

**ADDRESS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES**  
**“THE JOY OF BEING MISSIONARY DISCIPLES”**  
**V NATIONAL ENCUESTRO**  
**GAYLORD TEXAN RESORT HOTEL AND CONVENTION CENTER**  
**GRAPEVINE, TEXAS**  
**SEPTEMBER 20, 2018**

*Introduction*

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I wish to express the paternal affection and spiritual closeness of Pope Francis as you gather for these days, which will be critical for the life of the Church in the United States. I want to greet Cardinal DiNardo, the President of the Episcopal Conference, and Bishop Olson, our host in the Diocese of Fort Worth. Additionally, I want to acknowledge Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller of San Antonio and Bishop Nelson Perez of Cleveland for their leadership throughout the process. Finally, I want to thank not only the bishops, priests, and deacons who have labored intensely to bring us to this phase of the process, but also the many lay faithful, who have participated in the local and regional Encuentros and who remain engaged. Your presence reminds us of the vital role the laity play in the life of the Church.

The local and regional gatherings allowed us to listen to people of all ages –to hear their concerns, their hopes and dreams. The process opened our ears to the voices of those at the peripheries, who might not have otherwise been heard. It allowed those from different countries and cultures to express themselves and their faith in their own words. Furthermore, the Encuentro process has identified both pastoral priorities and leaders within the Hispanic community who, as missionary disciples, will be critical to the new evangelization. This national gathering marks a new phase in the transformation of the Church in the United States.

I have been asked to address the theme of “The Joy of Being Missionary Disciples”, reflecting on paragraph 24 of Pope Francis’ exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. For the Pope, the whole missionary endeavor begins with an encounter with Christ. *Evangelii Gaudium* begins:

“The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is born anew.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 1.)

Just as Pope Francis begins with the encounter with Christ, so too Pope Benedict XVI began his first encyclical with this encounter, writing:

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. (POPE BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *DEUS CARITAS EST*, 25 DECEMBER 2005, 1)

We have gathered here to encounter Christ, the One who gives our life direction and who brings us joy. Having encountered Him, we hope to be moved in a truly missionary spirit to share

the joy of the Gospel with all whom we meet, bringing the gifts and charisms of the Hispanic and Latino communities to the task of the New Evangelization in this country.

We have also come to encounter one another. Men and women do not exist in a vacuum, adrift from relationships; rather, they are inserted into a determined people and share a common lifestyle. We are the one People of God who reveal the many faces of God. (cf. *EG*, 115-118) The evangelizing Church is the evangelized Church, which the Holy Spirit beautifies by showing forth new dimensions of revelation – a new face.

Finally, we have come to this Encuentro to engage those we encounter in the world. The Church, rich in diversity, goes forth to the world. Jesus has touched our lives in diverse ways, and we, the Church, make known His Presence in the world, hoping to awaken in our brothers and sisters, even those who do not yet believe, a sense of Mystery and a renewed sense of their own humanity. We go forth in joy, having been called to be both disciples and missionaries.

### *The Dream of Pope Francis: A Missionary Church*

Pope Francis has a dream for the Church. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, 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. (*EG*, 27)

To understand what he means, consider his words during his visit to Brazil. There he spoke of our “Continental Mission”, which is both *programmatic and paradigmatic*. The programmatic mission is a series of missionary activities; while, the paradigmatic mission:

“involves setting in a missionary key all the day-to-day activities of the particular churches. Clearly this entails a whole process of reforming ecclesial structures. The ‘change of structures’ will not be the result of reviewing the organizational flow chart, which would lead to a static reorganization; rather, it will result from the very dynamics of mission.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE LEADERSHIP OF CELAM, 28 JULY 2013)

He dreams of a new missionary spirit. Only from this paradigmatic choice to be a missionary Church will authentic reform, vital for evangelization, flow. Just as wind pushes against a sail and causes a boat to move upon the water, so too the Spirit of God pushes the whole Church to go forth into the world, attentive to the signs of the times and the needs of the people, jettisoning that which is obsolete. Pope Francis adds that “What makes obsolete structures pass away, what leads to a change of heart in Christians, is precisely *missionary spirit*.”

The first work of the Spirit of God is conversion. The Aparecida document and *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. *EG* 25) refer to pastoral conversion, which involves believing in the Good News, believing in Christ as the one who announces the Kingdom and the triumph over evil, believing in the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with joy, and believing in the Church, who makes Christ incarnate in culture and among the peoples. Pastoral conversion takes place in the recognition that people’s religious experiences, including those of Latinos, are an authentic place of encounter with God. Pastoral conversion means moving from mere conservation to a decidedly

pastoral ministry. Pastoral and missionary conversion go hand in hand – conversion of attitudes and structures.

### *Characteristics of an Evangelizing Church*

It is in this “missionary spirit” that the Church goes forth (cf. *EG* 20-24). Paragraph 24 of *Evangelii Gaudium* begins with these words:

“The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.” (*EG*, 24)

I want to examine these characteristics of an evangelizing Church. First, we are a *Church that goes forth*, which the Holy Father described in this way:

“Instead of just being a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. The ones who quit sometimes do it for reasons that, if properly understood and assessed, can lead to a return. But that takes audacity and courage.” (INTERVIEW WITH ANTONIO SPADARO, 21 SEPTEMBER 2013)

To go forth to the spiritual and existential peripheries demands courageously leaving our comfort zone. At the beginning of the Encuentro, the Holy Father said:

“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)

Second, the community of missionary disciples takes the first step: it *shows initiative*. Pope Francis invites us to be “imitators of God” by having foresight. God seizes the initiative with us and calls us to do the same with those at the peripheries. The term *primerear* captures this idea. We need to be proactive rather than reactive. We need to be spiritual entrepreneurs for Christ. The Holy Father writes:

“An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative; he has loved us first (cf. 1 John 4:19), and therefore, we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.” (*EG*, 24)

Third, the evangelizing community is *involved or engaged* with its members. The clear majority of the faithful are lay Catholics who have been made priest, prophet, and king through baptism. They have talents and expertise to offer the Church and the world. The bishops and priests have the task of animating their vocations. Unfortunately, many, including Latinos, are left as bystanders. The Holy Father sometimes uses the word *balconear*, which means to stand by the window or balcony to see what is happening, but without personal engagement. A person

sees and criticizes everything without ever personally getting involved in the mission. The Pope proposes Jesus as the opposite of this sort of person:

“Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples, ‘You will be blessed if you do this.’ An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances. It is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.” (EG, 24)

We should not be surprised when the Holy Father speaks of having the “smell of the sheep.” The Gospel must “embrace human life” and engage reality, including the reality of suffering – physical illness, spiritual alienation, the suffering that comes from being separated from family members or being detained, of having one’s dignity attacked on the basis of race and nationality, of poverty, and many other evils. There is a remedy for this suffering – it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, a community of missionary disciples *accompanies* others. Speaking in Assisi, Pope Francis said:

I repeat it often: walking with our people, sometimes in front, sometimes in the middle, and sometimes behind: in front in order to guide the community, in the middle in order to encourage and support; and at the back in order to keep it united and so that no one lags too far behind, to keep them united. (FRANCIS, “MEETING WITH CLERGY, CONSECRATED PEOPLE, AND MEMBERS OF DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCILS,” CATHEDRAL OF SAN RUFFINO, ASSISI, 4 OCTOBER 2013.)

Accompaniment entails guiding, encouraging and supporting, and uniting. The Church that actively does this is a synodal Church – a Church that walks together. One speaks of synodality in the Church and synodality of the Church.

Synodality *in the Church* – being the Church that journeys together living the faith – is one of the most meaningful expressions of ecclesial communion, one which renews the life and praxis of faith, beginning with the Word of God, interpreting it, asking questions, examining structures, leading to discernment and action. Synodality involves many forms of participation and co-responsibility in the Church. The Encuentro Process has shown the effectiveness of synodality in the Church – listening, speaking, participating by asking critical questions, and discerning the path forward. If communion is a sharing of the faithful in the mysteries of faith and mission of the Church, synodality is the sign and fulfillment of communion.

The synodality *of the Church* refers to the Church which is like a “sacrament or sign and instrument both of a very close-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” and which “desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.” (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1) The synodality of the Church describes the journey of the Church with all of humanity in its concrete history. This journey continues in the history of the Church in the United States and in the whole continent. The Church in the United States, which is now 40% Latino, witnesses to the unity of God’s family as it discerns how to bring these gifts to this country and its peoples.

As we accompany others, we learn the art of dialogue. We live in a time of epochal change. We, who announce the Gospel, cannot evangelize by neglecting the new forces at work affecting

new generations who have their own expectations and aspirations, including those who are coming to this country.

I spoke earlier of the suffering of many, but others are frightened of change and frightened of strangers. Rather than seeing a brother or sister as a member of the family, they see them as a threat or competitor. What will this new person mean for me, my future, and my existence? In the face of this existential fear, one approach would simply be to build a wall around ourselves, but this would never banish their fear. This would not help them live in a new way or experience the joy that comes with freedom offered by Christ and the Gospel.

The alternative to building walls is dialogue. The late-Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran described this dialogue:

“The response is always and in any case a dialogue, an encounter ... the only possible road is that of an unarmed dialogue. Substantially, in my opinion, to dialogue means to go toward another unarmed, with a conception of truth that is not aggressive, and yet not disoriented.” (JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN, “UN ALTRO PASSO VERSO L’ABISSO...”, INTERVISTA A CURA DI PAOLO RODARI, *LA REPUBBLICA*, 27 JULY 2016, P. 8)

At the heart of dialogue is the communication of one’s own personal life to others. It is a sharing of the existence of others in one’s existence. It is not always about proving oneself right. It is about a mutual sharing that deals with how to live in harmony, while offering the best of our Tradition.

Fifth, the evangelizing community is *fruitful*. In paragraph 24, the Holy Father refers to the parable of the weeds and wheat, writing:

“An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient with the weeds. The sower when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear.” (*EG*, 24)

Fruitfulness demands discernment and patience. The fundamental task is discernment. The parable of the weeds and wheat speaks of distinguishing what is from the Son of Man, who sows good seed, the children of God, in the field from the weeds, the children of the Evil One, sown by the Devil. In Greek, the word used for weeds is *zizania*, which specifically refers to ryegrass. *Zizania* looks like wheat as it begins to grow, but only when it is mature can one discern the difference.

Jesus cautions his disciples of the need to be patient and to discern because things are not always initially clear. While farmers discern between wheat and weeds, the Church embraces people, who have the possibility of responding to the Divine Initiative and who, by grace, can be transformed from sinner to saint, from weeds to wheat. Following Jesus’ example, we try to be patient. Patience in the art of accompaniment and discernment allows the whole Church to move forward.

Pope Francis sees patience as a mark of holiness:

“I see holiness in the patience of the People of God ... I often associate sanctity with patience; not only as *hypomoné*, taking charge of events and circumstances of life, but also as a constancy in going forward, day by day. This is the sanctity of the militant Church also mentioned by St. Ignatius.” (INTERVIEW WITH ANTONIO SPADARO, 21 SEPTEMBER 2013)

The final characteristic of an evangelizing community is *joy*. It celebrates even small victories in the work of evangelization. (cf. *EG*, 24) Joy is the greatest experience of the Church that goes forth. The Eucharist is the source and summit of all life in the Church. The Eucharist is the sacrament which nourishes Christian joy.

It is the strongest sacramental sign of the Paschal Lordship of Christ, recalling his victory over sin and death. In the Eucharist, Christ is among us. The joy that He has won is preserved and shared. Eucharist joy is not incomplete or fading like the pleasures of this world; it is a lasting joy. Joy is fruit of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus breathed on the Apostles at Easter, when they rejoiced to see the Risen Lord!

The Church celebrates the Eucharist with the spousal joy of one promised to Christ. It is a foretaste of the eschatological banquet in which those invited will share in the heavenly banquet of the kingdom in its fullness. Through the Mass, the Church brings the world joy. Thus, the Holy Father writes:

“Evangelization with joy becomes beauty in the liturgy...The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving.” (*EG*, 24)

### *Conclusion*

Pope Francis has a dream of a missionary Church – one that goes forth to the spiritual and existential peripheries. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he marks out the characteristics of this missionary Church. It is one that goes forth; that seizes initiative; that engages and accompanies others, demonstrating patience in bearing fruit; and, ultimately, offers the world joy in the person of Jesus, who comes to us in Word and Sacrament. The characteristics of an evangelizing community are modeled after the life and ministry of Jesus, the Divine Master. We are His disciples, called to be joyful missionaries at the peripheries of our world.

I conclude once more with the words of the Holy Father:

“...the position of missionary disciples is not in the center but at the periphery: they live poised towards the peripheries... including the peripheries of eternity, in the encounter with Jesus. In the preaching of the Gospel, to speak of ‘existential peripheries’ decentralizes things; as a rule, we are afraid to leave the center. The missionary disciple is someone ‘off center’: the center is Jesus Christ, who calls us and sends us forth.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE LEADERSHIP OF CELAM, 28 JULY 2013)

It is my sincere hope that as we gather for these days, we may be the Church that Christ wants us to be – with Him at the center of our lives, our conversations, and our ministry, confident that with the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe to accompany us and to intercede for us, we may always move forward in hope, making known the joy of the Gospel.