

HOW WE SHOULD PREACH CHRIST TO THE NATIONS

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Homily of the 6th Sunday of Easter, May 29, 2011
Acts 8:5-8, 14-17, Ps. 65, 1 Ped. 3:15-18, John 14:15-21

“Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ” (Acts 8:5).

Here we see that the deacon Philip went to a city of Samaria, preached Christ to the Samaritans, and baptized many of them. Later Peter and John “came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit ... Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15, 17). After this, Philip went to the desert and preached Christ to an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27), and after that, “Philip was found at Azotus, and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:40). We see Philip’s great zeal in preaching Christ to those who did not know or believe in him. We see this time and time again in the New Testament, especially in the journeys of St. Paul. What a contrast there is between this wonderful spirit of evangelization and the spirit of some today who see no need or point in preaching Christ to Hindus and Buddhists, for example. If one has received this gift of preaching the gospel to those who do not know Christ, then this is his job, duty, and work. It is his mission, and it is of the greatest importance that he do it if it is possible to do. It is God’s will and plan that missionaries be sent out to preach Christ to those who do not yet know him.

The apostles and their successors received the gift of the Holy Spirit precisely for this purpose, to be his witnesses in Samaria, in the desert, and in all parts of the world. This is what Jesus told his apostles, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This is the missionary vocation, namely to bring Christ to the world. This is what St. Paul did in place after place, as in Corinth for example. “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus” (1 Cor. 18:5). Apollos did the same, “for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus” (Acts 18:28).

And what did they preach? They preached the death of Christ on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins, repentance, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of

Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, obedience to the will of God, and the indwelling of the Father and the Son in the hearts of those who believe in Christ, love him, and obey him. We too should preach today in this same way to those who do not know Christ. Christ has sent us too to preach this same message of salvation to all. Christ came for planet Earth, for the whole world, and he has sent us into the world to preach this message of salvation in his name.

From where then does the idea of some come that this is no longer necessary? It does not come for the New Testament. It does not come from the revelation of God or from the teaching of the Church, nor does it come from Vatican II, which, on the contrary, reaffirmed that this is indeed the mission of the Church today. This idea that we no longer have to preach Christ to those who do not know him comes either from their own heads, or from the world, or from the devil. It is an idea that is destructive of the mission of the Church, and that should be rejected by every true Christian.

St. Peter gives us an example today of how he preaches Christ. He says, "Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). It is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, offered only once, that redeems us from our sins and from their punishment. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). Because of his sacrifice, we receive the forgiveness of our sins, for he suffered their just and necessary punishment on the cross for us instead of us. To receive this forgiveness, we have to repent and believe in Christ, invoking the merits of his death on the cross. Then we will also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who unites us to God and rejoices our heart. This Spirit also gives us the power and the zeal to preach Christ to nonbelievers for their salvation. In his first sermon, St. Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Those who mock preaching Christ to nonbelievers and baptizing them should read their Bible and realize that God has revealed to us that it is his will that we preach Christ and try to convert and baptize nonbelievers, respecting their human freedom of course. In mocking this, they mock Christianity itself and God's revelation in the Bible. To preach the gospel and baptize is the missionary vocation in its purest form.

The sacrifice of Christ is what saves us, when we put our faith in him. "He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of

himself" (Heb. 9:26). "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

Through Jesus Christ, we receive from the Father the gift of the Holy Spirit to unite us to God in love and to rejoice our heart. Truly, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). The Holy Spirit also gives us also the courage to preach the salvation that is in Christ to those who still do not know him.

Christ himself also comes to dwell within us when we believe in him and obey his will. He said, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). To have him dwelling within us like this, rejoicing and strengthening us, we have to do his will and obey his commandments, as he said, especially his first and most important commandment, which is to love God with our whole being, heart, soul, mind, will, time, and strength (cf. Mark 12:30). We do this by living only for God and renouncing all that could divide our heart.

It is monks who do this most completely, living without wife or family, and without traveling. They fast and avoid delicacies and succulent food, and they renounce visits to friends and family. They also renounce television, radio, and movies, to live only for God with a mind and heart that is not clogged with other things. The more we can live like monks, the more will we live only for God with all our heart, with an undivided heart in our love for him; and hence, since we are obeying him so completely, the more richly will he dwell within us. He will be all the more the source of our life and joy. Indeed because he lives, we will live. "Because I live, you will live also," he says today (John 14:19). This is the mystery that we live in Christ, and that we preach. This is how we are to preach Christ to the nations.