

The Church Pope Francis calls us to be

Extracts from Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* apostolic exhortation (November 2013)

Jesus' command to "go and make disciples": "all of us are called to take part in this new missionary 'going forth'". All of us are called "to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel". (20)

It is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded. (23)

The Church which "goes forth" is a community of missionary disciples. (24)

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. (24)

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37). (49)

The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge. (102)



"Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others..."



Being Church means ... that we are to be God's leaven in the midst of humanity. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel. (114)

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". (120)

Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey. (127)

This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them. (198)



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A Marian face of the Church

Excerpts from Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*

Mary, mother of evangelization: With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present in the midst of the people. She joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:14*) and thus made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost. She is the Mother of the Church which evangelizes, and without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelization. (284)

There is a Marian "style" to the Church's work of evangelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for "bringing down the mighty from their thrones" and "sending the rich away empty" (*Lk 1:52-53*) is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice. She is also the one who carefully keeps "all these things, pondering them in her heart" (*Lk 2:19*). Mary is able to recognize the traces of God's Spirit in events great and small. She constantly contemplates the mystery of God in our world, in human history and in our daily lives. She is the woman of prayer and work in Nazareth, and she is also Our Lady of Help, who sets out from her town "with haste" (*Lk 1:39*) to be of service to others. This interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization. We implore her maternal intercession that the Church may become a home for many peoples, a mother for all peoples, and that the way may be opened to the birth of a new world. It is the Risen Christ who tells us, with a power that fills us with confidence and unshakeable hope: "Behold, I make all things new" (*Rev 21:5*). With Mary we advance confidently towards the fulfilment of this promise, and to her we pray: (288)



Excerpts from Brother Michael Green's Marian Lecture, "Who is Mary for today's Marists?" delivered at Catholic College Bendigo in 2011.

Michael made reference to research undertaken into a multitude of religious congregations founded in France which had a Marian name or an explicitly Marian affiliation: The conclusion of the researcher, a Jesuit, was that of all the religious congregations he studied, the "least Marian" were the Marists. They had introduced no new titles for Mary, no new Marian devotions or prayers, no new Marian sodality or movement. They did not wear any distinctive Marian symbol as part of their religious habit. In fact, they did not outwardly seem any more Marian than any other French Catholic group. But he also concluded that, from another perspective, they were in fact the "most Marian" because, rather than being devotional towards Mary, the Marists saw themselves as actually being Mary.

Michael spoke about the new "Mari-ists": But unlike the Jesuits who were self-styled to some degree as soldiers for Christ and had a strong rigour in their spirituality and their missionary style, the new "Mari-ists", as they dubbed themselves, would bring a mother's mercy before all else. To renew the vitality of the faith in France, these Marist missionaries believed that they needed to go to the places where the light of the gospel had grown to be dimmest. And in those places they wanted to offer forgiveness rather than to threaten punishment or Divine retribution, to educate rather than to condemn ignorance, to look for ways to include everyone rather than exclude people who fell short, and to always believe in what was possible for people rather than be thwarted by their fallibility and failure, to be gentle with people. Their approach was intuitively maternal. They believed this to be Mary's way of doing things.

The founding Marists had a deep sense of the role that Mary played in the early Church, and they wanted to be imbued with her spirit, to make it their own.

In the book "*Water from the Rock*", the most recent reference text on Marist spirituality, we read:

The Marists understood their project to be a sharing in Mary's work of bringing Christ-life to birth and being with the Church as it came to be born. It was a work which they hoped would touch every diocese of the world, and would be structured like a multi-branched tree by including lay people, priests, sisters and brothers. And, later in the same document:

We share in the spiritual motherhood of Mary as we take our part in bringing Christ-life to the world of those whose lives we share.

Being Marian wasn't essentially about praying the Rosary more often or lighting a candle and praying in front of a statue of Our Lady, as fine as both those things may be in themselves. It was, rather, about **being** Mary – being like Mary of the Annunciation, who allowed God into her life, who allowed God to unsettle and disturb her life and, without having it all sorted in her own head or heart, was still ready to say "Yes" to what was asked of her. God comes to us as our ordinary lives; God is the God of our daily lives, God of the here and now. We are called, like Mary, to say "Yes. Let it happen to me as you want." Not in the sense of passively accepting whatever life dishes up to us. No, that is not the sense of Mary's "Fiat" in the Annunciation story in Luke's gospel. It means, rather, saying yes to allowing Christ-life to take hold in us, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, whatever happens. It is to be able to say with St Paul, "I live. No, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

"Yes. Let it happen to me as you want."