, the Council Fathers noted that the universal salvific plan of the Father is shown in the sending of His Son and finds its completion in the gift of the Holy Spirit. They stated that the Church is “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” (LG, 4)

To evangelize, the Church must refer herself back to God, who has manifested Himself in Christ and who through the Holy Spirit continues to dwell in and animate the Church. An evangelizing Church must act in accordance with God’s will and make His presence known. Therefore, the Pope does not want a self-referential Church, but a Church which goes forth bringing the “joy of the Gospel” to the whole world. Pope Francis explains his preference:

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)

This friendship with Christ is the fruit of an encounter with Him. It is the Church’s mission to facilitate this encounter, which can be life-changing just as it was for Saint Paul. While new programs might be helpful for evangelization, the encounter is essential. Pope Benedict XVI expressed it this way:

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)

This event or Person is Jesus Himself. The proclamation of the Lord’s Resurrection cannot be understood as a mere recollection of a past event; rather, He continues to live. The Church exists to help others encounter the Risen One who offers salvation. To encounter the Risen One means to be gathered under the loving gaze that introduces us into the love of God, in a living and lasting relationship with Him. The Holy Father reminds us that the primary reason for evangelizing is “the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of Him.” (cf. *EG*, 264) The best incentive to share the faith and to evangelize comes from contemplating His love. It is the Beauty of the Lord that amazes and excites us and that attracts new believers.

The Gospel of Mercy

If there is a new emphasis on the primacy of God in the life of the Church by Pope Francis, it comes from his proclamation of the “Gospel of Mercy.” Mercy is not an aspect of the Gospel or a parenthesis in the life of the Church. In his letter concluding the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Holy Father wrote:

Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible. Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father. (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC LETTER *MISERICORDIA ET MISERA*, 21 NOVEMBER 2016, 1)

Mercy is fundamental to the face of God revealed in Christ Jesus. Therefore, the Church must begin from the person of Jesus, from his attitude and praxis – his words and deeds – especially toward sinners; for these reveal the mercy of God and become the source of joy for humanity. To enter into contact with Christ means having a relationship with the Father of Mercies, who has a heart for the lost, the forgotten, the abandoned, and the miserable, especially for sinners. God has a heart for suffering humanity and desires to mercifully embrace us, as the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) marvelously captures. Mercy is at the heart of the Gospel. If I can say it directly: this is Pope Francis' contribution. The Gospel is more than just doctrine; it cannot be reduced to an idea. The concrete expression of the truths of the Gospel must reflect the newness of the Gospel itself. (cf. *EG*, 41)

The Gospel builds the Church, and the churches proclaim the Gospel to the people in their different cultures and situations – in concrete and sometimes difficult situations. The Gospel message of mercy should not be understood as an equivocation or an indifference to the demands of conversion or worse still, a toleration of sin, thereby leading to laxity or a lack of moral responsibility. Rather, one might think of faith and conversion as a pilgrimage in which the People of God “journeys tirelessly toward the fullness of his kingdom of justice, love, forgiveness and mercy.” (*MV*, 14)

The Holy Father distinguishes between the sinner (who needs mercy) and the corrupt (who attempts to justify himself and who sees no need for mercy), a distinction seen in the story of the publican and the Pharisee. Mercy is a gift, which we are invited to share. We receive it by allowing ourselves to be touched by Christ and converted.

The Church of Mercy

The Church must witness to this mercy. Only a truly evangelical Church would continue on this path of mercy. Ecclesial mediation is indispensable because the God of Mercy appeared in Christ and reaches others through His Mystical Body, the Church. This Church reflects the light of Christ to the nations and reflects it, even if the “mirror” that is the Church is, at times, dirty due to human weakness.

An evangelical and merciful Church must herself be a subject of the Gospel of Mercy, open to conversion. She is an *ecclesia semper reformanda*, being shaped, formed, and conformed to her Spouse by the Holy Spirit at work in her. What is demanded is not simply external, formal, structural change but a true interior conversion of heart to be a Church of the Poor for the Poor. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis points out that the preferential option for the poor is principally a theological category, as God shows the poor his mercy first, and that “This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians since we are called to have ‘this mind ... which was in Jesus Christ.’” (*EG*, 198).

Indeed, Christ became poor to make us rich. He was born in poverty, exercised His ministry among the poor, and died in poverty. A Church of the Poor is a merciful Church, which looks upon the woundedness of the poor – whether materially or spiritually poor – with compassion and is willing to take concrete steps to heal the wounds, to offer forgiveness and the possibility of a new life – to offer hope. We live in what the Pope calls “the time of mercy.”

In our day, there is an urgent need not only for the Church to show forth the Merciful Face of the Father, but also for the Church to rediscover her identity as Mother. She is a mother who gives new life in baptism; who bandages up the wounds of her children in Reconciliation; and, who feeds her children with the Holy Eucharist. The Church is not a business or an NGO; rather, she is a Mother, who announces that God has a heart for sinful and suffering humanity. The Church is not the “tribunal” for punishment, but the place, “the womb”, to encounter this mercy.

The Church: the Holy, Faithful People of God

Earlier I said that Pope Francis has a dream for the Church. When he speaks of the Church, he describes her as “the holy, faithful People of God.” Following the Second Vatican Council, which emphasized the People of God, there was shift in emphasis to the Church as a communion: a communion with God; a communion of the members with each other; and a communion between the laity and the hierarchy. Pope Francis now wants to re-emphasize the Church as the People of God for the task of evangelization. It is the whole People of God that proclaims the Gospel.

God has called, chosen, and saved us, not just as individuals but as a people. (cf. *EG*, 113) We belong to a People. We are His people. This idea of belonging to a community is challenging in an American context with its strong emphasis on individual liberty. Nevertheless, this idea of being a people can be prophetic in a world, marked by individualism. In *Laudato Si*, the Holy Father laments that rather than having care for a common home, many tend to view things as completely subject to individual use and progressively distance themselves from nature and from one another (POPE FRANCIS, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LAUDATO SI*, 24 MAY 2015, 115-121). The Holy Father wants us to understand the Church as the People of God, not the individuals of God.

This emphasis on the People of God helps the missionary Church focus on its destiny and the destiny of humanity. The Church is to be the universal sacrament of salvation. This is the Church that Pope Francis dreams about:

Being Church means being God’s people in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. This means that we are to be God’s leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God’s salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged. (*EG*, 114)

The Church as the “holy, faithful, People of God” is made up of many members with equal dignity and who share a co-responsibility for evangelization. The members have different roles, but no one is exempted or excluded. We do not need a clericalized Church, nor do we want to clericalize the laity; rather, clergy ought to place themselves wholeheartedly at the service of the Gospel and the lay faithful, so that the laity can live their vocations and evangelize. Each vocation – that of the clergy and that of the laity – began with baptism, through which we were made children of God, incorporated into the Church, and anointed with the power of the Spirit. The clergy have been called to a special pastoral service of the People of God. A pastor is a pastor of a people. The concept of the People of God includes both the pastor and the flock, who journey together.

The whole People of God has a collective responsibility to evangelize. Here we must recall the Second Vatican Council’s teaching on the universal call to holiness – to daily holiness, which is associated with patience, not only in our duties or our existential situations but also in moving forward each day. This call to holiness is not only for the well-educated or “qualified” but for the whole people.

As such, we can speak of a “popular Church” in which each member contributes something to the holiness and mission of the Church. Thus, the vision of the People of God strengthens the idea of fraternity in the Spirit, which demands openness to the Spirit and to the other – the otherness of God and the otherness of our brothers and sisters made in His image. There is a true mystical fraternity (cf. *EG*, 92) in the People of God. Christ Himself summarized the Law and the Prophets in the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. Without keeping these two commandments, holiness is impossible. The communion of the People of God – fraternity – is a sign of the vocation to communion with God, the source of holiness. The People of God is called to be holy.

The Church: Unity in Diversity

I began by speaking of “dreams” and referred to the patriarch, Joseph, who wore a multi-colored garment. The Fathers of the Church saw in this a symbol of the Church, resplendent in its variety of peoples and cultures. While we speak of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation, the presence of the Church among the diverse nations and cultures of the world speaks to its mark of catholicity. The People of God is incarnated in the different peoples and cultures of the earth. Thus, the one People of God as a Church is rich in diversity.

It is precisely within the context of these peoples and cultures that evangelization happens. Here in Brooklyn, where so many peoples and cultures come together, including within the presbyterate, it is important to maintain unity as a local church, especially with your bishop. However, unity does not mean uniformity or suppression of one’s culture and heritage; rather, it suggests making an extra effort to appreciate and appropriate the best cultural traditions in the service of the local church and the mission of evangelization.

Presently, we are experiencing a rapid secularization and de-Christianization of society. What should we do? Should the Church flee from the culture? On the contrary, the Church must bring the Gospel to the cultures she encounters, taking what is best of the culture, but ennobling it with the truth and joy of the Gospel. It is within the culture(s) that the Gospel is proclaimed and received, offering its challenges, its call to conversion, and its promise of new life. This is the mission of the Church: to inculturate the Gospel. At the same time, the different groups and cultures here in Brooklyn can help the Church see things in new perspectives and so adapt and enhance techniques for evangelization, catechesis, and pastoral ministry.

The holy, faithful People of God, incarnated in different peoples and cultures, shares the gift of faith. Pope Francis has promoted a “theology of the people”, characterized by the unity of the people in their diversity. Unlike some forms of liberation theology, which started from a Marxist ideology or from the idea of an oppressed class, the theology of the people sees social injustice as being “anti-people”, that is, as that which threatens the people in their history and common culture through which they developed a “common lifestyle” as a people. Culture indicates the way a people are a people in their natural relationships and in their relationships with God.

Pope Francis speaks of “A People of many Faces” (cf. *EG*, 115-118), providing a vision of the People of God that is incarnated among diverse peoples and cultures. While St. Thomas Aquinas says that grace builds upon nature and perfects it, Pope Francis elaborates, saying that “grace supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it.” (*EG*, 115)

Men and women do not exist alone or as individuals, adrift from relationships; rather, they are incorporated into a determined people and share a common lifestyle. The baptized are inserted into and transfigure their cultures, forming the one People of God and revealing the many

faces of God. The evangelizing Church is the evangelized Church, which the Holy Spirit beautifies by showing forth new dimensions of revelation – a new face. Perhaps, that is what is happening here in Brooklyn.

No one culture can capture the diversity of the Church. The Holy Father states:

When properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to unity. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity where all things find their unity ... Evangelization joyfully acknowledges these varied treasures which the Holy Spirit pours out upon the Church.” (EG, 117)

This openness to cultures favors a “de-centralization” and adaption of some dimensions of pastoral activity and governance for the sake of more effective evangelization. The Gospel itself transcends every culture and must be able to express itself and be heard at all times and by all cultures. The Gospel does not exist in the abstract. It must be inserted within and evangelize cultures.

The Church: the Sensus Fidei and Popular Piety

This same holy, faithful People of God has been given the Holy Spirit who guides the Church and gives her an evangelizing Spirit. Pope Francis notes that “As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God” (EG, 119), thereby giving the faithful a genuine wisdom which helps them grasp divine realities, even when the specific expression escapes them.

The content of the faith is preserved in the people by the Holy Spirit, who helps them discern God’s will and presence and to act in accord with the Divine Wisdom, under the guidance of their shepherds. This “anointing of the people by the Spirit” allows them to journey toward an encounter with the Truth. The journey is not static, but dynamic, messianic, prophetic, and pneumatic. The ability, in union with their pastors, of the people to transmit the faith concretely exists and should be appreciated and celebrated. This is a gift, which should be received and developed through catechesis, formation, and prayer. With every gift, there is a corresponding task. In this case, there is a duty to share the gift of faith.

The truths of the faith are communicated not only to the clergy and experts, but to the whole People of God. They are often transmitted through popular piety and devotion, which are an expression of the *sensus fidei fidelium*. Popular piety and devotions are manifestations of an authentic theological life, animated by the action of the Spirit who has been poured out into our hearts (ROM 5:5). There is a spirituality present, incarnated in the hearts of even the simple to whom the Lord has revealed these things. (CF. MT 11:25; CF. EG 124) Popular piety, often found among the poor and simple, is a genuine, personal expression of faith which can enrich the whole Church and is often a reminder that the people themselves are children of a God.

Devotion and acts of piety can be a true theological locus for the new evangelization. Having spent nine years in Mexico, I think of the evangelizing power of the Virgin of Guadalupe who appeared to Juan Diego and who miraculously appeared on his tilma. A simple yet beautiful image led to the conversion of a whole people and fosters great faith and devotion to the Virgin and her Son. Popular piety can be manifested in devotions, art and architecture, shrines, pilgrimages and processions. These devotions allow the Church to see concretely how the faith has been incarnated and are useful in deepening and revitalizing spirituality. They can attract others in a secularized culture. They are not only useful for evangelizing but also are a way that

some of the faithful exercise their co-responsibility for the Church's evangelizing mission, using popular language and customs. In this way, the people can be true protagonists in their evangelizing mission.

The Church that goes forth: Pastoral Conversion

Pope Francis has a dream for missionary Church that goes forth from its comfort zone. Obedient to the Lord's command to *put out into the deep*, it ventures forth for a big catch. The Holy Father exhorts us to be in a *permanent state of mission*, which really means:

To go forth to meet without keeping a safe distance; to take rest without being idle; to touch others without fear. It is a matter of working day by day in the *fields*, where God's people, entrusted to your care, live their lives. We cannot let ourselves be paralyzed by our air-conditioned offices, statistics and our strategies. (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF CELAM, 7 SEPTEMBER 2017)

Today, we lament rapid secularization and declining Mass attendance and participation in parish life. A generation ago, Saint John Paul II called for a new evangelization that would address this changed situation and would make use of new methods to reinvigorate evangelization efforts. Pope Francis wants us to engage modern culture and to read it in light of the Gospel, so that we may be more effective in our daily attempts to evangelize. More than ten years ago, the Latin American bishops, aware of the drastic cultural changes and difficulties in transmitting the faith, attempted to address these challenges with the Aparecida document, a document whose strategies Pope Francis is bringing to the universal Church.

What are the highlights of this approach to evangelization? First, there is the idea that we are all missionary disciples. We are first disciples, then missionaries. We are subjects who announce the Gospel and subjects to whom the Gospel is announced. Christ gives the Church a missionary mandate to preach the Gospel to all the nations (Mt 28:19-20).

To be a missionary is not just for those who go off to a foreign land; rather, it is the task of the whole community to be missionary – to be an evangelizing community. Anointed by the Spirit and sharing the dignity of the children of God, all are responsible. The Church by her nature is missionary. There is a firm bond between discipleship and evangelization. The Church is called to announce the Gospel of Mercy from which she lives and is constantly evangelized herself. The Holy Father says:

Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" or "missionaries", but rather, we are "missionary disciples". (EG, 120)

Second, evangelization involves human promotion, which must be expressed in the Church's evangelizing work (EG, 178), including her charitable works. Charitable works are characteristic of a Church that goes forth to the peripheries. Her works are signs of mercy. They are not just the works of individuals or works that gain salvation. The Church's charitable work is part of the social Gospel and represents a dimension of evangelizing that fosters a space for fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. This social dimension of evangelization prevents the faith from becoming privatized, individualistic, or abstract. In the early Church, charitable works attracted non-believers, gained their respect and admiration, and brought some to the faith. The

sincere charity of Christians gave living witness to the faith they professed. Charity remains essential to evangelization in a secularized world.

Third, evangelization requires pastoral conversion at all levels of ecclesial life. 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)

A missionary church by its very nature has an unceasing duty to be pastorally converted; the Church is in a *permanent* state of mission. This pastoral conversion means that evangelization can never be reduced to mere administration or maintenance of current structures; that would mean stagnation and gradual decline.

Pastoral conversion involves finding new ways of making known the heart of the Gospel – the beauty of the salvific love of God manifested in Christ Jesus. These new ways might include the restructuring of Christian communities based on the need to proclaim the Gospel; creating new spaces for authentic fraternity and places where the Gospel can be heard; giving some priority to young people; and, really involving the laity, assisting them to accept responsibility for their vocations and for the mission that lies ahead.

Pastoral conversion involves recognizing that, while the family remains the primary locus of evangelization, many families are hurting and struggle to hand on the faith. They need the support of the Church and their neighbors. Pastoral conversion means challenging the idea that resources must be used simply to maintain the *status quo*, which often is unsustainable. Throughout the United States, many formerly-robust parishes and schools have had to merge, share pastors, or even close. School buildings are being rented out to charter schools and Catholic parishes are wondering how they will reach and catechize the young. Pastoral conversion means being bold and creative, challenging the idea that “we’ve always done it that way.” (cf. *EG* 33)

It implies creating communities in which Christians can come to know their faith and deepen it, receiving the faith in a healthy supportive way, so that as missionary disciples are sent forth into the world, they can respond to challenges, attacks, and being discounted. The communities themselves can become places of both fraternity and solidarity, places where people feel welcome and at home.

The new way of thinking includes giving a priority to youth. There is an upcoming synod on youth and young people have developed a preparatory document for the synod. Many young people struggle, because the faith has not been properly transmitted to them. Young people struggle, not only with existential questions, but also with practical problems like finding work, and spiritual problems like having a sense of belonging to a community of faith in a period of increasing secularization.

Last July at the Convocation of Catholic Leaders, Hosffman Ospino presented the stark reality:

In 1991 about 3 percent of the U.S. Population self-identified as non-religiously affiliated or “nones.” Today, 26 years later, about 25 percent of all people in our

country self-identify as such. The trend is very clear. We know that about 20 million people in our country who were born and raised Catholic do not self-identify as such anymore. It is likely that many of them, especially those who are young, joined the ranks of the nones. (HOSFFMAN OSPINO, "KEYNOTE ADDRESS," CONVOCATION OF CATHOLIC LEADERS, ORLANDO, JULY 2, 2017, IN *ORIGINS* 47/11 (JULY 20, 2017) 165.)

Are we passionate about our youth? If we are, then this means being willing and open to accompanying them personally, even if this makes demands on our time and energy. A passion, born out of love, means providing sound catechesis and formation, so that amid the pressures of a secular culture, they can verify their experience against the Tradition, learning to use their freedom to make wise choices that lead to authentic human flourishing.

Our great Tradition must contribute something to the culture – something of the true, the good, and the beautiful – that will support young people in their journey. The beauty of Catholicism – in art, architecture, music, and in its liturgical, spiritual and intellectual tradition – cannot be hidden but must be re-proposed. The Catholic intellectual tradition also can support many young people who are confronted with scientism, an ideology that exalts the scientific method, while excluding the life of faith.

Young people as members of the holy, faithful people of God should be taken seriously, and their gifts should be appreciated. The institutional Church might seek out the expertise of the young as a precious resource, especially in fields like social communications and marketing, for the purposes of evangelization.

Pastoral conversion involves helping the laity to accept responsibility for evangelization and to really live their vocations. I am grateful for the service of the bishops, priests and deacons, who work tirelessly for their flocks; however, the clergy are a distinct minority, who place themselves at the service of the lay faithful so that the laity might be protagonists in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

Of course, this mission is not carried out primarily within the walls of the church. Instead, the laity are called to be missionaries in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces and to transform those places with the Gospel. The laity need to be equipped for evangelization in the world. The Church goes forth to those places where the laity live and work to transmit the Gospel. This awareness must be a stimulus to deeper pastoral conversion, so that the structures, programs, and pastoral activity might be more effective in announcing the Gospel.

Finally, pastoral conversion involves a change of style and not in a merely superficial way. The Gospel must communicate the tenderness and mercy of God and the beauty of Christ. Harshness, severity, and being judgmental, in word and attitude, seldom, if ever, are effective strategies. Pastoral conversion means transmitting the faith in a language that people can understand and transmitting in a personal way – one on one.

This change in style also means being with the poor, ministering to them and learning from them (cf. *EG*, 198-200), gradually being transformed into a Church of the poor. While financial resources are important, when the faithful repeatedly hear calls for money, without a corresponding announcement of the joyful Gospel message and a genuine concern for the salvation of souls, they quickly become disheartened. The People of God want a Church that speaks for them with integrity and defends them. The proof of the change in style will come in the consistency of Christian witness.

Conclusion: Sharing the Dream

Now it is time for you, the Church of Brooklyn, to be missionary disciples – to put out into the deep for a great catch of new disciples. Recall that at the calling of the first disciples (Luke 5:1-11), when Jesus told Peter to put out into the deep, Peter was skeptical; nevertheless, he obeyed and was astonished at the great catch of fish. Aware of his sinfulness, he asked the Lord to depart, but Jesus refused. Instead, He called him to be a fisher of men. He left everything to follow Jesus. He became a disciple and a missionary.

At the conclusion of Saint John's Gospel (John 21:1-14), the Apostles were again fishing and hadn't caught anything. The Risen Lord told them to cast their nets, and they caught one hundred fifty-three large fish. With the Lord Jesus, all things are possible. The mission is daunting, but it is our mission: to make sure that "the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and minds of all who encounter Jesus" (*EG*, 1). That is Pope Francis' dream for the Church – right here in Brooklyn, and he wants this to be your dream too. So, be bold! Be creative! And put out into the deep!