



The Holy See

MEETING OF THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY IN THE ROMAN NEIGHBOURHOOD OF TOR
VERGATA,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE “WAY” IN ROME

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Tor Vergata
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[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I am pleased to meet you and, with you, to say ‘thank you’! Thank you to God and also to you, especially to those who have travelled a long way to be here. Thank you for your ‘yes’, for having welcomed the Lord’s call to live the Gospel and to evangelize. And a big thank-you also goes to those who began the Neocatechumenal Way 50 years ago.

Fifty is an important number in Scripture: on the 50th day the Spirit of the Risen One descended upon the Apostles and manifested the Church to the world. Earlier still, God had blessed the 50th year: “A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you” (Lev 25:11). A holy year, in which the chosen people would touch by hand new realities, such as the liberation and the return home of the oppressed: “you shall ... proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants”, said the Lord. “each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family” (v. 10). Thus, after 50 years of the Way it would be nice for each of you to say: “Thank you, Lord, because you have truly freed me; because I have found my family in the Church; because in your Baptism old things have passed away and I enjoy a new life” (cf. 2 Cor 5:17); because through the Way you have indicated the path for me to discover your tender, Fatherly love”.

Dear brothers and sisters, at the end you will sing the “*Te Deum* of thanksgiving for God’s love and faithfulness”. This is very beautiful: to thank God for his *love* and for his *faithfulness*. We often

thank him for his gifts, for what he gives us, and it is good to do so. But it is even better to thank him for *what he is*, because he is the God who is *faithful in love*. His goodness does not depend on us. Whatever we do, God continues to love us faithfully. This is the source of our faith, the great consolation of life. So take courage; never be saddened! And when the clouds of problems seem to thicken heavily over your days, remember that the faithful love of God always shines, like a sun that does not set. Remember his goodness, stronger than all evil, and the gentle memory of God's love will help you in anguish.

An important thank-you is still missing: to those who are about to go on mission. I would like to tell you something heartfelt precisely regarding mission, on evangelization, which is the Church's priority today. Because mission is giving voice to the faithful love of God; it is proclaiming that the Lord loves us and that he will never tire of me, of you, of us and of this world of ours, of which perhaps we tire. Mission is giving what we have received. Mission is fulfilling Jesus' mandate which we have heard and on which I would like to focus with you: "Go therefore and make disciples of all peoples" (cf. Mt 28:19).

Go. Mission calls for departure. But in life there is a strong temptation to linger, to avoid risks, to be content to have the situation under control. It is easier to stay home, surrounded by those who love us, but this is not Jesus' way. He sends forth: "Go". He does not use half measures. He does not authorize short transfers or reimbursed travel, but tells his disciples, *all* his disciples just one word: "Go!". *Go*: a powerful call that resonates in every cranny of Christian life; a clear invitation to always go out, pilgrims in the world in search of the brother or sister who does not yet know the joy of God's love.

But what can you do in order to go? You need to be agile; you cannot bring all your home furnishings. The Bible teaches this: when God freed the chosen people, he sent them into the desert with only the baggage of trust in him. And by becoming man, he himself journeyed in poverty, with nowhere to lay his head (cf. Lk 9:58). He asks the same manner of his own. Going requires being light. To *announce* you must *renounce*. Only a Church that renounces the world announces the Lord well. Only a Church free from power and money, free from triumphalism and clericalism bears witness in a credible way that Christ frees mankind. And those who, through his love, learn to renounce passing things, embrace this great treasure: freedom. They are no longer bridled by their own attachments, which always demand something more but never bring peace; and they feel their heart expand, without concerns, open for God and for brothers and sisters.

"Go" is the verb of mission and it tells us one more thing: that it is conjugated in the plural. The Lord does not say "you go, then you, then you...", but rather, a collective "go", together! Being fully missionary does not mean one who goes alone, but those who journey together. Journeying together is an art to be learned, always, every day. One must be careful, for example, not to dictate the pace to others. Rather, it is important to accompany and wait, remembering that the other person's journey is not identical to mine. As in life no one has exactly the same pace as

another, so it is in faith and in mission: we go forward together, without closing off and without imposing our own direction; we go forward united, as a Church, with the Pastors, with all brothers and sisters, without fleeing ahead and without complaining about those who have a slower pace. We are pilgrims who, accompanied by brethren, accompany other brethren, and it is good to do so *personally*, with care and respect for each one's journey and without forcing anyone's growth, because the response to God only matures in authentic and sincere freedom.

The Risen Jesus says: "*make disciples*". This is the mission. He does not say: conquer, capture, but rather, "make disciples", that is, share with others the gift you have received, the encounter of love that has changed your life. It is the heart of the mission: to bear witness that God loves us and that with him true love is possible, the love which leads to the offering of life everywhere, in the family, at work, by consecrated and married people. Mission is becoming disciples once again with Jesus' new disciples. It is rediscovering oneself part of a Church that is a disciple. Of course, the Church is a teacher, but she cannot be a teacher if she is not first a disciple, just as she cannot be a mother if she is not first a daughter. This is our Mother: a humble Church, daughter of the Father and disciple of the Teacher, happy to be *sister of humanity*. And this dynamic of discipleship — the disciple who creates disciples — is totally different from the dynamic of proselytism.

Herein lies the strength of the message, so the world may believe. What counts is not arguments that convince but life that attracts; not the capacity to impose but the courage to serve. And you have it in your 'dna', this vocation to proclaim by living as family, after the example of the Holy Family: in humility, simplicity and praise. You carry this familial atmosphere in many places that are desolate and devoid of love. Make yourselves known as friends of Jesus. Call everyone friends and be a friend to everyone.

"Go and make disciples of *all peoples*". And when Jesus says *all*, he apparently wishes to emphasize that there is room for all people in his heart. No one is excluded. As children for a father and mother: even if there are many, big ones and little ones, each one of them is loved wholeheartedly. Because by giving oneself, love does not diminish; it grows. And it is always hopeful. Like parents, who see first and foremost not all the defects and shortcomings of their children, but the children themselves, and in this light they accept their problems and their difficulties, as do missionaries with the peoples beloved by God. They do not put the negative aspects and things to be changed at the forefront, but "see with the heart", with a gaze that appreciates, an approach that respects, a faith that waits patiently. Go on mission in this way, with the idea of "playing on home turf". Because the Lord is at home with each people and his Spirit has already sown the seeds before your arrival. And thinking of our Father, who so loves the world (cf. 3:16), may you be inspired by humanity, working together for the joy of all (cf. 2 Cor 1:24), respected because you are neighbours, listened to because you are close. May you love the cultures and traditions of the peoples, without applying pre-established models. Do not begin from theories and strategies, but from concrete situations: thus the Spirit will shape the message

according to his times and his ways. And the Church will grow in his image: united in the diversity of peoples, of gifts and of charisms.

Dear brothers and sisters, your charism is a great gift of God for the Church of our time. Let us thank the Lord for these 50 years: a round of applause for 50 years! And looking to his paternal, fraternal and loving faithfulness, never lose faith: he will protect you, spurring you at the same time to go, as beloved disciples, to all peoples, with humble simplicity. I accompany and encourage you: Go forth! And please, do not forget to pray for me, who remain here!