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APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
“BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS” TRUSTEE DINNER
CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL UNION
HYATT REGENCY, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
APRIL 25, 2018

I am very happy to be with all of you this evening at this “Blessed are the Peacemakers” Trustee Dinner. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I want to express His Holiness’ warm greetings, spiritual closeness, and paternal affection for all of you, especially to the benefactors and supporters of Catholic Theological Union and to the many religious gathered here. In a special way, I want to thank Father Mark Francis, President of Catholic Theological Union, for his gracious invitation and for this prestigious award.

It has been a privilege to serve the Holy See in the diplomatic corps and to represent the Holy Father as an ambassador for peace in Uganda, Haiti, Mexico and now in the United States as an apostolic nuncio. Each mission has its own challenges and blessings. This evening I wish to speak to you about a theme close to the heart of Pope Francis: mission. In his recent exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, the Holy Father wrote:

Yet there are times when we are tempted to relegate pastoral engagement or commitment in the world to second place, as if these were “distractions” along the path to growth in holiness and interior peace. We can forget that “life does not have a mission, but is mission.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE*, 19 MARCH 2018)

From the beginning of his Pontificate, the Holy Father spoke of the Church’s mission:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 27)

Pope Francis dreams of a poor Church for the poor, one that is close to the abandoned and forgotten and which conveys the tenderness of God. He wants an evangelical Church, willing to go forth out of its comfort zone, as he said in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel. (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 20)

Tonight, I want to emphasize the words “Each Christian and every community”, because this missionary Church of which Pope Francis dreams lives as the People of God – the holy, faithful People of God. To evangelize, the Church must constantly refer herself back to God and to the mission He entrusted to her – to each member of the Church – to go forth and announce the Gospel. God has given the Church a vocation: to be “the holy, faithful, People of God.” God has called us, chosen us, and saved us, not merely as individuals but as a people. (cf. *EG*, 113)

This idea of belonging to a community is challenging in an American context in which there is such a strong emphasis on individual rights and choices. This idea of being a people can be prophetic in the Western world, marked by individualism. In *Laudato Si*, the Holy Father lamented that rather than having care for a common home, many tend to view things as completely subject

to individual use and progressively distance themselves from nature and from one another (POPE FRANCIS, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LAUDATO SI*, 24 MAY 2015, 115-121).

Pope Francis wants us to understand the Church as the People of God, not the individuals of God. This emphasis on the People of God helps the missionary Church focus on its destiny and the destiny of humanity. The Church is to be the universal sacrament of salvation and a true instrument for peace in the world.

The Church, as the “holy, faithful, People of God”, is made up of many members who have equal dignity and who share a co-responsibility for evangelization. While the members have different roles, no one is exempted or excluded from responsibility. Each vocation – that of the clergy and that of the laity – began with baptism, through which we were made children of God, incorporated into the Church, and anointed with the power of the Spirit.

Here we must recall the Second Vatican Council’s teaching on the universal call to holiness – to daily holiness, which is associated with patience, not only in our duties or our existential situations but also in moving forward each day. The clergy have been called to a special pastoral service of the People of God, so that the whole Church might grow in holiness, each person according to his or her own vocation, and so fulfill her mission.

In baptism, we became children of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “*How blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.*” In fulfillment of our baptism, we are called to be instruments of peace daily. This is no easy task. The Holy Father tells us in *Gaudete et Exsultate*:

It is hard work; it calls for great openness of mind and heart, since it is not about creating a “consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority”, or a project “by a few for the few”. Nor can it attempt to ignore or disregard conflict; instead, it must “face conflict head on, resolve it, and make it a link in the chain of a new process”. We need to be artisans of peace, for building peace is a craft that demands creativity, sensitivity and skill. (*GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE*, 89)

Pope Francis’ vision of the holy, faithful People of God reinforces the need for fraternity in the Spirit, which demands openness to the Spirit and to the other – the otherness of God and the otherness of our brothers and sisters made in His image. The communion of the People of God – fraternity – is a sign of the vocation to communion with God, the source of holiness. Wherever I have been sent on a diplomatic mission, this has been the focus: to build fraternity, and, therefore, peace.

What I have tried to do in different parts of the world, we are called to do together, right where God has placed us: to be holy and to be missionary. I conclude with the words of the Holy Father regarding our collective mission:

Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has 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 he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” or “missionaries”, but rather, we are “missionary disciples”. (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 120)

I am grateful for the Catholic Theological Union and for all it does to shape and form the next generation of missionary disciples who will fill the whole world with the joy of the Gospel. Thank you and may God bless you.