

Address of the Apostolic Nuncio, Msgr. Luigi Bonazzi
Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Bishops of Canada
(Beaupré, September 15, 2014)

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,
Dear brothers in the Episcopate,

Seven months after my arrival in Canada, in this vast territory which extends from one ocean to another, *a mari usque ad mare*, after a first contact with your Regional Episcopal Assemblies, after visiting different dioceses – permit me to mention Whitehorse, perhaps the most distant – I have today the joy and the grace of meeting all of you, Pastors of the Church of the Lord which is in Canada, at the beginning of the Plenary Assembly of your Episcopal Conference.

I find particularly significant the place and the moment where our meeting unfolds: here, in the Archdiocese of Québec, in this “Mother Church” from where began the evangelization of Canada 350 years ago; in this same moment, when through Pope Francis, the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to a renewed evangelization. This is truly a favorable moment, a time of grace to be welcomed! (Cf. 2 Cor 6:1-2)

Thank you, Lord, for this gift! Sincere thanks to you, dear brother Bishops of Canada for your warm welcome. It reminds me of the words of St. Paul: “*Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.*” (Rom. 12:10).

In order to know and make oneself known, as we are all aware, one must leave one’s own home, go out from one’s self, and walk with confidence and respect towards the home of others. In this regard, permit me to assure you of my profound desire and grateful availability to visit your homes, each of you personally, your dioceses, insofar as you will see useful a visit of the Apostolic Nuncio. I feel encouraged to manifest to you my availability by Pope Francis who – I tell you this with joy – regards you, the Bishops of Canada, with high consideration and esteem. Last year, three months after his election to the Chair of Peter, he wished to meet with the Apostolic Nuncios. Emphasizing that he was expressing “*not merely formal words*” but “*things I have pondered in my heart*”, Pope Francis told us: “*Your job is more than important, it is the work of making the Church, of constructing the Church, among the particular Churches and the universal Church, between the Bishops and the Bishop of Rome. You are not intermediaries; rather you are mediators, who create communion with your mediation.*” This is precisely the daily service that I would like to offer you, relying upon the grace of God, confident also in the assistance you will provide.

The Church in Canada. You are her Pastors. You know her more than I do. You know her and you love her. The information that I have received and which I have heard from you, leads – after these last decades of increased secularization – to the recognition of new problems and great challenges. Let us consider, for example, the Consecrated Life which, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, belongs intimately to the life, holiness and mission of the Church (cf. VC, n. 3). “*What would the world be without religious?*” St. Teresa of Avila used to say (cf. CV 105). It is a view I share profoundly and which I recall whenever I can. As you know, at the beginning of the 1960’s the Church in Canada could count on more than 60,000 religious. Today, there are a little more than 15,000, and their average age is 80 years. Surely, this is a problem and one of the great challenges. In this context how providential is the Year of Consecrated Life, which Pope Francis will inaugurate this November 30. O Lord, enlighten us and help the Church in Canada to live this time of grace with an abundance of fruit! Besides, you know other areas, which are a source of anxiety and suffering: the shortage of priestly vocations, the aging of the clergy, the weakening of the faith...

The statistical “sociological perspective” seems to lead to “an alarming portrait”. Certainly, we cannot close our eyes. But even more, we must not close them to the “theological perspective”, the one that leads us to look at the Church as the Holy Spirit sees her. How does the Holy Spirit see the Church today? What does the Spirit say to the Church?

One must work hard each day to find a response to these fundamental questions. But in the meantime, by means of that instrument – Peter and his successors, the Bishops of Rome - given to the Church in order to “confirm in the faith” (Luke 22:32), the Holy Spirit has already given us some fundamental perspectives. These can and should encourage us, inspire us and enable us to work with confidence.

- In what I like to consider as his “spiritual testament” handed to the Church at the threshold of the third millennium - I am referring to the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* - St. John Paul II saw the pathway of the Church within the framework of the “*miraculous catch of fish*” (cf. Luke 5:1ff). In her navigation on the sea of history, sometimes calm, sometimes agitated, sometimes even rough, the “barque” of the Church has at its disposal, an “emergency kit” to use in case of necessity. In this “emergency kit”, there is the invitation not to be afraid to put out into the deep again and again: “*Duc in altum.*” There will be a miraculous catch of fish. With the icon of the “miraculous catch”, St. John Paul II exhorts us all – pilgrims of the third millennium – to keep alive an ever-renewed hope, assuring us that the Lord calls us to an inexhaustible experience of grace. The Pope strongly invites us to look deeper: this is not the time for a final assessment, but for a more profound attention to the Word and to the promise of God. This is the time to

listen to what the Lord is saying to our Church, this is the time for trusting and for casting the nets into the deep. Therefore: Do we see a troublesome picture before us? Yes! Days, months and years without apparent results? This too! Does the Church seem somehow declining? That also! But all of this is accompanied by the certainty – if we trust in the word of Christ and we cast out the nets – that a miraculous catch lies ahead, the birth or rebirth of a Church more evangelical.

In perfect harmony with St. John Paul II, Pope Francis – gift of the faith of Pope Benedict XVI to the Church in the Year of Faith – is not asking if the weather is good, if the forecast is favorable, if the nets are well prepared: he invites the Church to go forth, “to go outside.”

“A Church which goes forth” is, basically, the fundamental theme of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. A Church that goes forth is a Church that does not look at itself nor live for itself. “*All of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth’.*” (20). “*The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.*” (24). These words make spontaneously arise before our eyes the images of Pope Francis in the midst of people, without barriers, totally immersed, a living image of how he and we would like the Church to be. “Going forth” does not mean opening the doors for people to enter into the Church; rather it means bringing Christ into the world and – according to the missionary vocation of a Christian – bringing Him to those who do not know Him. “*Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm!*” (80). “*Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization!*” (83). “*Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!*” (109) Hence the call, or even better, the “dream”, as Pope Francis has put it, of the “*Church’s missionary transformation.*” (EG, Chapter I).

- It is not possible to have a “Church that goes forth” unless there is a solid “Church that enters”, a Church that is profoundly rooted in God, in the mystery of the Trinity and of Redemption. All of Chapter V of *Evangelii Gaudium* insists on this fundamental point. “*Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence.*” (259) “*Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out.*” (262).

Therefore, it is necessary first of all to pray and then to proclaim. Pope Francis insists strongly on this hierarchy of values: the first task of an apostle is prayer, then proclamation. “*When we think of the Successors of the Apostles, the bishops – this includes the Pope for he too is a bishop – we must ask ourselves if this successor of the Apostles*

prays first and then proclaims the gospel; this is what it means to be an Apostle and this is what makes the Church apostolic.” (General Audience, October 16, 2013). This hierarchy of priorities reminds me of that wise rule of pastoral life that says: **“What Christ does within me is more important than what I do myself.”**

- The depth of the “contemplative dimension” will assure depth to our “ministerial dimension”, to the apostolate. What gives depth to our pastoral work? We all know that the perception of space - technically called the “stereoscopic vision”, namely the perception not only of length and height but also of depth - follows from the synergy of our two eyes, each of which has a slightly different view from the other. With one eye, we can see, but we cannot perceive the depth of space. This perception comes from the combination of the two different visions of our eyes. In other words, the diversity of the two images is essential for depth. Drawing from the metaphor: it is communion, the constant engagement to achieve unity among us – which is always a unity of differences – that assures the “depth” of our pastoral action. We need the other; we need the eyes of others. If I look at things only from my point of view, I have partial vision. Hence the value of the Episcopal Conference, of Episcopal Collegiality: they offer the possibility of knowing the “eye” of my brother bishops. Hence again, the value of the Council for Economic Affairs, of the Presbyteral Council, of the Pastoral Council, of the various organisms of communion: all of them are places allowing the enlargement of my point of view, which is enriched by the “eye” of my priests, of the laity... Of course, many times, it is not easy to harmonize different views; it is tiring to bring together different visions. However, by oneself, one does not go far.

All of this brings us to treasure and to live another fundamental rule of pastoral life which says: **“Acting in unity is more important than acting, no matter how perfect it may be, in isolation: collaboration then is more important than working in solitude; the communion is more important than the action.”** *“The diocese walks with the feet of its priests”*, a Brazilian Bishop that I met during my holidays said to me. He told me how, with three days off, he had arranged to visit three different priests in three different parishes. With great fruitfulness for the three priests and for himself. I leave to you to develop the numerous pastoral implications, which arise from the desire to promote an evangelization that has depth, that is to say, an evangelization in communion.

Our consolation is that God always goes before us. *“This is our great consolation* - these are the words of Pope Benedict XVI which I like to repeat – *God goes before us. He has already done all things. He have given us peace, forgiveness and love.”* (Lectio Brevis from the Hour of Terce, October 3, 2005). The Resurrection of Christ has already been sown in the vast fields of Canada! St. Marie de l’Incarnation and St. François de Laval, two new stars shining and enlightening the firmament of the Church of Canada are

the bright proof of this! Precisely in the light of this perspective, Pope Francis concludes *Evangelii Gaudium*: “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). The Pope goes on, inviting us to advance with confidence towards the fulfilment of this promise, while entrusting ourselves to Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, praying to her:

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,
help us to say our own “yes”
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.*

*Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,
that the gift of unfading beauty
may reach every man and woman.*

*Star of the new evangelization,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith,
justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel
may reach to the ends of the earth,
illuminating even the fringes of our world.*

*Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones,
pray for us.
Amen. Alleluia!*