

Archbishop Lori's Remarks: "The Distinctive Gift of Consecrated Life for the New Evangelization"

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Let me begin with a word of thanks on behalf of the whole local Church that I am privileged to serve, the Archdiocese of Baltimore. I am most grateful for the presence and ministry of the Capuchins at St. Ambrose in Park Heights and Our Lady of the Mountains in Cumberland. My gratitude for your ministry includes the need of this local church for priests. Your presence in these parishes helps me deploy Archdiocesan priests elsewhere, in parishes that otherwise would not have the fulltime services of a priest.

There is, however, a more profound reason for my gratitude and it goes to the heart of the remarks I wish to share with you this morning. As a bishop, I am grateful for *who you are* as Capuchin Franciscan Friars and thus, for the distinctive gifts you bring to the Church's mission of evangelization. For your charism, spirituality, and way of life, which are deeply rooted in the Gospel, contribute in many different ways to the Church's mission of evangelization and it is on these distinctive gifts that you bring to mission that I shall speak. In addressing this theme, however, I know I speak as something of an outsider. Unlike the Holy Father and many of my brother bishops, I am not a member of a religious institute, or to put it another way, I am not a member of the "regular" clergy. So I guess that means I'm a member of the "irregular" clergy! Anyway, Fr. Betz, it was nice of you to invite me!

Let me not hesitate, however, to transform an apparent deficit into an asset. Precisely because I am *not* a Capuchin Franciscan, I bring a certain perspective to the table, an ability to look at you at a distance. And, as long as I am wise enough not to don rose-colored glasses, my perspective on your religious consecration and

pastoral service may have value. This comment, however, leads me to make a distinction: It is one thing to have a wildly optimistic outlook on human nature and thus an unrealistic assessment of Church structures that are largely made up of flawed human beings. It is quite another thing to trust the workings of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Among the works of the Spirit is the gift of consecrated life and the charisms that the Spirit freely distributes in the life of the Church. If we are “led by the Spirit” and if we “follow the Spirit” (Rom. 8:14), our sites are not raised in unrealistic ways that glorify us, rather than God. Rather, we peer, as St. James teaches, “into the perfect law of freedom” (Jas. 1:25), so as to recoup and live, as far as possible, the ideals, the holy excellence, that first attracted us to the priesthood and religious life. At the outset, then, let us distinguish between untrammelled optimism pursued in a Pelagian manner and those ideals toward which God’s grace draws us.

To shed some light on the distinctive gifts you bring to the new evangelization, I would like to reflect a bit on what this “term of art” means in the life of the Church. To tell the truth, I don’t think it has an entirely happy history. Even though the II Vatican Council was largely all about proclaiming afresh the Gospel in contemporary times and in varied cultures, and even though every Pope since the Council has made evangelization a centerpiece of his papal magisterium, some still say that they don’t know what the term “evangelization” means and still less how to engage in it. Over the years, I’ve been told that evangelization is “Protestant” terminology as if that reason alone were sufficient for excising it from our vocabulary. More often than not, however, it is regarded as something unattainable. Some think that evangelization-talk is simply too idealistic, especially in distressed settings like the inner-city. Others claim that they weren’t formed by the seminary to be evangelizers but rather parish managers whose main job really is maintenance, not mission. Still others see evangelization as requiring more exertion than their years or health permit. And let us not forget that old demon, ennui, that lack of zeal, which, over time, can overtake priests, religious, and lay ecclesial ministers.

Thank goodness this Assembly takes place in the afterglow of Pentecost! That Solemnity makes it clear that bearing witness to the Risen Lord and spreading the Good News are only possible by the gift of the Spirit. When the Spirit came upon the apostles and their companions gathered for prayer, they were transformed into wise,

courageous, and loving witnesses to the Risen Lord. In short, the Holy Spirit is the source of the Church's mission of evangelization. Thus this mission is not the product of human planning or of esoteric knowledge... (that which Pope Francis identifies as Gnosticism). Nor is it the product of our goodwill, energy, and effort, (that which Pope Francis identifies as Pelagianism). Rather, as Pope Francis reminds us in his exhortation, *Rejoice and Be Glad*, holiness and fruit of holiness, namely, evangelization, are the gift of the Spirit by whom we are connected to Jesus & his merciful love, like branches to the vine.

Let me pause on the tendency to think of evangelization as a formula or a program. Isn't that the American way? Isn't that how we've largely gone about the renewal? When we think about evangelization, we first ask what program is to be used with little or no thought to grassroots evangelization, *mano a mano*, if I may say. So too, the post Vatican II renewal often has been framed as a struggle between liberals and conservatives. In so doing, we wasted a lot of energy, lost a lot of time, and squandered a lot of gifts. What was the renewal that the Council had in mind if not the new evangelization? That is to say, a new and fresh impetus in spreading the Good News, with new ardor and methods, reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. To repeat, evangelization is not the result of mere human effort, nor is it the fruit of ideology, but rather the fruit of holiness – the fruit of a love and a truth that restlessly diffuses itself in word and deed, with a special respect and love for the poor and vulnerable.

In his most recent exhortation, Pope Francis sees evangelization in its many forms as a mission to be embraced by each individual Christian. Each person has a mission in life, or better, each person *is* a mission – for whatever God calls us to do for his Kingdom constitutes our deepest identity. In *Laudato Si* Pope Francis points to the care and respect we owe creation. Surely the degradation of the environment by those who are well-off is a grave injustice that threatens the lives of millions upon millions of people. Thus, we are to care for creation because it is our common home. But creation is also the arena where the Gospel is to be preached and spread so that human beings can be led to their full potential of life and holiness – and in this context the Pope brings to the fore the inspired phrase, “human ecology”. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites us to look at our Church – to look at our individual lives of faith, our parishes, our preaching, our ministries – and to ask

ourselves if we are guilty of just going along to get along. Does he not challenge us, in ways that make us uncomfortable, to go beyond our comfort zones, to undergo ourselves a missionary conversion, to preach in an attractive missionary key, and to foment in the grace of the Spirit missionary conversion in our parishes and in all the visible structures of the Church? Here Pope Francis is not saying anything that his predecessors did not say but he's saying it so clearly and emphatically that we can scarcely miss his meaning!

Evangelization, then, is all about encountering Christ, falling deeply in love with him and sharing that love of his which irradiates not only our hearts but the lives of those around us. It is rooted in our living the Beatitudes, not as a strict moral code, but rather as a way of being formed by the Spirit in the likeness of Christ. For when the living image of Christ is formed in us and in our communities, when a fresh spiritual way of thinking informs our preaching and our witness as well as our very way of life as ministers of the Gospel – our parish communities take on a new attractiveness; and people who are in these communities find the strength, courage, and wisdom to help make their parishes missionary centers that are unafraid of the culture and unafraid of rejection and even persecution. For love casts out fear and imparts a peace the world cannot give. Thus an evangelizing community isn't afraid to touch the wounds of human existence; it seeks to be, not a resort, but a field hospital in the midst of our culture. An evangelizing community does not hesitate to walk with others, including those whose life-experience is very different from our own. Holiness rooted in Word and Sacrament, in small group prayer, in intensive formation coupled with love for and engagement with the poor – all this is what opens the door to the Holy Spirit who in Christ Jesus drives forward the mission of evangelization with ourselves as his instruments, that is to say, his disciples and indeed his friends.

The Franciscan Charism

I hope my thumbnail sketch of the new evangelization hints at what I'll say about the distinctive gifts you bring as Capuchin Franciscans to this fundamental mission that constitutes the Church's deepest identity. And to tell the truth, it is hard for me to imagine a charism more connatural to the new evangelization than the Gospel form of life which the Spirit of the Lord Jesus imparted to the Seraphic Father Francis. For, as I understand it, the Franciscan charism is all wrapped up in Francis' Spirit-

driven desire to live ‘according to the form of the Gospel’, to follow the Crucified Lord in his poverty and humility.

Missionary Conversion: Encountering Christ in the Poor

But let us begin where Francis of Assisi began – his own conversion. The Spirit of the Lord interrupted Francis’ comfortable style of life by an encounter with a leper who brought him face to face with human suffering and with utter poverty. In that leper, Francis met Jesus who assumed our flesh in its frailty and experienced the depth of our human poverty. In meeting a man whose experience was utterly different than his own, Francis opened his heart to the poor and the crucified Christ. Thus he was led beyond the confines of a self-contented life to the peripheries, as Pope Francis says, where the outcasts of society were found: the poor and the sick, especially the lepers. In leaving behind his former way of life, Francis discovered in those he previously shunned newness of life and joy. Not only were his values overturned; his world was turned upside down!

In the same way, Pope Francis emphasizes that the new evangelization entails encountering Christ, not as a museum piece, not as an abstraction, not as the bearer of an ideological message or a strict moral code – but rather the Christ who is alive, the Christ who is poor and crucified, the Christ who is of the poor and for the poor. Are there many neighborhoods more distressed than Park Heights? Are there counties in the State of Maryland more underserved than Allegany? St. Francis’ conversion through his encounter with an outcast is a good model for what missionary conversion means in all our parishes but especially in parishes where the poor are with us in abundance. How many people suffering in the midst of urban or rural poverty lack “the look of love that they crave” (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 18).

Embracing the poor is not to be done *only after* a conversion has occurred; rather, it is a pathway to our missionary conversion as individuals and communities. In this context, the beauty of your *evangelical counsel of poverty* shines forth. It is difficult for any of us to see the face of Christ so long as we are attached to material possessions and find in them not only comfort but also the measure of our worth. St. Francis found joy in a poverty rooted in the Lord’s own poverty and his trustful dependence upon the Lord made him powerful in his witness to Jesus. Indeed, there

is no other way to embrace the Cross except in poverty; we are to testify that we have no other wealth except in Jesus. So your evangelical counsel of poverty is a proclamation for the rest of us that, if we would evangelize, we must at least strive to be poor in spirit and that we must devote ourselves to the service of the poor.

A Way of Life Rooted in Mission

Of course, Francis' encounter with the leper was the beginning, not the end. His moment of profound conversion opened his heart to the gift of the Spirit. And what the Spirit imparted to him was not merely new insight into religious life but rather into a wholly new form of consecrated life in the heart of the Church. For, in leaving behind his comfortable surroundings, Francis did not go into a monastery but was instead led by the Spirit to seek a new, itinerant form of life, deeply in accord with the Gospel. This was not the result of a strategic plan or wise advice. Rather, it was a gift given him by the "God of Surprises", as Pope Francis likes to say. While the charism and the form of life it portended unfolded over time, it seems clear that Francis and his followers were, from the start, on mission. The mission of bearing witness to the poor and crucified Christ was not an add-on but rather was, in a sense, the deepest identity of Francis's life as well as the Order that, in its various iterations, bears his name. In a society where many lived an outwardly Christian life but inwardly were indifferent to Christ & the Gospel, namely, that of the 13th century, St. Francis and his followers lived & practiced what we call "the new evangelization".

As they came to adopt an itinerant form of life Francis and his companions offered something that was at once radically new and yet radically faithful to the Gospel. Walking from place to place 'as pilgrims and as strangers', they were messengers of the Gospel, witnesses to the poor and crucified Christ; they were messengers of the goodness of creation as the common home of all and as the place of encounter with Lord in the Church. Thus did Francis and his followers encounter people in their everyday lives. Like the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus, they walked with them and along the way Francis et al. opened their minds to the Scriptures. To use Pope Francis' terminology, these friars 'accompanied' others on their journey, including hardened sinners and adherents to the heresies of the day. Not everyone was converted but everyone was loved and cared for. Through the centuries, the form of

Franciscan itinerancy has necessarily changed but the distinction between your way of life and monastic styles has been maintained.

In my view, it's important not to lose sight of this inheritance from Father Francis. For so often the mission of evangelization fails because the Church is perceived as distant from the concerns of everyday people. Its preaching is sometimes abstract and its pastoral care is sometimes programmatic. As a result, many do not feel the presence of the Christ walking with them in their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears. Feeling alone in their challenges, they turn elsewhere for solace, often with sad results. That is why Pope Francis tells us to accompany not only our active parishioners but indeed those who are suffering, alienated, or searching. No doubt you have already reflected on the deep, inner compatibility of your itinerant style of life and Pope Francis' teaching on "accompaniment"; may I be so bold as to urge you to continue along that path. And along the way, may you lead us all to Christ, poor, humble, and crucified!

Rooted in the Word of God

At the heart of Francis' spirituality was an intense focus on the Word of God as expressed in the Gospels placed in his hands by the Church. In the pages of the Gospels Francis encountered the poor and crucified Christ just as he encountered Christ in the leper and in the poor. St. Francis absorbed the Gospels not as a fundamentalist might do; rather, in the Holy Spirit, his heart was completely open to the Lord and to his teaching, and in that same Spirit his whole life was conformed to Christ. The Lord's teachings in the Gospel, he understood, were meant for him and indeed for the times in which he lived. Both the Spirit and the Word of God led St. Francis to Christ.

This insight is so important for the Church's mission in our own day. Throughout the Easter season, the Acts of the Apostles were read in churches and oratories all over the world. In these readings, St. Luke describes how, through the Holy Spirit, the saving power of the Risen Lord was at work in the Apostles as well as in their co-workers and in the earliest Christian communities. Isn't it the case, however, that we find much to admire in these readings but often we find in them so little to imitate! We admire what the Apostles did but confine it to their times, not imagining that it can and should happen in ours. In other words, we inject an unholy distance

between ourselves and the Scriptures: it was fine for the Apostles to do what they did but that's not for us. Thus, we settle into an institutional form of life that "tames" the Word of God, and here every bishop, myself included, needs to examine his conscience.

For, at times, the mechanics of church administration crowds out the energy and boldness that we see in apostolic preaching, worship, service.

In reflecting on how St. Francis' spirituality was rooted in the Word of God there is another point not to be overlooked, and it's this: St. Francis understood that the Word of God is addressed not to isolated individuals but indeed to the community. He further saw that the Word of God can be adequately heard and responded to only in community, only in the brotherhood and sisterhood of the Order. It's not so much that the friars engaged in joint sessions of biblical exegesis. Rather, they first allowed the light of the Gospels to shine upon themselves. In Chapter they asked, as you ask, how in fact they lived according to the Gospels and how the rough and tumble of daily ministry and the experience of life tempered the living of the Gospel, for weal or for woe. They reflected, as you reflect, on whether and how they followed the poor and crucified Lord precisely in their *fraternal* relationships. Dear brothers, if we can live the Gospel in our relationships with our confreres, we are surely better equipped to live the Gospel with and for our people! When brethren dwell as one, when a religious community or a parish is united, the Gospel is rendered more believable. After all, Jesus prayed for unity among his followers - 'that the world may believe'. To sum up, in viewing themselves in the light of God's Word, St. Francis and his followers saw themselves more clearly and in seeing themselves more clearly they also came to understand the Word of God itself more deeply and could proclaim the Word more effectively.

Let me link this to the new evangelization. Whatever else evangelization may be, it is not a game of solitaire! It is not the sole preserve of the pastor or of a pastoral associate or of a department in a chancery office or of the experts. Evangelization is *the Church's* deepest identity and, as a result, it is the mission of the entire community, with the laity serving as the lead agents, as St. John Paul II taught in *Christifideles laici*. And while in many parishes it's the clergy who have been given the deepest biblical and theological formation, nonetheless the understanding of

Scripture, with due respect for the Magisterium, is something that must engage the whole of the community.

The community must see itself in the light of the Word of God and in seeing itself in that light, come to understand the Word itself more profoundly.

In a sense, this is what the Archdiocese of Baltimore is trying to do in asking parishes to form pastoral planning teams that reflect prayerfully on six core mission priorities drawn from the Gospels, namely: liturgy, welcome, encounter, accompaniment, sending, and mission support. In reflecting on these key elements of an evangelizing community, parish leadership has the opportunity to see the parish in the light of God's Word and thus to understand the Word itself more profoundly, that is to say, to see more clearly how the Gospels speak and apply to the life of the parish. In this way, readings from the Acts of the Apostles are no longer seen as "exploits from the past" but rather as an inspiration and a guide for the present. This is how a parish can become a community shaped by the Gospel itself.

As Capuchins living in community, you have the opportunity to reflect on God's Word in a communal setting and what a benefit that is. As a diocesan priest, before I attempt to preach, I do indeed pray over the Word and I spend time huddled with books, articles, and, of course, my trusty laptop. But no one of us is so capacious as to understand God's Word by oneself let alone the needs of the community to which we are addressing God's Word, (as Pope Francis instructs us to do in *Evangelii Gaudium*). That is why I continually shop out my homilies to my coworkers, lay and clerical, often bombarding them with two or three different homilies on any given weekend. Sometimes they remind me that my spelling and grammar need improvement but they also remind me of things I forgot to say or said poorly. Still, I often think how much better it would be if I spent time with others in prayer and conversation before attempting to preach, as indeed some priests in the Archdiocese do. Because you live and pray together, I would imagine you have some opportunity to reflect together on the Word as you prepare to preach.

Forming Missionary Disciples

In forming his community according to the Gospels, St. Francis did not neglect the

work of forming individual disciples. On the contrary, Francis paid great attention to this facet of his spirituality. Basing his instruction on the sower and the seed, Francis, somewhere in his *Earlier Rule*, applied his spirituality of the Word to the individual soul, to the life of the individual disciple. Francis underlined the importance of forming disciples whose hearts are truly receptive to the Word of God, whose hearts are that 'good soil' where God's Word takes root, matures, and bears the abundant harvest of evangelization. St. Francis sought to form disciples whose hearts are open to the Holy Spirit and thus also to the living Word of God as found in the Gospels. Both the Spirit and the Word inspire and transform the heart such that the disciple is conformed to the person of Christ in all things. Francis' approach to disciple-making was thus consistent with his own path to discipleship. He seeks to help those who would follow the Lord to leave behind the comfort of a self-satisfied life and to embrace rather the Lord, such that he becomes the center of one's life. This includes an emphasis on repentance and on doing penance both of which were very much a part of St. Francis' spirituality. And as one's heart becomes contrite and is purified, that person is equipped to bring the Lord to the margins, the peripheries.

So also with your own lives as individual friars and members of your community. As individual disciples you are called to an evangelical form of life. Already I've mentioned poverty but here I'll mention the counsels of chastity and obedience by which your minds, your hearts, your will, and your bodies are conformed to Christ who was himself 'poor, chaste, and obedient'. Many are the complications in understanding and living the counsels yet when they are lived with simplicity and joy, they make one's whole life a mission, a living proclamation of Christ and when a whole community unites in such a proclamation, the effect is powerful indeed!

In forming missionary disciples, we are not attempting to make of them clerics, either of the regular or the secular variety. Rather, we are seeking, in God's grace, to elicit from them a wholehearted response of love to the poor and crucified Christ. Recognizing the charisms, the gifts of the Spirit, distributed among the laity, we are seeking to enable them to claim and live their baptismal priesthood and to do so by witnessing to God's love in a world that still resists redemption. Of course, we must form them in the faith of the Church and help them to be competent in responding to people's questions and concerns and yes, there are techniques that pastoral practice has perfected - but mostly people are looking for authentic witnesses, just as Bl.

Pope Paul VI said!

A Eucharistic Spirituality

St. Francis love of God's Word and his openness to the Holy Spirit led him to a warm and deep devotion to the Holy Eucharist. Commentators on St. Francis tell us that he connected both the Word and the Eucharist with the activity of the Spirit of the Lord: the Eucharist is 'sanctified by the words of the Lord' and it is 'the Spirit of the Lord Who lives in his faithful who receive the most holy Body and Blood of the Lord.' Just as Francis 'heard' Jesus speak in the Word of God, so too Francis 'saw' Jesus in the Eucharist, in a way that was comparable to the experience of the Apostles. In the Eucharist St. Francis encountered, *he 'saw'* with the eyes of his soul the Christ of the Incarnation, the Christ who walked the earth preaching & healing, the Christ who submitted himself to the Cross, the Christ who rose from the dead. In his Eucharistic spirituality, St. Francis gazed upon the Christ who humbled himself to be among us in flesh and to be among us now.

And it was the Lord's humble Eucharistic presence that shaped how he and his followers were to live and to go on mission. It was from the Eucharist that they derived the inspiration and strength to live according to the Gospel and to bring Jesus outward to others. For St. Francis the Eucharist brimmed with the true presence of Christ so as to take flesh in him and in his followers on their missionary journeys. The humility of the incarnation and the charity of his passion - both of which Francis encountered so clearly in the Eucharist, were always at the forefront of St. Francis' mind and heart. Indeed, he was so conformed to the Christ he heard and saw, that he was privileged to receive the stigmata - he became what he heard, saw, celebrated and received.

Does this not give us new insight into the oft-repeated statement that 'the Eucharist is the source and summit' of the Church's life and mission? Yet this also implies a way of understanding and celebrating the Eucharist such that it is Christ who is at the center of everything that is said and done. It is all too easy for all us as presiders to act, not *in persona Christi*, but rather to become ourselves the lead actors in a sanctuary that functions more as a stage than a place of worship. Recouping the link between liturgy and mission is very much at the heart of the new evangelization and it is my belief that St. Francis' spirituality of the Eucharist is key.

Care for Creation

While St. Francis did not confront contemporary worries over the degradation of the environment and climate change, he did have a deep love of nature and sense of holy wonder about the world which God in his goodness had created. Not surprisingly, Pope Francis frequently cites St. Francis in *Laudato Si*, for St. Francis has contributed mightily to the development of the Church's social teaching on care for our common home. Francis regarded the world as alive with the glory of God. Everywhere he sensed in the cosmos, the presence of Christ and the goodness of God. For him as well the world was something of a quasi-sacrament; after all, it was into this world, in the humility of our flesh, that Christ was born and it is the elements of this world which continue to bear his presence. Thus in his "fraternity" with the created world – he senses how the moon, wind, water, fire, and earth reflect the brilliance of Brother Sun and thus he has a cosmic sense of liturgy and of his mission... the same sort of vision that we find in *Laudato Si*.

For some, *Laudato Si* may seem tangential to the new evangelization but, in fact, it has a very evangelical heart. After all, Pope Francis is pointing out that people do not live in a vacuum and the Gospel is not preached in a vacuum. Rather, the earth is our common home and the Gospel illuminates the beauty and worth of creation as well as the inviolate beauty and worth of the human person. The Gospel message is not only about one's personal salvation but it has to do with our view of who God is and what kind of a world he made. Care for creation, therefore, is a not "side-issue" but forms the whole context for the message of the Gospel and I would say that you, as Franciscans, are able to do this better than anyone else!

So, dear brothers, I'll conclude with this. St. Bonaventure, in his work *The Soul's Journey into God*, describes the six stages through which the Seraphic Father Francis passed on his way to glory. It is a progression beginning with the created world, a renewed sense of his own humanity and that of others, on the way to a warm and loving union with Christ Crucified, indeed a burning love of the crucified that scaled the heights of mysticism. You are traveling along the way outlined by St. Bonaventure and it is my prayer that as you progress from glory to glory your witness to the poor, the humble, and the crucified Lord will bear the good and lasting fruit of the Gospel, in Cumberland, Park Heights, or wherever you minister in the spirit of Francis.

St. Francis of Assisi, pray for us!