

Memorial of Pope St. Paul VI

Homily of Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

May 29, 2024

Today we celebrate the Memorial of Pope Saint Paul VI (1897-1978) who was canonized by Pope Francis on October 14, 2018.

With Pope St. John XXIII, he shepherded and guided the Second Vatican Council.

In the turmoil of 1960s and 1970s, Pope Paul spoke up prophetically for the missionary spirit of the Church in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), the Church's teaching on marriage and the family in his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the Church's true doctrine of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist in *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (1973), and the need in a spirit of Catholic social justice for Development and Progress in the Third World in *Populorum Progressio* (1967).

Pope St. Paul VI was a courageous and prophetic teacher of the truth and a teacher willing to carry the Cross for the mission of the Church and for the entire world. In his suffering for Truth, Pope St. Paul VI drank from the chalice of the suffering of Jesus Christ.

In 2015, at a meeting with families in Manila, Pope Francis described the legacy of Pope St. Paul VI in regard to *Humanae Vitae* and his promotion of marriage and the family: "I think of Blessed Paul VI. At a time when the problem of population growth was being raised, he had the courage to defend openness to life in families. He ... looked at the peoples of the earth and he saw this threat of families being destroyed for lack of children. Paul VI was courageous; he was a good pastor and he warned his flock of the wolves who were coming ... Our world needs good and strong families to overcome these threats! ... Every threat to the family is a threat to society itself. The future of humanity, as Saint John Paul II often said, passes through the family ... Be sanctuaries of respect for life, proclaiming the sacredness of every human life from conception to natural death."¹

¹ Ibid.

In regard to his teaching on global Catholic missiology, Pope St. Paul VI's 1975 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is the fruit of the 1974 Synod on Evangelization (4). It commemorates the tenth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council (2) and hopes to continue motivating "a fresh forward impulse, capable of creating within a Church still more firmly rooted in the undying power and strength of Pentecost a new period of evangelization." (2)

In a section entitled "At the Price of Crucifying Effort," St. Paul VI writes: "This Kingdom and this salvation, which are the key words of Jesus Christ's evangelization, are available to every human being as grace and mercy, and yet at the same time each individual must gain them by force – they belong to the violent, says the Lord, through toil and suffering, through a life lived according to the Gospel, through abnegation and the Cross, through the spirit of the beatitudes. But above all each individual gains them through a total interior renewal which the Gospel calls metanoia; it is a radical conversion, a profound change of mind and heart." (10)

We can see in this passage so much of Pope Francis' own global missiology in *Evangelium Gaudium* which reflects his deep appreciation of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and his emphasis on missionary conversion. All effective evangelization involves conversion and "crucifying effort." All real evangelization passes through the crossbeams of Christ's Cross and the Paschal Mystery, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul VI identifies the relationship between the Church and evangelization: "1)The Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the Twelve; 2)Having been born consequently out of being sent, the Church in her turn is sent by Jesus. The Church remains in the world when the Lord of glory returns to the Father. She remains as a sign – simultaneously obscure and luminous – of a new presence of Jesus, of his departure and of his permanent presence; 3)The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself; 4)The Church is the depository of the Good News to be proclaimed; 5)Having been sent and evangelized, the Church sends out evangelizers." (15)

Once again we see many harmonies with Pope Francis' *Evangelium Gaudium*. Pope Francis states: "The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized." (174)

St. Paul VI emphasizes the unity of witness and teaching: "Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who

is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one (21)...Nevertheless this always remains insufficient, because even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified – what Peter called always having ‘your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have’ – and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.” (22)

St. Paul VI strikes the correct balance. Our Gospel witness must be compelling and raise “irresistible questions” but we must also be willing to proclaim and verbalize our faith.

We have often heard these words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.”

St. Paul VI makes it clear that both the daily witness of life and the daily witness of words are necessary. He states: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” (41)

Pope St. Paul VI emphasizes the unity of truth and charity in evangelization: “Every evangelizer is expected to have a reverence for truth especially since the truth that he studies and communicates is none other than revealed truth and hence, more than any other a sharing in the first truth which is God himself. The preacher of the Gospel will therefore be a person who even at the price of personal renunciation and suffering always seeks the truth that he must transmit to others. He never betrays or hides truth out of a desire to please men, in order to astonish or to shock, nor for the sake of originality or a desire to make an impression. He does not refuse truth. He does not obscure revealed truth by being too idle to search for it, or for the sake of his own comfort, or out of fear. He does not neglect to study it. He serves it generously, without making it serve him (78)...The work of evangelization presupposes in the evangelizer an ever increasing love for those whom he is evangelizing.”(79)

St. Paul VI emphasizes the relationship between the Splendor of Truth, charity and interior life. An evangelizer may have a strong understanding and commitment to the Splendor of Truth but unless that evangelizer has a commitment to the interior

life and a life of charity dedicated to the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, their presentation of the truth may lack humility, prudential judgment, charity and understanding, fortitude and perseverance.

In summary, all the Catholic evangelization documents from *Ad Gentes* (1965) to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) to *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) to *Evangelium Gaudium* (2013) share certain critical themes:

*Jesus Christ is the unique Redeemer of the World, the Alpha and the Omega, the Way, the Truth and the Life for all peoples, cultures, geographies and moments of history.

*The Catholic Church, “the universal sacrament of salvation”, is by its very nature Missionary.

*All Catholics are called to be missionaries and to be constantly open to “missionary conversion.”

*Catholic Evangelization needs us all to be both witnesses and teachers to the faith in the context of our universal baptismal call to Holiness and Mission.

*All Catholic Evangelization is focused on the mysterious power of the Cross of Jesus Christ and all Catholic Evangelization requires in the words of Pope St. Paul VI “crucifying effort.”

*The vibrant living of Matthew 25 and the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy are critical to the witness and progress of Catholic Evangelization.

*Pope St. John Paul II stresses: “The Church proposes. She imposes nothing. Open the Doors to Christ!” A critical component of Catholic Evangelization is the Catholic emphasis on Religious Liberty seen in the Second Vatican Council’s *Declaration on Religious Liberty*.

*Catholic Evangelization and Mission require fidelity to every dimension of Catholic teaching. Catholic Evangelization and Missiology cannot be separated from Catholic Trinitarian Theology, Christology, Pneumatology, Biblical and Fundamental Theology, Dogmatic or Systematic Theology, Sacramental Theology, Moral Theology (including the Gospel of Life and Catholic Social Justice Teaching), Spiritual Theology, Anthropology (the Church’s view of the human person), and Eschatology (the Church view of the Last Things).

*This Fidelity to every dimension of Catholic Teaching and Evangelization is in service of the Ecumenical and Interfaith mission of the Catholic

Church. Ecumenical and Interfaith progress occur when the Catholic Church is open to sharing in a spirit of charity and mercy the objective truths of her teaching.

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us!

Pope St. Paul VI, pray for us!