

**SPRINGTIME OF FAITH FOUNDATION
INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC LAY LEADERSHIP FORUM**

**ST. JOHN PAUL II'S VISION FOR THE NEW
EVANGELIZATION**

Dear brothers and sisters permit me first of all, to use this opportunity so generously offered me by your invitation, to thank you for it and to tell you how important it is to me. There are only two places in the whole world where I could have been in either of today; that is, in Rome for the Canonization of St. John Paul II or in Nashville to talk about the Vision for the New Evangelization of St. John Paul II.

2. Please pardon my special personalization of this matter but let me tell you why I am doing this. Exactly ten years and three months ago, Pope John Paul II appointed me Bishop of Issele-Uku Diocese in Nigeria. So, for me to know that somebody whom I stayed so close to, as to be able to touch him and speak with him, is a Saint today in the kingdom of heaven, is no small matter to me. And of all the Millions of Saints in heaven St. John Paul II is the only one whom I have known personally and whom I have had contact with, also personally. I am a very happy man for this.

3. Now, New Evangelization is a theme and topic which St. John Paul II brought his charismatic exuberance to bear heavily on as to leave an indelible and an irresistible emphasis in the minds of all Christians of, not only the worthwhileness of it, but also, of its urgency now.

4. Karol Jozef Wojtyla was born in May 18th 1920 in Poland. He had his Baptism on June 20th 1920. He was ordained a priest in November 1st 1946 and later on September 28th, 1958 was ordained a Bishop and as a young Bishop he participated in the Second Vatican Council and

played a major role at the 1974 Synod on Evangelization. This experience probably so heightened his passion for spreading the Good News that when he finally became Pope on the 16th October 1978, he took the name “John Paul II”. He made Evangelization the “core theme” of his papacy. He restored to Christianity its true face as a Religion of hope, to be lived in history in an 'Advent' Spirit, in a personal and communitarian existence directed to Christ, the fullness of humanity and the fulfillment of all our longings for justice and peace.

5. His profound humility, grounded in close union with Christ, enabled him to continue to lead the Church and to give to the world a message which became all the more eloquent as his physical strength declined. In this way he lived out in an extraordinary way the Vocation of every Priest and Bishop to become completely one with Jesus, whom he daily receives and offers in the Eucharist.

6. In 1979, he visited his own Country Poland and announced “a New Evangelization as if it were a new proclamation but in reality it is the same as ever. In 1982 while addressing the Bishops of Nigeria and 1983 in Latin America he said: “We need a New Evangelization, new in zeal, new in Method and new in Expression”. According to him, the New Evangelization renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity and also offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. He helped us to see how we as Catholics can enter into a New Evangelization in a way that is consistent with the Church’s teaching and tradition.

7. Pope emeritus, Benedict XVI offered a very important explanation about the New Evangelization, stressing that whereas “the Church always evangelizes and has never interrupted the path of evangelization”, still “New evangelization means: never being satisfied with the fact that

from the grain of mustard seed, the great tree of the Universal Church grew; never thinking that the fact that different birds may find place among its branches can suffice – rather it means to dare, once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow (Mk 4: 26-29). Large things always begin from the small seed and the mass movements are always ephemeral” (*Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger told a world gathering of catechists and religion teachers in Rome, December 10, 2000*).

8. **The** official command of Christ to all of us was that we should go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News (cf. Matt 28:19-20). Jesus did not break up that central theme into outlines for its accomplishment. The Holy Father, St. John Paul II, made a subdivision by proposing that the best way to carry out this command is by the renovation of our methods of evangelization and he came out with the triple novelty – zeal, method and Expression.

9. **The** pope's call to a new evangelization is a prophetic and revolutionary calling to the Roman Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II is re-directing and re-focusing the Church's priorities. John Paul II proclaims "the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples" (RM, no. 3). The Catholic Church committing all of its energies to a new evangelization and mission to the nations is a radical change in emphasis. The reality is that the vast majority of Catholics (clergy and laity) are not inclined to evangelization. The term, evangelization, itself for most Catholics sounds Protestant. Additionally the Catholic Church is understood

by many of her own members, as well as by those outside her life, to be primarily liturgical, pastoral and hierarchical.

10. In actual fact, the Church teaches that she is missionary by her very nature, evangelization is a duty of every Christian (*Lumen Gentium* 16-17; *Ad Gentes*, 2, 23 35). Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states, "We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize. . ." (EN 14) While the notion of evangelization may seem foreign to Catholics, in light of the times we are living in, the changing world scene, the deterioration of western civilization, and the weak condition of the Church in many parts of the world, Pope John Paul II's urgent call to a new evangelization is imperative. The entire Church must come to embrace this calling and make it a normal part of Catholic life.

11. In the new evangelization, however, it is clear that the call is to the entire people of God. When reading *Redemptoris Missio* it is striking to see the number of times Pope John Paul II states that missionary evangelization is the responsibility and calling of all Christians" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1,2,3,11,23,27,30,32,37,42, 47,49, 71,72,92). In the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II says, "I spoke explicitly of the Church's permanent mission of bringing the gospel to the multitudes . . . who as yet do not know Christ . . . and of the responsibility of the lay faithful in this regard. The mission *ad gentes* is incumbent upon the entire People of God . . . missionary activity which is carried out in a wide variety of ways, is the task of all the Christian faithful" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 71).

12. The distinctive characteristics of the laity or the People of God are that they have a variety of gifts and function. The list of such gifts abounds in the New Testament: (Rom 12; I Cor 12; Eph 4 and 1 Pet 4) where he actually advises, on how to put the various gifts that one might have at the service of others. The variety of gifts shows us that there is no way in which one person, the 'Ordained Minister' can possibly be the only one designated to carry out the 'ministry' of the body of Christ. Neither is one person called upon to put everyone else to work. Rather, the leaders equip, organise, assist, and serve the bearers and executors of the Spirit's gifts, but do not control, determine, or assign such gifts.

13. This is a remarkable shift in emphasis, one that I believe necessitates a pastoral plan by the bishops of the Church for helping the faithful to share in the responsibility of evangelization and the mission *ad gentes*. In order for all of the Christian faithful to participate in this calling to the new evangelization the reality of the life changing, gospel message must be experienced as "good news" in each of their lives. The message of the Gospel must to be heard, understood, embraced, lived and shared by all members of the Church! In order for this radical shift in emphasis to occur priority must be given to proclaiming regularly and clearly what the message of the new evangelization is. And with declining number of priestly vocations in some countries such as yours, the importance of the laity's responsibility in evangelization becomes a matter of necessity.

14. When Pope John Paul II uses the term "a new evangelization" he does not mean a new message. "Evangelization cannot be new in its content since its very theme is always the one gospel given in Jesus Christ" ("*The Task of the Latin American bishops*", *Origins* 12 (March 24, 83) p. 659-62). In its writings about evangelization the

Church means most fundamentally the proclamation of the basic Christian message: salvation through Jesus Christ (*Redemptoris Missio*, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 18; *Dives in Misericordia* 7; *Lumen Gentium* 1).

15. On this foundation of the basic message of eternal life in God, Pope John Paul II extends the notion of evangelization. He notes that there is a diversity of activities in the Church's one mission. He states that evangelization should not be limited to individual unbelievers but also addressed to non-practicing Christians and to entire cultures (those that need re-evangelizing and those who do not yet believe in Christ (RM 3, 37). When the pope talks about evangelization that is new he states "evangelization can be new in its ardour, methods and expression" (*The Task of the Latin American Bishops*" *Origins* 12 (March 24th. '83) p. 661). It must be adapted to the people of our day.

16. When we talk about zeal and most certainly, what St. John Paul II most surely referred to when he emphasized the new zeal, was a reference to the fervor and spirit of the early apostles especially of St. Paul. It was not a matter of spur of the moment that made St. Paul say "Woe to me if I do not evangelize" (I Cor 9:16). And neither was the success of the mission of St. Paul the fruit of great rhetorical art or pastoral prudence. The fruitfulness was tied to the suffering, to the communion in the passion, death and resurrection of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 5:7; 11, 10 ff; 11:30; Gal 4:12-14).

17. St. Paul left us an unbeatable example of how to evangelise with great success. He had everything against Greek Philosophy, not the least of which was the poor result he got from the great effort he made once to get acquainted with Greek Philosophy and to use it to convey the Gospel of Christ, precisely at Athens (Acts 17). He was what one would

today refer to as a Canon Lawyer, but because of the demands of the scope of the important message he had, he tried Philosophy and was very good in it.

18. But the result was disproportionately balanced against the great effort he made to acquire the wisdom of the Greeks. After that, he hated Greek Philosophy because of its non-functionality and he resolved to just preach Christ without the flourish of oratory, or the accuracies of philosophical language, upon which the Greeks so much prided themselves (I Cor 2:3ff; Col 2:8).

19. He did not preach the gospel in this manner, in order that the cross of Christ should not become of no effect, that the success should not be ascribed to the force of art, and not of truth; or to the powerful oratory of those who spread it, which would automatically have diminished or eclipsed the honour of the cross of Christ.

20. Instead, Paul preached a crucified Jesus in plain language, and told the people that that Jesus who was crucified at Jerusalem was the Son of God and Saviour of men, and that all who would be saved must repent of their sins, and believe in him, and submit to his government and laws, in short and simple sentences like this. This truth needed no artificial dress; it shone out with the greatest majesty in its own light, and prevailed in the world by its divine authority, and the demonstration of the Spirit, without any human helps. The plain preaching of a crucified Jesus was more powerful than all the oratory and philosophy of the heathen world. And the weakest instruments God uses are stronger in their effects, than the strongest men can use.

21. Let me use this opportunity to warn that we have to be careful about fine tuning the message of Christ so as to make

it much more easily acceptable and so as not to cut away the cross of Christ. On Good Friday, we lift up the wooden cross and sing: *Ecce lignum crucis in quo salus mundi perpendit*. It was on a wooden cross that the Saviour of the world died. It will be heretical to fine tune it and say that Jesus died in the Intensive Care Unit of a New York Pristine Hospital after a brief illness. We are now enjoying the resurrection power. But that was preceded by a death on the cross. Current theological fallacies of a crown without a cross are unwholesome. We understand that to follow Christ at all, means taking up one's cross and following him.

22. In our evangelisation, we will often have to work with poor resources in a world saturated with sophisticated communication gadgets. In many Catholic churches, at least from my own end of the world, microphones don't ever work well. But in our Sister Churches, like one famous one "Christ's Embassy", theirs never fails. So it is obvious that we have to count on God's grace for any measure of success that we have achieved or that we will ever achieve. As a matter of fact, the more we take pride in our wisdom and eloquence, the less efficacious the entire process become, because then and as at now, for all our efforts, it is only God who still gives the increase (**1Cor 3:6-7**). Mere words and the whole art of communication alone cannot reach the human person and certainly, not to such depths as the Gospel inspired by the Holy Spirit could reach.

23. Now, people from my own end of the world have the concrete history and experience of how the doggedness and determination of our missionaries, in the face of almost unsurmountable obstacles planted the seed of Christianity, whose fruits we are still reaping today.

24. The Structure of the New Evangelization includes but is not limited to the celebration of the Eucharistic mystery every day, administration of the sacraments, proclamation of the word of life – the Word of God. The Gospel is destined to all and not only to a specific circle and this is why we are obliged to look for new ways of bringing the Gospel to all. The New Evangelization does not mean “new gospel” but rather a new response to the needs of humanity and people today in a manner adapted to the signs of the times and to the new situations in cultures which are the basis of our personal identity and the places where we seek the meaning of our existence.

25. The Acts II Process: This is a brief, powerful and clear summary of the content and the Spirituality of New Evangelization. The Act II process is based on the experience of the Apostles themselves in (Acts 2). These intimate disciples of Jesus were led by the Divine Master; schooled and influenced to a radical Conversion brought to a climax with the pouring of the Holy Spirit. This Conversion experience radically transformed them and changed them from timid, and fearful people into bold and courageous men and women (*Matt. 26:25, Mk 14:50, Acts 2:14, 4:13; 18-20*) - *This is with a zeal that is completely new.* The Apostles' Conversion experience resulted in the proclamation of the Good News without fear (*Act 2:14-36*). Those who heard the Good News were converted (*Acts 23:37-42*). A collection of the converted resulted in a Community (*Acts 2:43-47*).

26. CONVERSION: A *metanoia* or a total change of heart and mind is the first requirement of New Evangelization. It is a call to Personal Encounter and intimate Communion with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image which is made alive in us by grace and by the power of the Spirit. In order to pass on the Gospel to others it must have first

permeated one's lives. This on-going growth of character transformation is both vertical and horizontal: i.e. leading to a deeper relationship with both God and neighbor (cf. *Rm. 8.3-13.*) And to achieve this, there is need for constant spiritual exercises, daily study and reflection on the Scriptures, fervent prayers and frequent reception of the Sacraments especially of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

27. PROCLAMATION: The second dynamics of New Evangelization is Proclamation. When one encounters Jesus in that intimate Personal relationship, there arises an urge to tell others about Christ (*Phil 3:8-10; 1Peter 3:15-16*). One's Personal Testimony helps for a better understanding of the Gospel message which stimulates faith on the part of the listener - *This is an expression that is new.*

28. COMMUNITY: And yet another of the important characteristics of New Evangelization is forming of Small Communities. When Christ is proclaimed either to groups or to individuals and when the Good News is listened to, accepted and assimilated, it arouses a genuine adherence in the one who has thus received it (*Acts 2:43-47; EN 23*). There is a great emphasis therefore, on setting up of Small Christian Communities where Christians can come together to pray, share the faith of the Church, celebrate and share the Eucharist and give a helping hand to the needy in the Communities (*Matt 25: 1-46*). New Evangelization sets up Small Christian Communities or Parish Cell groups or Zones which in turn lead to Conversion, Proclamation and Community. The process continues - *This is an element of the New Method.* There is an interconnected movement from Conversion to Proclamation and to Community and back again to Conversion.

29. The new evangelization like all evangelization must also be founded on the person of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

"Evangelization will always contain -- as the foundation, centre and, at the same time, the summit of its dynamism -- a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ . . . salvation is offered to all men and women, as a gift of God's grace and mercy." "The new evangelization," according to Pope John Paul II, "is not a matter of merely passing on doctrine but rather of a personal and profound meeting with the Saviour." "(The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, the centre of the universe and of history" RM 1)

30. Pope John Paul II helps us to distinguish between those situations needing primary evangelization (*ad gentes*), re-evangelization, or pastoral care. These distinctions are critical to recognize at this point in history. His summons to re-evangelization is an honest and essential assertion by the successor of Peter that must be heeded by the Church. The time is long overdue to recognize that evangelization cannot be limited to the mission *ad gentes* (RM 33).

31. I think it is now becoming increasingly obvious that in our countries, many Catholics (and other Christians) have not been effectively incorporated into life in Christ. Baptized as infants many have never made a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel. As adolescents and adults many drift away from the Church. Evangelization must be directed to the Church itself. (*Redemptoris Missio*, 36; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 52 54 & 56)

32. In the face of directly anti-gospel proclamations that are constantly being proclaimed to Christians in many countries there needs to be the clear proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord and his Gospel. People need to be regularly inspired, encouraged and formed in their faith in order to live a Christian lifestyle. There is the need for orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

33. The proclamation of the Gospel is the essential first step. It is the foundation of a lifelong process. Evangelization according to the pope also involves catechetical instruction, moral doctrine and the social teaching of the Church. Those who are incorporated into Christ are incorporated into His Body. They are joined to God through the sacraments and the Church community (RM 51).

34. Pope John Paul II aims the call and the challenge of a new evangelization at each one of us. He practiced what he preached. Missionary activity, he tells us, "renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. For those who would participate in the new evangelization they are called to personal communion with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. For those who would be missionaries in the new evangelization they must first be Disciples of Christ, in living relationship with the Lord and His Church.

35. Finally, in his call to a new evangelization John Paul II following the directives of Vatican II has helped to focus the Church on some of the crucial priorities necessary for the strengthening and renewal of the Church. Furthermore, I believe that he is proclaiming God's call to the Church in our day in such a manner as to both address the Church's past and present difficulties, and to prepare her for the third millennium.

Thanks for your wonderful attention.

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25th – 27th April, 2014.