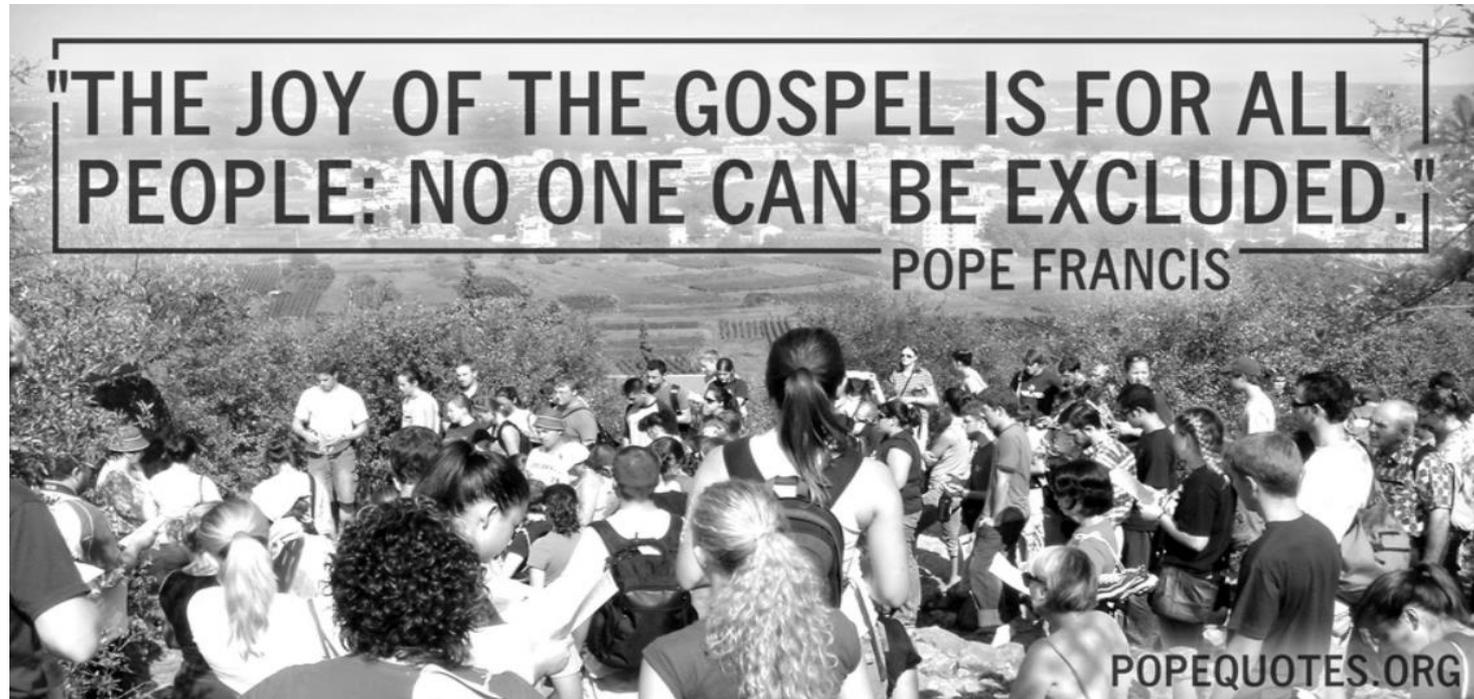


PARISH LEADER'S RETREAT PRESENTATION II 'THE CHURCH AS A WELCOMING COMMUNITY'

From the Documents “Evangelii Gaudium”, “Amoris Laetitia,” and Thoughts and Words of Pope Francis I



Holy Family & St. Anthony Abbott Mission
Open Gate Retreat Center, Williston
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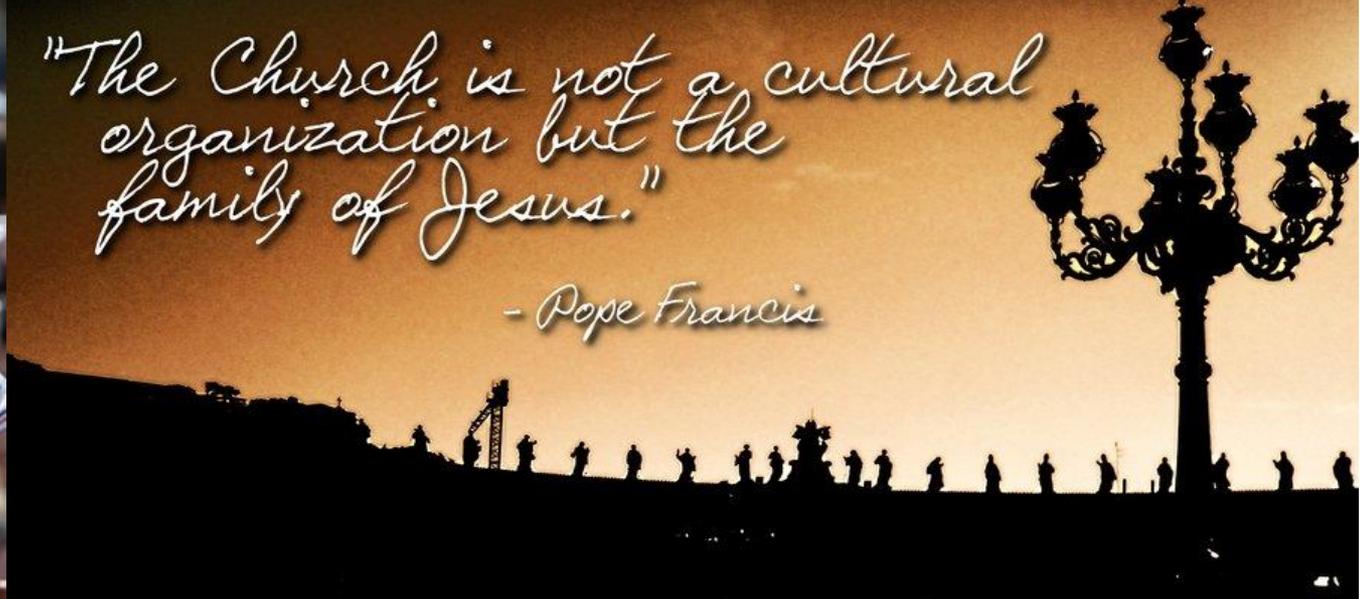
I.) A POINT OF DEPARTURE:

"I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined, and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center, and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.

If something should rightly disturb us, and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light, and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning, and a goal in life.

More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving, and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37; §49)." (Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis)

"A church that lives according to the Gospel must always have its doors open and be a welcoming community, not an exclusive, closed sect.....Churches, parishes, institutions with closed doors must not call themselves a church; they must call themselves museums" (General Audience, St. Peter's Square Sept. 9, 2015.)



II.) A PEOPLE BEING CENTERED IN CHRIST AND IN THE GOSPEL

We need a Church that is fearless, proclaiming the faith, not only with words, but through lives transformed by Christ.” (Evanglii Gaudium)

“You tell us that to love God and neighbor is not something abstract, but profoundly concrete: it means seeing in every person the face of the Lord to be served, to serve him concretely. And you are, dear brothers and sisters, the face of Jesus.” (5/21/13)

“We must be convinced, from our own experience, that a life with Jesus is richer than a life without him. We must have prayerful encounters with our Lord lest we lose heart.” (Evanglii Gaudium)

“God is love”. His is not a sentimental, emotional kind of love but the love of the Father who is the origin of all life, the love of the Son who dies on the Cross and is raised, the love of the Spirit who renews human beings and the world. Thinking that God is love does us so much good, because it teaches us to love, to give ourselves to others as Jesus gave himself to us and walks with us. Jesus walks beside us on the road through life. (5/26/13)

“Nor is the light of faith, joined to the truth of love, extraneous to the material world, for love is always lived out in body and spirit; the light of faith is an incarnate light radiating from the luminous life of Jesus. It also illumines the material world, trusts its inherent order and knows that it calls us to an ever widening path of harmony and understanding.” (6/29/13, #34)

“We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. This is why we evangelize.” (Evanglii Gaudium 266)

“The Eucharist...is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” (Evanglii Gaudium 47)

“He who nourishes himself with faith in Christ, the Living Bread, is driven by his love to give his life for his brothers and sisters, to go out to meet those who are marginalized and despised.” (3/4/15, Focolare)



III.) THE WELCOMING CHURCH AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

These encounters (with Jesus) will propel us into the midst of society, responding to real needs. When we speak of these encounters, we will speak to the deepest yearnings of people's hearts. WE must become a mission! (Evangelii Gaudium)

Evangelization does not take place in a vacuum. Far too many people in the world are living day to day. Our economy is one of exclusion and inequality which breeds violence. The economic problems we face are a human problem. Our goal must be the common good.

The Church itself needs to do more to foster a sense of belonging, focusing on a pastoral approach rather than an administrative one; focusing on the People of God, not the institution of the Church. To do so, pastoral ministers need to be more energetic and bold. They don't need to work harder but do need to work smarter. (Evangelii Gaudium)

Women must be allowed to take greater roles of leadership and Catholics in general need to rise up to the call to evangelize with great joy and enthusiasm, responding to people's thirst for God. Above all, we must stop "warring" with each other in the Church. (Evangelii Gaudium)

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. (Evangelii Gaudium 85)

"We can no longer turn our backs on reality, on our brothers and sisters, on mother earth. It is wrong to turn aside from what is happening all around us, as if certain situations did not exist or have nothing to do with our life. It is not right for us, nor is it even humane to get caught up in the play of a throwaway culture." (Message to Educators, 7/7/15)

"The Christian vocation is first and foremost a call to love, a love which attracts us and draws us out of ourselves, "decentring" us and triggering "an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God" (Deus Caritas Est, 6). (3/29/15)



“Jesus wants to caution us too, today, against the belief that outward observance of the law is enough to make us good Christians. Dangerous as it was then for the Pharisees, so too is it for us to consider ourselves acceptable or, even worse, better than others simply for observing the rules, customs, even though we do not love our neighbor, we are hard of heart, we are arrogant and proud. Literal observance of the precepts is a fruitless exercise which does not change the heart and turn into practical behavior: opening oneself to meet God and his Word in prayer, seeking justice and peace, taking care of the poor, the weak, the downtrodden.” (8/30/15)

“What will Jesus say to open the doors of Heaven to us? “I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was homeless and you gave me a home; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me” (cf. Mt 25:35-36). Jesus exists in humility.” (12/18/15)

Have the courage to go against the tide of this culture of efficiency, this culture of waste. Encountering and welcoming everyone, solidarity – a word that is being hidden by this culture, as if it were a bad word – solidarity and fraternity: these are what make our society truly human. Be servants of communion and of the culture of encounter! . . . Watch over me, Mother, when I am disoriented, and lead me by the hand. May you spur us on to meet our many brothers and sisters who are on the outskirts, who are hungry for God but have no one to proclaim him. May you not force us out of our homes, but encourages us to go out so we may be disciples of the Lord. (Mass with Bishops 7-27-13)

“Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (cf. Mt 25:40). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth.” (11/24/13, no. 209)

“Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence.” (11/24/13, no. 259)

“I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber, but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy” (Evangelii Gaudium)

“ I would also point out that the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (#305).



IV.) THE HOLY SPIRIT MUST FUEL OUR EVANGELIZATION EFFORTS.

“To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds: “The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, even the most complex and inscrutable” (11/24/13, no. 178)

“The Holy Spirit is truly transforming us, and through us he also wants to transform the world in which we live. Let us open the doors to the Spirit, let ourselves be guided by him, and allow God’s constant help to make us new men and women, inspired by the love of God which the Holy Spirit bestows on us!” (4/28/13, Confirmation)

“After Confirmation even, our whole life is an encounter with Jesus: in prayer, when we go to Mass, and when we do good works, when we visit the sick, when we help the poor, when we think of others, when we are not selfish, when we are loving... in these things we always meet Jesus. And the journey of life is precisely this: journeying in order to meet Jesus. “ (12/1/13, Feast of St. Cyril)

““I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, ‘always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street’” (Amoris Laetitia #308).



V.) ON THE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

“Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares” (Amoris Lætitia #30)

“The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church”. (Amoris Lætitia #31)

“it is easy nowadays to confuse genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and everything were possible and permissible. The ideal of marriage, marked by a commitment to exclusivity and stability, is swept aside whenever it proves inconvenient or tiresome. The fear of loneliness and the desire for stability and fidelity exist side by side with a growing fear of entrapment in a relationship that could hamper the achievement of one’s personal goals.” (Amoris Lætitia #34)

It is true that there is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things. Nor it is helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority. What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them. (Amoris Lætitia #35)

“We need a healthy dose of self-criticism. Then too, we often present marriage in such a way that its unitive meaning, its call to grow in love and its ideal of mutual assistance are overshadowed by an almost exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation. Nor have we always provided solid guidance to young married couples, understanding their timetables, their way of thinking and their concrete concerns. At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families”. (Amoris Lætitia #36)

“We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life. We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden. We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.” (Amoris Lætitia #37)

Marriage is firstly an “intimate partnership of life and love” (Amoris Lætitia #80)



CLOSING THOUGHTS:

Pope Francis on Epiphany:

“.....Believers who feel this longing are led by faith to..... go to the peripheries, to the frontiers, to places not yet evangelized, to encounter their Lord. Nor do they do this out of a sense of superiority, but rather as beggars who cannot ignore the eyes of those who for whom the Good News is still uncharted territory” (Epiphany Homily, 1/6/17).

Encountering others entails risk:

“...Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pains and their pleas, with their joys which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. (Evangelii Gaudium 88).

CLOSING EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

REFERENCE & SOURCES:

- “Amoris Laetitia, The Joy of Love” on-line at:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

- “Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel” on-line at:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf

- UNDERSTANDING THE HOLY FATHER’S APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION – EVANGELII GAUDIUM By Joe Paprocki, DMin, © 2013 Loyola Press. All rights reserved.

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- USCCB Pope Francis Quotes by Subject on-line at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/upload/pope-francis-quotes1.pdf>