

Thank you. I am so happy to be here with you today.

As many of you know, I love sayings, especially the ones from Mexico. One of my favorites is: "*Ahora los patos le tiran a las escopetas*" – "Now the ducks shoot at the rifles." It is my favorite because normally when I'm invited to speak that's what it's like. Usually the ducks are shooting at the shotguns, and today you go first. I like this better. Bishop Mario and I have been asked, at the end of each session, to simply reflect briefly with you on how we might be protagonists in the work of responding to the pastoral needs and situations encountered in the peripheries. In other words, how can we as missionary disciples help to realize these dreams and these hopes? And as I was thinking about it, I was thinking I don't know what they're going to say, so how do I respond?

One thing that keeps us from realizing our dreams and hopes is fear. Quite often as human beings it's the element of fear that keeps us from those realizations. I was thinking back in 1993, I went to the ICTE Program in Rome. It's a program for priests for continuing education. We were there for 3 months and one of the things that I wanted to do was climb the dome of St. Peter's. But I have a little claustrophobia and a little acrophobia. So, every week I would say, "This is the week I'm going to do it." But I would never do it. And then the last week I said, "Well this is it, I'm going to go home, I better do it." So, I got my dear friend Fr. Norm Smith from Cleveland, Ohio. And I said, "Norm, would you go with me?" "Oh I've been up it a million times." "I know, but I have to tell you I'm kind of afraid, would you do it?" "OK." So, we did it. We went up to the top with some trepidation, climbing up to the very top. We had just gotten to the top and I said "OK, very nice, let's go back." No, I stayed there and watched it. I say that because I think Fr. Norm was a real missionary disciple for me. He journeyed with me, he accompanied me and helped me to overcome my fears.

I'm not going to go into it too much, but in looking at the *Echoes of the Encounters in the Peripheries*, it seemed to me that one theme is this theme of fear. For example, when you look at our recent immigrants who have so many fears coming from their countries of origin, in transit and coming here to this country. Many of our families lived in fear. They have fled from their countries of origin and they were even more fearful when they started their journey to the United States. And now they're living in fear in part because we're failing to give welcome to the foreigners amongst us. And we see this even in our Church. Fear of not being accepted, of being rejected, of not being able to pray in their traditional ways. We see it in many communities and in parts of our Church. The fear of being undervalued when we get older, being forgotten. Parents have fears for the children. Children have fears of not being accepted or liked on Facebook, whatever the case may be.

So how does the missionary disciple, a witness of God's love, respond to these pastoral needs and situations helping people to realize their dreams and their hopes? I think the answer comes from Luke. Remember when Jairus came to Jesus and said my daughter is dying? And then the report came that she had died. And Jesus says, Fear is useless, what is needed is trust, and her life will be spared. Trust in Jesus Christ. Communion with Jesus brings new life and dispels fear. And so, it seems to me that the missionary disciple must deepen her or his relationship with Jesus day after day after day. To conquer our own fears so that we can bring love to the peripheries and help others to do the same.

Deepening our relationship with God has to begin all over again every day, as if nothing had yet been done. Every day we must encounter the Lord and we must be present to the Lord as he is present to us. Because just as Jesus became one with us in the Incarnation so that our fears would be dispelled, so must we, the Body of Christ, root out the causes of fear by witnessing to God's love, by being present to one another. And yet, so often, as missionary disciples it seems to me that we undervalue the power and importance of being there, of being present to one another. We may feel inadequate, unprepared, too busy, unworthy. And this is sad because you and I have the power to affirm each other. But often we allow that power to remain fallow.

As missionary disciples we must experience the presence of Christ and be passionate about bringing that presence to others. How do we do it? It seems to me we do it principally by just being with people and giving them of our time. Time is life. Time is the only thing we truly own. I have a watch, but it's not really mine, not really me. But my time is me. We spent this weekend with each other. We can't get it back again. We've given each other our time, our lives. I love that little exercise of taking the word "time" and substituting "life." I had a good time – I had a good life. What are you doing? Oh I'm just wasting time – I'm just wasting life. So, time is important. What is important is the time that we spend with each other, being with each other, placing existence over achievement, love over accomplishment. As we waste time with each other or waste our lives with each other. I think maybe this is what Pope Francis is getting at when he says that time is greater than space. Perhaps what he means is that space is static but time is dynamic.

For the Pope it is more important to start a relationship, a process, than to freeze frame this time into a limited and limiting space. This process, these relationships, they take time. And we have to give it to one another. By encountering one another. By being with each other. As Pope Francis says in *Evangelii Gaudium*, #10, quoting the document from Aparecida: "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others." In his homily on September 13, 2016, Francis lamented that we often limit our presence by putting people in a box, a space, a stereotype. He speaks of a culture of indifference, he lamented that when we see people suffering, we say, "Oh, what a shame, poor people, they suffer so much" and then, having put them in their place, their space, we move on. Francis went on to say that an encounter is different: "If I do not look, -- seeing is not enough, no: look – if I do not stop, if I do not look, if I do not touch, if I do not speak, I cannot create an encounter and I cannot help to create a culture of encounter."

Jesus gave us the perfect example in the Good Samaritan. We mustn't be like the priest and the Levite, caught up in fear of getting involved or breaking the purification laws. We must be like that Good Samaritan, encountering the stranger, taking risks, overcoming fear and making known our love of our neighbor.

Part of this encountering is to listen. That's why as I say it was good for me to listen to you first. Because I'm not sure that we listen all that well anymore. A few months ago, I was going to do a confirmation at one of our parishes in Albuquerque. And I was standing on the sidewalk. We were all vested, ready to go in, waiting for the music to start. And this woman comes down the sidewalk right at me and just as she passes me, she says, "I love you, pumpkin." I said, "Oh, well!" But she was on the phone of course. So, I waved and said, "God bless you dear." But we're losing the capacity – that was a superficial example – but there are many deeper examples where we're not listening to one another,

we're not attending to one another. As Luke tells us in the road to Emmaus: "Were not our hearts burning within us while the Lord spoke with us?" Jesus listened to them first and then they listened to Jesus. I think that this presence is really critical. Jesus came to be one of us so that he could be present to us. He did not deem equality with God something to be grasped, but took the form of a slave, our form, so that he could communicate personally and intimately the love of the Father. His love for us given on the cross in the Spirit.

This is what I think we need to do as missionary disciples – stay present to Jesus, let his presence embolden us to be present to one another and to spend time with one another. I love the 16<sup>th</sup> century friar, Luis de León. He said once: "*Cuando se os acabare todo, se os dará todo Él.*" "When you have run out of all else, then he will give all of himself to you...He will unite your whole self to himself in a tight and most sweet bond that will never fail." So many of our brothers and sisters on the peripheries have "run out of all else" and Christ unites himself to them, in a special way, through you and me. We're called to have this sensitivity of Christ. To encounter and to journey, to enter into these "sweet bonds" that make up the Body of Christ. The love of Jesus is present in us as we give of ourselves, our time, our presence, to those on the peripheries.

I am grateful to Father Norm who passed away some years ago. He was a real missionary disciple accompanying me. Jesus calls all of us to recognize that with him present, fear is useless. What is needed is trust...presence...missionary disciples. God bless you!