

“Spirit-filled Evangelisers: Living in the Truth Today”

Your Grace, Archbishop Brown,

Dear Spiritual Directors and Facilitators, one and all,

I. Introduction

Fr Michael Router, director of Adult Faith Formation in the diocese of Kilmore, wrote an article called *Adult Studies in the Catechism* in the February 2014 edition of *Intercom*. In it he said:

So many people fail to grasp the depth, richness and beauty of the Christian faith and as a result they struggle to bear witness to it beyond a stoic and resilient sense of duty. . . . That is why it is so important that more and more adults are given the opportunity of partaking in religious education and finding support in small groups gathered for study, faith sharing and discussion. . . . The Adult Studies in the Catechism course will, I believe, give renewed confidence to people in their ability to be an agent of the new evangelisation in the future.¹

I don't have to quote this to convince anyone here of the merits of Adult Studies in the Catechism. Rather, I wish to note Fr Router's belief that the Holy Spirit is calling us to learn the Catholic faith well, so that we can share it with confidence. For anyone who has explored the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the **“polyphonic relatedness”² of Faith** which is to be found there brings with it a sadness because an all-too-commonplace pigeon-holing of Catholicism in the public sphere today is often advanced as the only permissible narrative of the effect of Roman Rite Catholicism on the Irish psyche. Providentially, however, what we witness today arising from this situation is a great urgency that now moves the hearts of many **to know better so as to proclaim louder** the authentic mystery of faith. For my part, I wish to

¹ Fr Michael Router, “Adult Studies in the Catechism,” *Intercom* (February 2014), 28-29.

² Joseph Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularisation: On Reason and Religion*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 79.

offer you some words of encouragement as you discern the best way forward for that proclamation. I propose to make three points. Firstly, I will look briefly at the correspondence between knowing the faith and studying the faith. Secondly, I will develop this a little further by reflecting on the need to know our faith well so that we may live in the truth today. Finally I wish to take a teaching from Pope Francis which expresses in concrete terms how one may live today as someone knowing and communicating the joy of the Gospel. This is the idea of a “Spirit-filled Evangeliser.”

II. Knowing the Faith and Studying the Faith

Let me begin with a movie. *Jurassic Park*, for anyone who remembers the 1993 cinema sensation, is a tropical theme park off the coast of Costa Rica which is conceived through the cloning of dinosauric DNA with Frog DNA. After a park worker is killed by a Velociraptor, a preview tour of the cloned dinosaur theme park is organised by John Hammond, the founder and *CEO* of bioengineering company *InGen*. The park’s legal team and investors demand that independent experts visit the park and certify it as safe. The group of invited guests are initially euphoric by the sight of living and breathing Brachiosaurus’ and other prehistoric animals. Quite quickly however, things begin to go wrong, particularly when the tour bus malfunctions in front of the Tyrannosaur-Rex paddock. One of those invited on the tour is mathematician Dr Ian Malcolm. Dr Malcolm soon realises the arrogance of what is happening in the name of frenzied profiteering and immoral scientific exploration. He summarises the situation with the following equation:

**God creates Dinosaur –» God destroys Dinosaur –» God creates Man –
» Man destroys God –» man creates Dinosaur –»**

Dr Ellie Sattler (another member of the preview tour) adds, somewhat cryptically, – **Dinosaur eats man; woman inherits the earth.**

Here in this cinematic dramatization is the insight that God is at the heart of human existence. Without the acknowledgement of the presence of the Creator at the heart of creation, created reality slowly devours itself from within. In other words, if we leave God out of the life and times of the human family, then human annihilation quickly becomes a clear and distinct prospect – indeed a prospect almost too horrific to contemplate.

God creates us with a great and powerful freedom but with great power comes great responsibility. Joseph Ratzinger, writing some years ago, made the point that it was as if the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in their deliberations were aware of humanity's great temptation to turn away from God as the source of all that is. In the first instance, Ratzinger observes, the Council desired to deliberate on the liturgy: "adoration comes first. Therefore God comes first."³ He goes on to say that the best way to look at the Council as a whole is from its God-centred perspective:

[. . .] the Second Vatican Council [was not only an ecclesiological Council, but that first and foremost, [it] spoke of God, and this not only within Christianity, but to the world, of the God who is the God of all, who saves all and is accessible to all. . . . [T]he Second Vatican Council clearly wanted to speak of the Church within the discourse on God, to subordinate the discourse on the Church to the discourse on God and to offer an ecclesiology that would be theo-logical in a true sense.⁴

Why, you might well ask, am I bringing this up? In our context here, as people involved in the study of the *Catechism*, a **God-centred understanding of your endeavour** throws up a very important distinction which ought not to be overlooked, namely that "faith" and "the study of faith" are not mutually

³ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Ecclesiology of the Constitution on the Church, 'Lumen gentium'*"; see <https://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdfeccl.htm> (accessed 10 March 2014).

⁴ *Ibid.*

exclusive but neither can they be equated. In other words, faith precedes theology. **To know the contents** of the *Catechism* is to become conscious of the “symphony of faith.”⁵ On the other hand, **to do theology** is to seek “the ‘reasons of faith’ and offer these reasons as a response to those seeking them . . . for [people] cannot become disciples if the truth found in the word of faith is not presented to them (cf. *Rom* 10:14 f.).”⁶ “Theology therefore offers its contribution so that the faith might be communicated.”⁷ For that reason, “the object of theology is the Truth which is the living God and His plan for salvation revealed in Jesus Christ.”⁸ When we keep God at the centre of our work and our study, a necessary correspondence and distinction is perceptible between knowing and studying the faith, between faith and theology, between the truth and the search for truth, between a great symphony and its multiple recitations down through the ages.

The *Catechism*, for its part, presents us with “a statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Church's Magisterium. [John Paul II] declare[d] [the Catechism] to be a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.”⁹ Indeed, he said, “it is offered to all the faithful who wish to deepen their knowledge of the unfathomable riches of salvation (cf. *Eph* 3:8).”¹⁰ Indeed, this majestic vision already opens in the very first sentence of the *Catechism's Prologue*: “God,

⁵ John Paul II, *Fidei depositum*, I.

⁶ CDF, *Donum veritatis*, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹ John Paul II, *Fidei depositum*, III.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life.”¹¹

Hence knowing the faith and studying its contents are different albeit inter-related works of love. Our concern in today’s context is primarily with the former. “Knowing the faith” is a work of love precisely because it empowers us to grow into intentional disciples of Jesus Christ who involve ourselves in the mission of catechesis. And lest anyone here be overpowered or overwhelmed by the scope of their vocation, please remember the words of St Peter who gives us one of the best definitions we have for “knowing the faith” and “the mission to catechise”:

Simply proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have. But give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience, so that those who slander your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their accusations. And if it is the will of God that you should suffer, it is better to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong (1Pet 3:15-17).

III. The Need to Know our Faith well so as to Live in the Truth

This brings me to the second point which I wish to share with you – the need to know the faith well so that we may live in the truth today. It was Pope Benedict who put this up to our generation when he introduced the world to *Youcat*:

You need to know what you believe. You need to know your faith with that same precision with which an IT specialist knows the inner workings of a computer. You need to understand it like a good musician knows the piece he is playing. Yes, you need to be more deeply rooted in the faith than the generation of your parents so that you can engage the challenges and temptations of this time with strength and determination. You need God’s help if your faith is not going to dry up

¹¹ CCC, 1.

like a dewdrop in the sun, if you want to resist the blandishments of consumerism, if your love is not to drown in pornography, if you are not going to betray the weak and leave the vulnerable helpless.¹²

Of course, there are moments of challenge. The work of catechesis is demanding. How indeed is one to not be afraid of this onerous task? How not to become despondent? How not to lose hope in the work of catechesis?

Let me put it in positive terms using the language of rights and responsibilities – terms which carry great currency in our day. **Have we the right to evangelise?** In the Irish context today, this is likely to lead us towards the “new-evangelisation” of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have been initiated in the faith but who have remained unconvinced or unmoved by it? The question is: **have we the right to evangelise in the Irish context? Have we the responsibility to evangelise in the Irish context? If we believe the symphony of faith is a gift and a precious inheritance, what do we do with it? Where can we find contact with those who cannot, for whatever reason, open their hearts to faith’s marvellous melody?**

There is one immediately obvious pressure-point. It is the challenge of an intellectual climate which deems it arrogant to claim to be in the ***possession of the truth***.¹³ From the perspectives of catechesis, it is a matter of the

¹² Benedict XVI, *Foreword to Youcat, the Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Catholic Truth Society: London, 2011), 10. In the style of a true Pastor, Pope Benedict then offers us some necessary words of encouragement, aided by the great Israelite prophet Jeremiah: “If you are now going to apply yourselves zealously to the study of the Catechism, I want to give you one last thing to accompany you: You all know how deeply the community of faith has been wounded recently through the attacks of the evil one, through the penetration of sin itself into the interior, yes, into the heart of the Church. Do not make that an excuse to flee from the face of God! You yourselves are the Body of Christ, the Church! Bring the undiminished fire of your love into this Church whose countenance has so often been disfigured by man. “Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord!” (Rom 12:11). When Israel was at the lowest point in her history, God called for help, not from the great and honoured ones of Israel, but from a young man by the name of Jeremiah. Jeremiah felt overwhelmed: ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth’ (Jer 1:6). But God was not to be deterred: ‘Do not say, “I am only a youth”; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak’ (Jer 1:7).”

¹³ See Joseph Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 68-72. With regard to the intellectual climate within which the Church operates, he says: “Today it has

convinced minorities in the Church striking a balance between their responsibility before the gift of truth and the avoidance of a “spiritual colonialism” that would subject others to “my” culture and “my” ideas. Once again, I wish to invoke Joseph Ratzinger. One of his key theological ideas is the giftedness of truth – **truth, he says, cannot be manufactured, it can only be received as a gift.**

As a response to the dominant view today that recipients of truth are either arrogant or ignorant or both, Ratzinger says one has to distinguish and unpack **the search for truth** that is being critiqued here, as well as the nature of **the truth-claim** made by Christianity:

[. . .] what kind of search is this that can never reach a conclusion? Is it really searching or is it just an unwillingness to find, because what is found is not supposed to exist? . . . Naturally, truth cannot be a possession; my relationship to it must always be a humble acceptance, in the awareness that I myself can endanger it; I accept the knowledge as a gift of which I am unworthy, about which I may not boast, as though it were my own. If it is given to me, then that is a responsibility that puts me in the service of others as well.¹⁴

become an irresistibly forceful prejudice to dismiss as simplistic and, at the same time, arrogant, those who are reputed to believe that they ‘have’ the truth. Such people are supposedly incapable of dialogue and ultimately cannot be taken seriously. For nobody ‘has’ the truth. All of us, the argument goes, can only be searching for it” (68-69).

¹⁴ Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 69. The issue of truth and Christianity came to the fore particularly in the year 2000 with the publication of the declaration, *Dominus Iesus* during Ratzinger’s stewardship of the CDF. The declaration reiterated the uniqueness and salvific universality of Christ and the Church. See *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000): AAS 92 (2000), 742-765. Most of Ratzinger’s reflections on this issue are found in his book *Truth and Tolerance*. See also Stephen J. Pope and Charles Hefling, eds., *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus* (New York: Orbis, 2002). To Ratzinger’s mind, there is a tension today between what he calls habitual Christianity (being content “with mere ritualised observances and the customs with which [people] were brought up” [*On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 76]) and the responsibility of gift in the truth. He says St Paul felt this responsibility of gift (1Cor 9:16) as did Jeremiah long before that (Jer 20:8-9). The parable of the fearful servant who hid his master’s talent because he was afraid (Matt 25:14-30) is also ultimately to be understood from this perspective. Ratzinger says that the “talent” – the treasure of the truth – given to us must not be hidden. Instead, it is meant to be spent boldly so that it can take effect. Knowledge of God passed on in this way becomes the “leaven” that permeates and renews humanity. Ratzinger says that he observes the West busily burying this treasure out of cowardice and laziness because we do not want to be illuminated by it ourselves. This way of living, by the least line of resistance, seems to consist in living a life untroubled by the burden of the *responsibility of gift*. But the gift should urge us on so that the ends of the earth might see the power of God (Isa 52:10; Ps 98:3). See *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 71-72.

What emerges here is the insight that a believer cannot abdicate the freedom that comes with the responsibility of gift – the gift of truth concerning God. To other groupings who do not confess Jesus as true God, this position can seem, at best, presumptuous. However, it is precisely this perspective, Ratzinger says, that places a great urgency on Christians to

[. . .] not view such knowledge as our own accomplishment but that we instead remain loyal to the truth that the encounter with the Word is a gift for us, too, which was given to us so that we might give it to others, freely, as we have received it. God made a choice, established some for others and all for one another, and we can only acknowledge in humility that we are unworthy messengers who do not proclaim ourselves but rather speak with a holy fear about something that is not ours but that comes from God.¹⁵

In Ratzinger's understanding, the truth can and must have no other weapon other than itself. Only in this way can the Church's missionary task be understood as transparency and accountability before the primacy of truth but never as spiritual colonialism. There is always the freedom to assent to the gift of truth, initially through a creative minority, and subsequently in the passing on of the "Gift of Faith" that has been received. **The Church's mission, which is conducted in the name of truth, must never be severed from the practice of freedom, neither on the part of the missionary, nor on the part of the potential recipient of the grace to believe.** Ratzinger's thought is strongly influenced by a theology of gift, whereby the human person is prepared to give only to the extent to which one loves. Ratzinger says that participating in the Church's witness requires,

[. . .] in the first instance readiness for martyrdom, a willingness to lose oneself for truth's sake, and the sake of others. Only then will [Christians] be credible; . . . [b]ecause only then is the primacy of truth erected. And then also, the idea of the presumption [of truth] is overcome from within.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 70.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Unterwegs zu Jesus Christus* (Sankt Ulrich Verlag GmbH: Augsburg, 2005), 71 [own translation].

IV. Spirit-filled Evangelisers – Living in the Truth Today

So how then can we bring together these two ideas – on the one hand, **the gift of the truth** and, on the other hand, **responsibility before that truth**? Pope Francis guides us well on this point in *Evangelii gaudium*. He points out that we cannot keep the gift of truth to ourselves – certainly not if we have been touched by it and convinced of its beauty and wisdom. “A person,” he says, “who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody.” Moreover, Francis goes on, “what kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known.”¹⁷ In other words, “[w]hen we are touched by joy all is changed.”¹⁸ We can stay silent no longer. One might even say, we would put ourselves in the line of fire with little thought for personal safety because we are in love and to love is to will the good of the other.

Pope Francis proposes for us an interesting designation for the person truly in love with the God of Jesus Christ, namely, a “Spirit-filled Evangeliser.” In fact he dedicates the concluding pages of *Evangelii gaudium* to pointing out the characteristics of such a person. They are 7-fold:

- 1. Is Courageous in the World and Fearless of the Holy Spirit**
- 2. Prays and Works – thereby Cultivating an Interior Space**
- 3. Approaches Christ as Gift and Faith as Treasure**
- 4. Lives through Closeness and Tenderness: (“The Spiritual Savour of Being a People”)**
- 5. Lives Hope in the Face of the Temptation to Weariness**
- 6. Is an Intercessor – A Heart Full of Gratitude to God for Others**
- 7. Has a Marian Lifestyle**

I would like to offer a brief word on each of these. They present to us a template for our Church as it immerses itself in the New Evangelisation – as it strives to live in the Truth today.

¹⁷ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 264-266. Hereafter, referred to as *EG*.

¹⁸ Bishop William Crean, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, Lenten Pastoral Letter 2014.

1. Is Courageous in the World and Fearless of the Holy Spirit

A Spirit-filled evangeliser is someone “fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit” and is thereby granted through that same Spirit, “the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness (*parrhesía*) in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition” (EG, 259). Notice the Pope’s logic: He does not say be naïve or foolish with your life. Nor does he say be reckless in the face of conflict. But rather, have **courage** in the face of opposition and hostility. And be **fearless** of how the Spirit uses such courage. Moreover, these dispositions have one essential prerequisite – that they be “firmly rooted in prayer, for without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty” (EG, 259).¹⁹

2. Prays and Works – thereby Cultivating an Interior Space

Therefore, and this is the second characteristic, “Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work” (EG, 262). In order to generate a renewed missionary impulse, a healthy balance is required between how we pray and what we do. Neither privatised spiritualities nor militant activisms are healthy for the mission of the Church. There are striking similarities here with the great Benedictine motto - *ora et labora* ("pray and work"), which once swept through a despondent European continent flagging in zeal for the God of Jesus

¹⁹ Pope Francis uses a striking phrase to encapsulate his motivation. He says that “[k]eeping 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)” [emphasis added] (EG, 280). This is not always easy, for, as he says, “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.” 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” (EG, 280). The Pope makes a great plea from his heart at the outset of his vision. For his he has the sacred task of confirming us in the faith so that we will want to go out to the whole world proclaiming the Good News: “How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction! Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. A spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel” (EG, 261).

Christ. Francis avidly points out that “[t]he Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer” (EG, 262).²⁰ However, what is most important to remember here is that nostalgia for another epoch in history is both naïve and unrealistic. Every generation has its struggles; every moment its challenges. What makes a great leader is someone who applies themselves to living the present moment well. Moreover, this is our time – we can have no other. Hence, Francis says, as we cultivate an interior space which can give meaning to our commitment and activity, “[l]et us not say. . . that things are harder today; they are simply different. [And] let us learn also from the saints who have gone before us, who confronted the difficulties of their own day” (EG, 263).

3. Approaches Christ as Gift and Faith as Treasure

By cultivating a contemplative spirit, Pope Francis says, our entire view of reality changes. Indeed, over time, and in God’s time, we come to view the saving love of Jesus as gift and as treasure – entrusted with such treasure, and contemplating its preciousness, there is but one option open to us – **to give another the gift given us:**

What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence (EG, 264).²¹

²⁰ Pope Francis continues: “What is needed is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity. Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out” (EG, 262).

²¹ In contemplating such giving, we may ask: will “Spirit-filled Evangelisers” be received graciously, or boorishly, by others? The truth is only God knows, but for the one touched by the joy of saving love, all is changed. This person must shout from the roof-tops for all who have ears to hear it. And we must remember that the human heart is seeking for love, therefore, it is seeking God – even if for the time being, it does not realise it. “Sometimes,” the Pope says, “we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel

In all things, and at all times, **we should strive to configure ourselves to the total self-giving which motivated the life of Christ – all the way to Calvary and beyond.** To emphasize this one more time, Francis says, “a person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody” (EG, 266). And when we ask the “what” question – “what is all this for?” – we must answer in a targeted and joyful manner: our motivation is the same as that of our brother Jesus:

In union with Jesus, we seek what he seeks and we love what he loves. In the end, what we are seeking is the glory of the Father; we live and act “for the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph 1:6). If we wish to commit ourselves fully and perseveringly, we need to leave behind every other motivation (EG, 267).²²

4. Lives through Closeness and Tenderness: (“The Spiritual Savour of Being a People”)

Here we meet a point which is very dominant in the Magisterium of Pope Francis:

The word of God . . . invites us to recognise that we are a people: “Once you were no people but now you are God’s people” (1 Pet 2:10). To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus’ gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people” (EG, 268).

responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters” (EG, 265).

²² The Pope continues: “This is our definitive, deepest and greatest motivation, the ultimate reason and meaning behind all we do: the glory of the Father which Jesus sought at every moment of his life. As the Son, he rejoices eternally to be ‘close to the Father’s heart’ (Jn 1:18). If we are missionaries, it is primarily because Jesus told us that ‘by this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit’ (Jn 15:8). Beyond all our own preferences and interests, our knowledge and motivations, we evangelize for the greater glory of the Father who loves us” (EG, 267).

Hence, to live in the truth today – or at any time – cannot be done in isolation. Ultimately, **belief requires community**. Moreover, correlative with this intimacy comes a tenderness that is modelled on Christ’s gaze from the Cross upon human disarray and disorder. From the divine perspective, “(e)very human being is the object of God’s infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives” (EG, 274). Moreover, “(t)he Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to **the revolution of tenderness**” (EG, 88). Henceforth, Spirit-filled evangelisers must be absorbed by such a tenderness, so that they

enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But we do so not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings us joy and gives meaning to our lives (EG, 269).

Whenever we lodge ourselves in the power of tenderness, “our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people” (EG, 270). In this way, even when we live in the truth and proclaim it with great joy and confidence, we will never be “grandees who look down upon others, but men and women of the people” (EG, 271).²³

²³ The Pope continues, while we may “[s]ometimes be tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord’s wounds at arm’s length. . . Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people’s lives and know the power of tenderness” (EG, 270). Indeed, Pope Francis says, “[w]e achieve fulfilment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!” (EG, 274). Moreover, “[a] committed missionary knows the joy of being a spring which spills over and refreshes others. Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary. This openness of the heart is a source of joy, since “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide.” (EG, 272).

5. Lives Hope in the Face of the Temptation to Weariness

A fifth characteristic of the “Spirit-filled Evangeliser” is the capacity to be alive with hope in the face of a perceived lack of tangible progress from one’s missionary effort. Francis says **it is easy to get caught up in an empty selfishness – a sort of self-destruct mechanism which is tempted to throw in the towel for good because of few results or the slow rate of change.**

However, we should believe the Kingdom of God is active among us – it is “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” (EG, 278). “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” (EG, 279). To encourage us, the Pope says, we may be certain that “[n]o 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.” He continues:

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 (EG, 279).

6. Is an Intercessor – A Heart Full of Gratitude to God for Others

As the Pope brings his treatment of spirit-filled evangelisation to an end, he returns to the theme of prayer – this time, to intercessory prayer. He explains that “intercessory prayer does not divert us from true contemplation, since authentic contemplation always has a place for others.” (EG, 281; cf. Phil 1:4, 7). In effect, from the perspective of Christianity, the missionary power of prayer lies in its capacity to be both incarnational and intercessory.

Evangelisers who are not on their knees bringing all the people in their heart to the Lord are lacking a vital component of their vocation. Here we can look with confidence to the saints who were great intercessors, and know that God is the prime mover but he also hears the cry of his people (Exod 3:9; Num 11:10ff; Job 34:28; Prov 21:13): [Doctrinally brilliant here – a harmony between immutability and omniscience captured – how prayer moves God without God moving (changing).]

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 (EG, 283).²⁴

7. Has a Marian Lifestyle

Without Mary, “we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelization” (EG, 284). She is there as the Son of Man fulfils his mission – she is an exegete of her Son’s life and mission. She is the mother of evangelisation. In a striking way, Francis says that Mary is Jesus’ gift to his people: “At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation,

²⁴ The evangeliser who intercedes arises from prayer with a heart full of gratitude to God for others - “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” (EG, 282).

Christ led us to Mary” (EG, 285). Each of us brings forth Christ just as Mary brings forth her Son in his body the Church.²⁵ **With Mary, we find that there is a Marian “style” to the Church’s work of evangelization. In her, the virtues of humility and tenderness become transparent to all generations.** In her is found the interplay of petitioning contemplation and maternal concern: “Mary is able to recognize the traces of God’s Spirit in events great and small” (EG,288).²⁶

V. Conclusion

Ultimately, we live in the truth today by living from within a revolution of tenderness; by breathing with a transparent sense of joy in our heart; and by giving to the world the gift which we ourselves have first received. When we keep God at the heart of contemplation, we are free to live in the splendid paradox of unapproachable light (1Tim 6:16).

[Let me finish with a word about the good fight of faith from the author of the First Letter to Timothy who very much advocates a **God-centred life** as the true treasure in a world full of transient riches:

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life (1Timothy 6:17-19).]

²⁵ “Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love. She is the handmaid of the Father who sings his praises. She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice. She is the missionary who draws near to us and accompanies us throughout life, opening our hearts to faith by her maternal love. As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God’s love” (EG, 286). The Pope quotes Blessed Isaac of Stella: “Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary’s womb. He dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church’s faith” (*Sermo* 51: PL 194, 1863, 1865).

²⁶ The Pope looks to her in the concluding prayer of his Exhortation. There he prays:

*Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God’s kingdom.*