

## *Evangelii Gaudium Paragraphs 275-283*

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The mysterious working of the risen Christ and his Spirit

275. In the second chapter, we reflected on that lack of deep spirituality which turns into pessimism, fatalism, and mistrust. Some people do not commit themselves to mission because they think that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort. They think: "Why should I deny myself my comforts and pleasures if I won't see any significant result?" This attitude makes it impossible to be a missionary. It is only a malicious excuse for remaining caught up in comfort, laziness, vague dissatisfaction and empty selfishness. It is a self-destructive attitude, for "man cannot live without hope: life would become meaningless and unbearable".<sup>[211]</sup> If we think that things are not going to change, we need to recall that Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty. Jesus Christ truly lives. Put another way, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). The Gospel tells us that when the first disciples went forth to preach, "the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message" (Mk 16:20). The same thing happens today. We are invited to discover this, to experience it. Christ, risen and glorified, is the wellspring of our hope, and he will not deprive us of the help we need to carry out the mission which he has entrusted to us.

276. Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet

invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.

277. At the same time, new difficulties are constantly surfacing: experiences of failure and the human weaknesses which bring so much pain. We all know from experience that sometimes a task does not bring the satisfaction we seek, results are few and changes are slow, and we are tempted to grow weary. Yet lowering our arms momentarily out of weariness is not the same as lowering them for good, overcome by chronic discontent and by a listlessness that parches the soul. It also happens that our hearts can tire of the struggle because in the end we are caught up in ourselves, in a careerism which thirsts for recognition, applause, rewards and status. In this case we do not lower our arms, but we no longer grasp what we seek, the resurrection is not there. In cases like these, the Gospel, the most beautiful message that this world can offer, is buried under a pile of excuses.

278. Faith also means believing in God, believing that he truly loves us, that he is alive, that he is mysteriously capable of intervening, that he does not abandon us and that he brings good out of evil by his power and his infinite creativity. It means believing that he marches triumphantly in history with those who "are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev 17:14). Let us believe the Gospel when it tells us that the kingdom of God is already present in this world and is growing, here and there, and in different ways: like the small seed which grows into a great tree (cf. Mt 13:31-32), like the measure of leaven that makes the dough rise (cf. Mt 13:33) and like the good seed that grows amid the weeds (cf. Mt 13, 24-30) and can always pleasantly

surprise us. The kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ's resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope!

279. Because we do not always see these seeds growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). This certainty is often called "a sense of mystery". It involves knowing with certitude that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit (cf. Jn 15:5). This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable. We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force. Sometimes it seems that our work is fruitless, but mission is not like a business transaction or investment, or even a humanitarian activity. It is not a show where we count how many people come as a result of our publicity; it is something much deeper, which escapes all measurement. It may be that the Lord uses our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world which we will never visit. The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment. Let us keep marching forward; let us give him everything, allowing him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time.

280. Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is he who "helps us in our weakness" (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour. It is true that this trust in the unseen can cause us to feel disoriented: it is like being plunged into the deep and not knowing what we will find. I myself have frequently experienced this. Yet there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!

#### The missionary power of intercessory prayer

281. One form of prayer moves us particularly to take up the task of evangelization and to seek the good of others: it is the prayer of intercession. Let us peer for a moment into the heart of Saint Paul, to see what his prayer was like. It was full of people: "...I constantly pray with you in every one of my prayers for all of you... because I hold you in my heart" (Phil 1:4, 7). Here we see that intercessory prayer does not divert us from true contemplation, since authentic contemplation always has a place for others.

282. This attitude becomes a prayer of gratitude to God for others. "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you" (Rom 1:8). It is constant thankfulness: "I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:4); "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you" (Phil 1:3). Far from being suspicious, negative and despairing, it is a spiritual gaze born of deep faith

which acknowledges what God is doing in the lives of others. At the same time, it is the gratitude which flows from a heart attentive to others. When evangelizers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open; freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others.

283. The great men and women of God were great intercessors. Intercession is like "a leaven in the heart of the Trinity". It is a way of penetrating the Father's heart and discovering new dimensions which can shed light on concrete situations and change them. We can say that God's heart is touched by our intercession, yet in reality he is always there first. What our intercession achieves is that his power, his love and his faithfulness are shown ever more clearly in the midst of the people.