

## **The Joy of the Gospel 5**

### **Chapter 2: Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment**

#### **II: Temptations Faced by Pastoral Workers**

To remind ourselves – In the first chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis called for the whole of the Church in all its aspects to be structured, or restructured, to promote faith sharing - for the Church to be ‘permanently in a state of mission’ (#25). Chapter two part one, set out the social and economic challenges which stand in the way of those seeking to share the Gospel today’s world, challenges threatening the very life and dignity of God’s people (#52-75). Today we consider in the second part of chapter two the temptations faced by pastoral workers – the challenges from within (#76-107).

As a message it’s not all negative. The Pope is at pains to say in a passage I wish I could quote in full that: “the contribution of the Church in today’s world is enormous ... (Christians) are dedicated in many ... ways to showing an immense love for humanity inspired by the God who became man. I am grateful for the beautiful example given to me by so many Christians who joyfully sacrifice their lives and their time. This witness comforts and sustains me in my own effort to overcome selfishness and to give more fully of myself” (#76).

Within this overall positive appreciation he calls attention to the particular temptations to which pastoral workers in the world and Church of today are prone, “from bishops down to those who provide the most hidden and humble services”.

The headings to the sub-divisions of the chapter convey a pithy message:

- Yes, he says, to the challenge of a missionary spirituality
- No to selfishness and spiritual sloth
- No to a sterile pessimism
- Yes to the new relationships brought by Christ
- No to spiritual worldliness ...
- No to warring among ourselves

It is difficult to summarise the many points made under these headings, but certainly they would include the temptations we all feel nowadays to protect ourselves, our free time and our private space; the temptation to keep our Christian convictions under wraps for fear of standing out; our desire to appear like everyone else, with the same possessions as everyone else; how we can so easily lose our courage, our confidence and our trust in the face of many of today's obsessions: for example, with instant results - our inability to wait and let results mature slowly; the temptation to take on too many commitments with insufficient preparation, as a result of which we can feel tense, over-burdened, dissatisfied, and unbearably fatigued (#82). Painful deserts exist in our world: in some situations there is violent opposition to Christianity; in others "family and workplace can also be a parched place where faith nonetheless has to be preserved and communicated ... In these situations," says Francis, "we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink. At times, this becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water. Let us not be robbed of hope!" (#86).

Community, encounter, reconciliation, companionship, solidarity, fraternity, spirituality: these are values and attitudes to which the Pope summons us; isolation, individualism, escapism, selfish choices, self-protection, self-centredness – these cripple the heart and at times the body (#91). "The solution will never be found," he writes, "in fleeing from a personal and committed relationship with God which at the same time commits us to serving others. This happens frequently nowadays, as believers seek to hide or keep apart from others, or ... flit from one place to another or from one task to another, without creating deep and stable bonds ... We need to help others to realize that the only way is to learn how to encounter others with the right attitude, which is to accept and esteem them as companions along the way, without interior resistance. Better yet, it means learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas. And learning to suffer in the embrace of the crucified Jesus whenever we are unjustly attacked or meet with ingratitude, never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity" (ibid.) This is a Pope, we should recall, who has opted not to live in splendid isolation in the Vatican, but with a community in Rome. He writes of how the experience of community can heal us, speaking of community life as a mystical or contemplative way of living (#92) – and it is in this spirit, I would

suggest, that those of us for whom it is relevant are to approach family life, looking for Christ in our spouses, our children, our extended family, friends and neighbours.

From this perspective, too, he says groups of Christians, whether within the Church or between different denominations, should never war among themselves: “Let us ask for the grace to rejoice in the gifts of each, which belong to all!” (#99) Important sections, too, are found towards the end of this chapter on the role of the laity in the Church (#102); on the role of women (#103-104); and on youth ministry and the contribution of young people to the Church (#105-106). There will be among you those who are roused, I am sure, to want to study these paragraphs for yourselves.

The Pope ends a very wide-sweeping chapter with the observation: “Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!” (#109)

Next time we’ll take a look at what the Pope has to say about the proclamation of the Gospel.

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