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Walking Together with Hope: Renouncing, Denouncing and Announcing

Introduction

God calls us as a Church to journey with hope, convinced that the His Kingdom is real, that another world is possible, and that this utopia¹ challenges what we take for granted. As Pope Francis indicates in the apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)* this involves not only identifying structures that are distant from the Kingdom of God (denouncing) but also kindling new convictions and attitudes to support new structures (renouncing and announcing).² Thus we are called not only to have hope, but to become witnesses of hope in our way of life, our way of journeying.

As Charles de Foucauld himself remarked, we do not have a right to be "blind watchmen", "dumb watchdogs" (Isaiah 56:10), "shepherds feed themselves rather than my flock" (Ez. 34).

Denouncing

In order to give this service to our fellow pilgrims *Evangelii Gaudium* invites us to take a clear standpoint: docile and attentive listening to the cry of the poor (EG 187). And we do this as witnesses of the joy of the Gospel (EG168³).

Therefore, **we denounce** that our peoples are oppressed. We do not do this by simply looking at the poverty rate extracted from a factsheet or a statistic. It outrages and shocks us that there are countries which waste enough food products to feed 300 million people, but then every day they have an increasing number of citizens who have to rummage in the garbage to find something to

¹ **Utopia** is the title of a book and the name of an imaginary country where St Thomas More situates an ideal society that is a moral and political model (1516). The word eventually took on a general meaning to designate an 'ideal of society' that helps to reflect on reality and gives prospects for action to improve it. The adjective 'utopian' can have both a positive meaning (the prospects for improvement) as well as a negative one (the impossibility realizing something). In our time the theology of liberation and political theology have revived the term utopia in the context of the social teaching of the Catholic Church.

² EG 189: Changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual.

³ EG 168: As for the moral component of catechesis, which promotes growth in fidelity to the Gospel way of life, it is helpful to stress again and again the attractiveness and the ideal of a life of wisdom, self-fulfilment and enrichment. In the light of that positive message, our rejection of the evils which endanger that life can be better understood. Rather than experts in dire predictions, dour judges bent on rooting out every threat and deviation, we should appear as joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of the goodness and beauty which shine forth in a life of fidelity to the Gospel.

eat or to sell. These are not only statistics and numbers, they are our brothers and sisters.⁴ However, we cannot just complain. We must take a stand. We must be active in facing the world and become actors in the construction of its history. We cannot be simply passive analytic observers. We have to make a discernment. No denunciation is impartial or does not disturb the status quo. One always denounces from a position. Is denunciation fraternal? It is indeed fraternal to denounce and not be silent in the face of injustice.

Therefore **we denounce** all that which gets in the way of engaging in fraternal relationships, but on the contrary distances us from our own humanity and consequently from God and from our neighbour.

Renouncing

In order to embody the hope that we profess and to reach out, *Evangelii Gaudium* indicates (not exhaustively but indicatively) some important areas that we have to renounce. If we have to listen to the poor, we must surrender false spirituality: ie. not to renounce the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel (EG88). Moreover, it implies a readiness to renounce some of our rights so as to place our goods more generously at the service of others (EG190). Above all we need to renounce consumption and distraction which lead to alienation (EG196⁵).

We renounce to be silent, to forget the utopias, **we renounce** fundamentalism and blind fanaticism, lies and the loss of religious and human values.

We renounce the temptations that we we come across in our life: inequality, consumer society, an increasingly materialist world engulfed in superficiality, a society of nonbelievers.

We renounce to be accomplices and to remain silent. **We renounce** to remain with arms folded in the face of the plundering by the powerful and the lies spread by the mass media.

Announcing

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, in order to help us to discern what we have to announce in our own context, we find important criteria:

1. To always focus on the core of the Gospel, the heart of the message of Jesus Christ and give it priority over what is secondary (EG 34-35). Therefore “the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary.” EG 35.
2. The centrality of the the announcement implies discerning what is important and a way of announcing that incarnates the very announcement itself:

⁴ Cf. Address of the Holy Father to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements. Expo FERIA Exhibition Centre, Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia). Thursday, 9 July 2015

⁵ EG 196: Sometimes we prove hard of heart and mind; we are forgetful, distracted and carried away by the limitless possibilities for consumption and distraction offered by contemporary society. This leads to a kind of alienation at every level, for “a society becomes alienated when its forms of social organisation, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer the gift of self and to establish solidarity between people.”

“The centrality of the kerygma (the announcement) calls for stressing those elements which are most needed today: it has to express God’s saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part;

it should not impose the truth, but appeal to freedom;

it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical.

All this demands on the part of the evangeliser certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental.” (EG 165)

3. Announcing the kerygma implies social consequences: “Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. [...] The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. (EG 180)

4. In our announcing we should avoid a “vain sacralisation of our own culture” (EG 117) in order not to impose our culture on the other but to truly evangelise the culture of the other.

5. In order to do this we need a contemplative spirit: “we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realise 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.” (EG 264)

We announce that fraternity can be lived every day there where “the poor teach us to read the gospel.” In our everyday life we also meet our “nearest neighbour”: our family, our friends, our colleagues at work and those we come in contact with in our life. Since two thousand years ago right up to our times, the memory of our martyrs who have shed their blood onto our world challenges us. Moreover it is because of this memory that we announce that we have a dream which we neither want nor can renounce; a dream of a world more just and more united, without armaments, without xenophobia, without judgement, more equitable and more fraternal, as it was dreamed by those who gave their lives for these utopias.

Walking together with hope

The main thrust of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the roadmap for the Church in our times, is to ‘go out’, share the joy of the Gospel, and avoid the temptation of pessimism: “Let us not be robbed of our hope” (EG 86). Thus, in the challenging contexts we face, “Our faith is challenged to discern how wine can come from water and how wheat can grow in the midst of weeds.” (EG 84). We are challenged not to lose the sense of boldness (*parrhesia*): “One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses’. Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents in the midst of weeds.” (EG 85). Thus hope sets us on a journey as we experience the desert: “Yet ‘it is starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us men and women. In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today’s world there are innumerable

signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, by the example of their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive.⁶ In these situations we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink.” (EG 86).

This joyful and courageous hope enables us to give reason for our hope not with pointed finger and condemnation, “not as an enemy who critiques and condemns” but as “men and women of the people” (EG271) seeking the wellbeing of our neighbour and the happiness of others (EG272).

Walking together with hope. Our journey, however, is difficult, costly and painful. In these moments we need to turn to the review of life and, as what happened in Emmaus, analyse from the deepest point of our disappointment (the "We hoped ..."), as well as share the bread together as Jesus did in Emmaus to manifest himself (Lk 24,13-32)..

Sharing the bread today is vital for so many people impoverished by the neoliberal policies that have left millions of brothers and sisters below the poverty line. Sharing bread is also sheltering people fleeing war and persecution, sometimes because of their faith. However, we do not speak only of sharing the bread as food to eat, but also of sharing what nourishes our lives spiritually and reaches us as daily joys: the birth of a new son or grandson, the study begun or finished, the struggle for a salary increase or for better working conditions and their achievement, the declaration that calls for justice against those who commit genocides, the fraternal encounter under a flag, a banner, a common and manifest cry in a quest for justice and freedom for political prisoners, the joy of a brother whose health is restored, a smile to someone who feels lonely, abandoned or depressed... sharing all this is also sharing the bread. In this way, hope grows among us, in our daily fraternal life in which we share and struggle. Only then will we feel and recognise that Jesus is in our midst.

But where do we announce, renounce and denounce? We know from the *Way of Unity* that we should: “*Share the sorrows of the poor, their hopes and their struggle in the search for true freedom.*”

Walking together with hope. This image is full of motion, it prompts us, it sends us to a place... a "utopia", a "good place". Jesus speaks to us again and again about the Kingdom of God, the Guarani people walk in search of an "Earth without evils"... This "utopia" is our criterion of discernment: a world where there is space for all the worlds, where there is life in abundance for all creation.

Perhaps we can ask ourselves about the way in which we are invited to make this journey. In the last verse of the Acts of the Apostles we are told how Paul ended his days, "*proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ **with complete fearlessness and without any hindrance from anyone.***" The penultimate word of this book, a model for every Christian community, is "*parrhesia.*" In many of our Bibles it is translated as "freedom." However, this Greek term has a much richer meaning. It is not only freedom, but also trust, courage, firmness, frankness, audacity... All these qualities have accompanied so many martyrs (witnesses of the love of God) throughout the centuries and made them capable of denouncing, renouncing and announcing...

⁶ Benedict XVI, Homily at Mass for the Opening of the Year of Faith (11 October 2012): AAS 104 (2012), 881.
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What is it that sustains and nourishes our "*parrhesia*"? An outline of an answer can be found in two realities: memory and relations.

The Jewish people are the people of memory... "Do not forget!" "Remember!" Jesus, at the moment of his total surrender, invites us to live washing one another's feet and offering ourselves as food for one another in a sign of belonging and identity. He says, "Do this in memory of me." Going through our personal and communal history, we can see the deviations, the obstacles, the bumps on the road... But above all it reminds us of so many passages full of life, of fruitful surrender. Memory is the place where thankful confidence dwells. "If God had not been on our side..." says the psalmist in the name of those who have experienced the love of God in the paschal dynamic that animates all creation.

Our God is Trinity, He is relation, He is family, He is encounter. Our "*parrhesia*" is nourished in our relations. First of all, the daily and familiar encounter with God (with its uniqueness for each of us) as well as those ties that unite us with others, who encourage us, sustain us, challenge us, These relations accompany us... Mark and Luke describe four men who, finding themselves with a door blocked by the crowd, deploy their creativity by opening the roof of the house and bringing down a paralytic, so that Jesus may heal him. That is the creativity, the "*parrhesia*" of love and bonds: where the doors are blocked, other entrances are invented...

And let us remember Paul's supplication (Eph 6: 19-20): "*Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God's holy people, and pray for me to be given an opportunity to open my mouth and fearlessly (with parrhesia) make known the mystery of the Gospel of which I am an ambassador in chains; pray that in proclaiming it I may speak as fearlessly (with parrhesia) as I ought to.*"

The whole world is in labour, and it is a multiple birth. Every time a chain of oppression breaks, it is as if we give birth and that is how we see a light of hope in the middle of the night. One of the most original contributions in recent decades to the renewal of the Church and of Christian spirituality came from America; this continent haemorrhaging, raped, plundered since colonisation, scandalously full of poor and at the same time of oppressors, which is constantly seeking a path of liberation through the faith of its people. It is the Theology of Liberation, which propels towards listening to the poor and the oppressed and which confronts the issues that affect their lives whilst urging towards sharing the joys and hopes of the simplest.

This spirituality has been misunderstood. "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. But when I ask why the poor have nothing to eat, they insult me and call me a communist," said Dom Helder Camara, Bishop of Recife, Brazil. Similar criticisms are made to Pope Francis for his denunciations about injustice and the irresponsible use and abuse of the planet.

Following the example of America, other continents and other regions of the world have developed theologies that respond to the needs of their peoples and prompt Christians to witness the joy of the Gospel in their own environment.

For reflection and sharing

"Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to

the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.” (Lk 24:21-24)

And on this journey, we ask ourselves: Why do things happen in the world? Do we still have hope?

Let us look within ourselves, within our fraternities, within our countries and continents. What are the signs of hope in our journey?

What we are willing to denounce, renounce and announce?

Let us share with others our searching and our reflections.

Let us build together a spirituality which is alive, courageous, aware and fraternal in the whole world!!

1. Hopelessness, disillusion

- What hopelessness did Charles de Foucauld experience?
- What hopelessness in my life, in my fraternity, in my country?

2. Hope

- How did Charles de Foucauld experience hope?
- What signs of hope do I see in my life, in the life of my fraternity, in my country

3. The audacity to be fearless, to talk freely and frankly

- In what way was Charles de Foucauld fearless? How were his words free and frank?
- And I, do I dare to speak freely and frankly in my fraternity, within the church, in society?

4. Renouncing

- What did Charles de Foucauld renounce?
- What am I asked to renounce today?

5. Denounce

- What did Charles de Foucauld denounce?
- What am I and my fraternity asked to denounce today?

6. Announce

- What did Charles de Foucauld announce?
- How did he announce it?
- What am I and my fraternity, asked to announce today?
- In what manner?