

Intro: At the ACTA conference held at Leeds Trinity University in March 2015, Fr Joe Smith and Margaret Siberry presented these reflections on Pope Francis's exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel" (Evangelii Gaudium)

EVANGELII GAUDIUM – THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

'The granaries have been opened for the people to bake their own bread.'

Fr. Joe Smith 1995

1

'We are to be God's leaven in the midst of humanity . . .

a place of mercy, freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged.' (114)

Pope Francis 2014

2

- **A New Tune – language, tone, images**
- **A New Heart – the 'kerygma', the proclamation of the Gospel**
- **A New Lens for the Church - pastoral mission**
- **A New Spirit – spirit-filled Evangelisers**

3

A New Tune

'All of them (the topics in the doc) help give shape to a definite style of evangelisation

which I ask you to adopt in every activity which you undertake.

In this way, we can take up, amid our daily efforts, the biblical exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say: Rejoice"

4

. . . nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself "the door": baptism.

The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.

5

These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators.

But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems. (47)

6

1

Heart Language

- a mother with an open heart (46)
- the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart (165)
- listening is an openness of heart (171)
- this openness of the heart is a source of joy (272)

7

- a heart attentive to others (282)
- a missionary heart (45)
- homily a heart-to-heart conversation (142)
- we strive to light a fire in the heart of the world (271)

8

(Our) Christian identity, as the baptismal embrace which the Father gave us when we were little ones, makes us desire, as prodigal children - and favourite children in Mary - yet another embrace, that of the merciful Father who awaits us in glory.

Helping our people to feel that they live in the midst of these two embraces is the difficult but beautiful task of one who preaches the Gospel

9

A New Heart

- the 'kerygma', the proclamation of the Gospel

10

Benedict XVI put it nicely at the beginning of the Synod's reflections:

"It is important always to know that the first word, the true initiative, the true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves into the divine initiative, only begging for this divine initiative, shall we too be able to become - with him and in him - evangelisers". (112)

11

It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.

For this reason too, "the priest - like every other member of the Church - ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continuously in need of being evangelised". (164)

12

In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the centre of all evangelising activity and all efforts at Church renewal.

The kerygma is Trinitarian. The fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father's infinite mercy.

On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over:

13

"Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you."

This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things.

14

A New Lens for the Church

- pastoral mission is the key

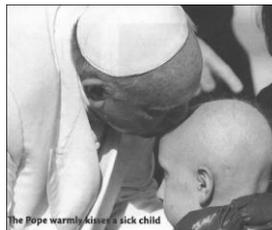
15

Pastoral mission in a missionary style is not obsessed by the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed.

When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone, without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. (33)

16

Evangelisers, (that's you and me) thus take on the 'smell of the sheep' and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.



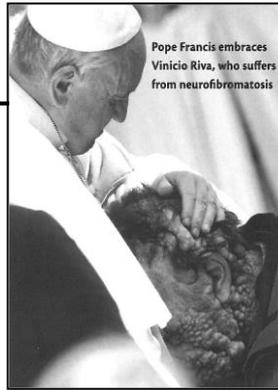
An evangelising community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. (24)

17

My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an "extra" or just another moment in life.

Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. (273)

18



Pope Francis embraces Vinicio Riva, who suffers from neurofibromatosis

'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, schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.' (27)

19

In all the baptised, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work.

All the baptised, whatever their position in the Church, or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelisation . . .

Anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love . . .

We are always 'missionary disciples'

(119, 120)
20

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way".

I invite every-one to be bold and creative in this task of re-thinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in their respective communities . . .

The important thing is not to walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.

21

A New Spirit

- Spirit-filled Evangelisers

22

The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart.

If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us.

But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others. (264)

23

Jesus' whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life.

Whenever we encounter this anew, we become convinced that it is exactly what others need even if they may not recognize it: "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:23). Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us:

4

24

- friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters.

If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people's hearts:

The missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death.

25

The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation".

Enthusiasm for evangelisation is based on this conviction. We have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive, and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint.

It penetrates to the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never out of date because it reaches that part of us which nothing else can reach. Our infinite sadness can only be cured by an infinite love.

26

Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up.

It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty.

But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit.

27

On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads.

Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history.

Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed.

Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelise are instruments of that power. (276)

28

Reflections

- 1. Was there an image which attracted you or one that was a particular challenge for you?**
- 2. Where might we find opportunities to be 'bruised and dirty' in our call to be missionary disciples?**
- 3. In what ways does my belief in the risen Jesus affect my daily life?**

29

Fr Joe Smith & Margaret Siberry