

Themes for Sermons

WHAT DO WE NEED TO REMEMBER?

- Returning to His Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ left his disciples the following commandment: Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt. 28: 18-20)
- The disciples of Christ began to live according to this commandment after they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read how the Lord increased daily number of those who were to be saved, that is the community grew daily. (Ac. 2: 41-47)
- The missionary character of Christianity is reflected the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (literally: "Good News") Whenever something good happens to someone, they feel the need to share it with others.
- His Beatitude Sviatoslav calls upon every parish of our Church to proclaim Christ's teaching to the world, and to change the world my means of a Christian Spirit. He asks us to be a "spiritual wellspring" for the world, and not to be ashamed of our faith, but to courageously witness to Christ, to defend the Christian Church against those who attempt to harm it.
- In general, we need to ask ourselves this simple question: does my behavior show whether I am a Christian or not? Remember, that there are many people living among us who have left the Church for various reasons, or who do not attend Church because there was no one to ask them: "Come and see!" (Jn. 1: 46).
- Every parish community should be a sign of evangelical joy and life with God. A missionary spirit is precisely manifest in all the parish activities, because when a parish is a sign of God's presence in the world, that parish proclaims the Good News. Today *evangelization* is spoken of in a general manner, which comprises the entire Christian life.
- To be a "vibrant parish" means also to be a "missionary parish" always ready to share the Good News with all, regardless of one's origin or nationality. We are called to be a "light for the world" and "the salt of the earth". Let us work to develop a missionary spirit, let us be open to all and ready to share our spiritual treasure with everyone who desires to encounter Christ, because that is what it means to be a "vibrant parish".

Sermon

Before his Ascension, Jesus Christ gave his apostles this command: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). By these words, Jesus Christ sends his disciples to preach the Good News to the whole world. (see: Eph. 1: 20). The Church was yet unstructured. It is true here was a circle of disciples, but after the resurrection they were overcome by fear and doubt. Under such circumstances, the Church was not able to develop – this began on the day of Pentecost. It was important for the disciples to meet the resurrected One, who noticing their hesitation, repeatedly said: "Peace be with you!" (Jn. 20: 22-23), and also assured them: " behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt. 28:20). In order for them to fulfill their apostolic mission, they needed the gift of the Risen Christ: "'Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.'" (Jn. 20: 22-23).

On the fiftieth day after the resurrection, the apostles along with the Blessed Virgin Mary gathered in an upper room in a house in Jerusalem. This upper room – as though a mother’s womb, was the place from which the Church was born. Among the first disciples, while praying, something new as came about which would eventually encompass the whole world.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the Church is in its essence a missionary Church, and how the missionary activity of the Church lasts from the beginning until the second coming of Jesus Christ. (see the decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church: *Ad gentes*).

The parish may be likened to one small stone comprising the mosaic of the Church. Missionary activity, or evangelization corresponds to every aspect of Church activity, and likewise of the parish. The parish is the place of continual unceasing missionary activity.

Let us review certain aspects of mission in the life of the Church and their relationship.

1. Witness – testimony of the faith

1.1. Jesus Christ is the basis of the Christian faith and the example of preaching.

The Word of God, Jesus Christ, “ the Word became flesh” is the foundation and content of preaching, the aim of which – is the propagation of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ Himself is the Word, the Word to mankind. He entered into the life situation of the human race, and preached in a manner which everyone could understand. The disciples who accepted Jesus teaching, went out into the world to preach the Good News.

1.2. Religion and faith cannot be divided in a person’s life.

On account of the tendency of individualization in today’s society, a person may consider one’s religion to be a private matter, and the Church as unnecessary. However the Church is made up of individuals. For preaching to take place, people need to bear witness to their faith by their way of life. Then it is understandable how Jesus Christ is the “friend of life”. Pope Paul VI said: “A person of our time desires to hear witnesses, rather than teachers, and if he listens to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” Obviously Christian preaching reflects the Church’s teaching, based on Sacred Scripture, however this preaching must also take into account the situation of those to whom it is addressed.

The Second Vatican Council explains that it means to be a Christian in the world today. Preaching, evangelization, needs to touch the joys and hopes, the sorrow and worries of contemporary people (see: Constitution on the Church in the world today).

1.3. Every Christian – is empowered through Baptism and Confirmation – and has the right and obligation to preach. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 10).

One who preaches the Gospel, must first of all listen to the Word, since faith comes from hearing. (see: Rom. 10:17). Only that which we have, we can entrust to others.

1.4. Preaching – Evangelization is the union between world and deed: witness to the Word.

Witness to the faith should be manifest in every person or in a group of people – in classrooms, in the places of work, in politics, in economics ... Christians on account of their faith should be the “Fifth Gospel” in the world, that is be truly holy. Contemporary society needs holy doctors, teachers, politicians and businessmen ...

The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar says: “Holiness is the living and true commentary on the Gospel”. Here we particularly recall the martyrs, especially those of the XX century, who sealed their preaching with their own blood.

1.5 Various means of spreading the faith.

- Preaching
- Spiritual direction
- Missions (for example in the style of the Redemptorists), retreats
- Presentations in the mass media
- Catechetical instruction on various levels

Preaching – evangelization belongs to the very nature of the life of the Church and parish. Let us see how it is related to diakonia and koinonia.

2. Diakonia

The history of God and humanity can be traced out as diakonia. The revelation of God in the Old Testament (WHWH – I am the One who Is) shows that God is “gracious”, “all powerful”, “all-knowing”. God stands alongside humanity, He is faithful, freeing from captivity and oppression. This finds profound expression in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In Him is manifest a unity of preaching, healing, and forgiveness. From this it follows that caring for those in need lies at the center of Christian social service.

Werenfred von Straaten says: “The essence of my vocation is to wipe the tears from where God weeps. God is not in heaven, residing in eternal light and glory. God weeps on earth. The tears of those in need are the tears of Jesus and the tears of Jesus are the tears of God. God weeps in the needy and suffering people of our time. We cannot love God until we wipe away their tears.”

3. Koinonia

In the biblical sense, *koinonia* – is the relationship among those called to God (to Jesus Christ), and the community of all Christians. The Christian (parish) community exists on account of the fact that every member is called and accepted by God. Without the foundation of faith, such a community would not be able to exist. Likewise there would be no liturgical services or the administration of the sacraments.

Koinonia is evident (perceptible) in various forms of political-social service, when dealing with the conditions of the needy. (weak - unfortunate).

The union between humanity and God’s love is expressed in communal prayer, in the liturgical services. The Eucharist is the manifestation unity among the various churches in the bosom of the Universal Church.

The Divine Liturgy should not simply end with the conclusion of the service in Church. “So he gave orders to have them sit down in groups on the green grass” (Mk. 6: 39). The parish community is the place where people grow in faith, and share their lives together. Here everyone can speak their peace. The Sunday Liturgy should be have a continuation in the family, such as a family dinner at the supper table.

Who is to be the (carrier) one responsible for evangelization in the parish? Usually everyone who makes up the community in respect to their ability. An ancient legend relates how the devil asks Jesus not to die on the cross, since who would be the one to preach and heal people here on earth. Jesus replies: “I have called Peter, John and others.” To which the devil replies: “But these few people cannot do anything.” To which Jesus says: “They will call others, and these others as well, so that the school will grow.” The devil insisted: “And what if they wish to disagree (quarrel)?

Isn't this taking a chance?" To which Jesus replied: "Yes, this is taking a great chance, but I do not have any other plan!"

This significant outline of God's manner of teaching humanity shows how God has confidence in the human race. The task of humanity – is to thankfully accept God's trust and to justify this trust by becoming the "salt of the earth ... the light of the world" (Mt. 5: 13-14).