

The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith



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JESUS YOUTH AND THE YEAR OF FAITH
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MANOJ SUNNY



YEAR OF FAITH 2012

It was 1999, and I was making my first trip to the capital city of the only Catholic country in Asia. I was there to attend an International Meeting. On the third day of the meeting, the Church was celebrating the feast of Pentecost and the organisers took us out on a surprise visit to a famous mall, one that was known as the largest mall in Asia at that time. We reached there early in the morning - we saw a long corridor in the mall, which had been converted into an Altar and a beautiful choir getting ready to sing. All of a sudden, employees dressed in uniforms started flowing into the place and soon there were thousands of people worshipping the Lord together. Right after the Mass, they all returned to their shops for the day's business. The altar was taken away. Everything disappeared within minutes. I had one of the most beautiful Pentecost Day Masses in that Mall. I was much surprised to see such a lively expression of faith centred on the Eucharist in that secular context.

Recently in the last week of November I was in Brazil, another totally secularised Christian country, with Rajju Varghese for the WYD Preparatory Meeting. After several days filled with meetings, we were searching for a Church to attend Holy Mass just before we started our trip back to India. We followed the sound of Church bells and reached a place where we could see a big truck fully loaded with a professional sound system; right on top of this truck was a choir. There was also a priest wearing vestments. We realized we were just in time to attend a solemn Mass in the square of one of the busiest streets of downtown Rio! Right opposite this square, there is a street with no traffic that is lined with pubs - a few hundreds were drinking there. This was yet another beautiful experience - to join a group of faithful around the Altar in contradictory surroundings - to celebrate and proclaim our faith in the Eucharistic Lord.

The Church is getting ready for a new 'spring time' during this Year of Faith. This is going to be a time of gratitude and joy - to thank God for the gift of faith, which has been given to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. How are we going to celebrate this year? The Church recommends three ways of responding to this call. Keeping this mind, the Jesus Youth movement puts forward six proposals for every Jesus Youth for this Year of Faith.

1. Renewing and deepening our faith

I have a fear that many times, we, especially Jesus Youth take our faith for granted - unlike in other parts of the world, we are not challenged to pay a price for this gift of faith which was transferred to us from our ancestors - it is always a sign of dignity and pride to be a Catholic. But how many of us know the roots of our faith? How many of us stand strong in our faith when shaken by the difficulties in life or when it comes to facing questions from other sects? "Concepts such as incarnation, resurrection,

redemption, sacrament and grace – core themes of theology used to explain our belief in Jesus Christ – have little meaning for the Catholic and the fallen away Catholic in a culture where rationalism prevails.” (*Instrumentum Laboris 20*).

i). Form small groups to study the YouCat

YouCat is being proved as one of the most approachable and effective study materials for learning the fundamentals of our faith. Can we form small groups - in parishes, colleges, work places, etc., to study the YouCat and to know and deepen our faith more seriously in this Year of Faith?

ii). A Journey with the Saints

“In fact it has often been said that the real protagonists of the new evangelization are the saints: they speak a language intelligible to all through the example of their lives and their works of charity”. (*Pope Benedict XVI - Homily of the concluding Holy Mass of Synod, 28th Oct. 2012*). We can do it personally or collectively - Jesus Youth is preparing a guide to journey with 12 saints during the year of 2013 - not just to know more about the saints - but to closely accompany their lives, allowing them to talk to us and change our lives.

2. Living our faith in a new way and celebrating it

In a multi-religious context how can we have a genuine expression of our faith respecting other religions and without denigrating any other beliefs in this year of faith? Can we have beautiful celebrations of witnessing to this precious gift of faith we have received from Him?

i). Praying for Priests

Jesus Youth has always had great respect and love for priests. “We all know that we can never do the wonderful amount of God’s work that any single priest does. (Though sometimes some priests tell us that many of us Jesus Youth do much more than any of them, I believe that our effectiveness comes from our sharing of the work of these priests.) Even if we cannot work like a priest, we can surely have a share of the abundant graces of priesthood by loving and praying for priests. ‘He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward’ . . . (Mt. 10:41)”¹. As a sign of gratitude for the gift of faith we have received from God, which is nourished through priests, can we take a commitment to pray for our priests? Can each family in Jesus Youth adopt one priest for prayer? Will it be possible to accompany them in prayer and offer sacrifices for their priestly ministry? If every one of us takes such a commitment, I believe we will be accompanying at least 40 - 50,000 priests.

ii). Giving a ‘Faith Gift’

In one of the consultation meetings, the present National Spiritual Director - Fr. Cherian Nereveetil shared a very creative idea of giving a ‘Thank You Gift’ during this Year of Faith. Each of us has hundreds of stories of personal encounters and moments through which our faith sprouted and grew over the years. Looking back, each of these milestones seems like personal miracles that God has worked in our lives. Often, we are left with a question: “Lord, why did you choose someone like me?”

¹ from a mail sent to Joyenet by Dr. Edward Edezhath.; ²from the write up on ‘The Thank you Gift’ by Shelton Pinheiro

How do we say 'Thank You'?

Deep in our hearts, we know that we can never make an adequate response to this gift. Yet like the simple gifts of the shepherds of Bethlehem or those of the learned men from the orient, we see that offerings chosen from our way of life often acknowledge the presence of God in the journey of our lives.

"Today, in the Jesus Youth movement, we are a multitude spread across nations. Some of us have been journeying with the movement for decades while some of us have very recently encountered God's presence in our lives through the movement. Yet God has endowed each one of us with diverse skill sets, talents and proficiencies that have helped many of us establish ourselves as respected professionals in today's world. These proficiencies range from student-level, amateur skill sets to extremely developed professionally valued expertise levels. We have, by God's grace, worked hard on these skill sets to make a living, support our families and invest in our future needs. Yet, in this Year of Faith, our movement calls us to offer a special gift to the movement, our world and the Church - a gift drawn out of the skills and professional expertise that we have honed and mastered over the years.

Can every one - student or professional, married or unmarried, layman or religious - offer at least one gift drawn out of their unique talent, expertise or professional skill to the mission of the Church on earth? This outpouring of gifts could be collected as a large bank (perhaps the largest collection of this kind) from which anyone in the movement, the Church or even the larger world could access and put them to use in their lives? This opens up millions of possibilities depending on who we are and where God has placed us. Since we would be sharing the skills or the fruits of our expertise the gift can take the form of a product, a tutorial video, a power point slide, a short film, a recipe, a farming document or any other form that suits the specific area that we are in.

What would the gift actually be? Some examples.

- 🎁 An art director offers (through a power point slide, a mobile video or a set of images in a word document) 20 easy ways to create, great looking stage design ideas and templates across different themes and colours that can be created for different programmes.
- 🎁 A farmer offers an easy to follow tutorial (through a video interview) on how to start and maintain a small organic farm.
- 🎁 A music student offers the guitar chords and lyrics of all commonly used songs in campus prayer groups as a power point file.
- 🎁 A nurse offers a document with 10 tips on how to make a difference to every patient a Jesus Youth nurse comes across.
- 🎁 A college student offers a set of 12 posters on 'Life' that can be downloaded and printed by others.
- 🎁 A web designer offers a tutorial teaching anyone to put together a basic website in a short time.
- 🎁 A theologian offers a short introduction to theology - as a presentation.
- 🎁 A theatre actor offers a basic course in body movements and method acting.

- 📁 An architect offers his simple, beautiful design for a low cost 1000 sq. ft. house.
- 📁 A photographer offers a collection of 100 hi-res images in over 20 themes for download and use in the community.
- 📁 An experienced businessman offers 5 business start-up possibilities in a country where the presence of a Christian entrepreneur can make a difference.
- 📁 A graphic designer offers a tutorial on how to design a professional looking, effective power point document in 20 minutes.
- 📁 A short filmmaker offers a video tutorial featuring five different ways in which a positive theme can be made into a short film with a minimal budget.
- 📁 A chef offers a collection of 50 healthy recipes for families - each of which can be prepared in less than 15 minutes.
- 📁 A Scripture scholar offers 5 different theme based Scripture studies as documents.
- 📁 A designer offers 100 Biblically themed, beautifully designed wallpapers for professionals.
- 📁 A teacher offers 10 effective teaching methods as a document.
- 📁 A florist offers a presentation on how to arrange flowers into different shapes.
- 📁 A cinematographer offers a tutorial on the basics of using a 5D camera for video captures.
- 📁 A politician offers an article on the need for people with values in the political arena.
- 📁 A musician shares a video tutorial - to help budding musicians pick up the guitar in three months.
- 📁 A carpenter offers 15 innovative, low cost furniture designs.
- 📁 A scriptwriter offers a collection of scripts based on youth themes that can be acted out as skits".²

So what will your gift be?

3. Sharing our faith with others.

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, the Holy Father refers to two categories of people - "those who are baptised, but not sufficiently evangelised and those who are not baptised, not evangelised." If we closely look at our ministry, we can find that we are focusing only on the first category - what can we do to reach out to the second category too?

i). Sharing our faith with a new person

The recently concluded Bishops' Synod had a beautiful reflection on the importance of the first proclamation – specially quoting Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (cf. John 4:5-42). "There is no man or woman who, in one's life, would not find oneself like the woman of Samaria beside a well with an empty bucket, with the hope of finding the fulfillment of the heart's most profound desire, that which alone could give full meaning to life. Today, many wells offer themselves to quench humanity's thirst, but we must discern in order to avoid polluted waters. We must orient the search properly, so as not to fall prey to disappointment, which can be damaging. Like Jesus at the well of Sychar, the Church also feels obliged to sit beside today's men and women. She wants to render the Lord present in their lives so that they can encounter him because his Spirit alone is the water that

gives true and eternal life. Only Jesus can read the depths of our heart and reveal the truth about ourselves: "He told me everything I have done", the woman confesses to her fellow citizens. This word of proclamation is united to the question that opens up to faith: "Could he possibly be the Messiah?" It shows that whoever receives new life from encountering Jesus cannot but proclaim truth and hope to others. The sinner who was converted becomes a messenger of salvation and leads the whole city to Jesus." (*Final Message of the Synod, 1*). Like this Samaritan woman, can each one of us, with our simple faith, take a commitment to share our faith with at least one new person during this Year of Faith? We are surrounded by people who are yet to receive this Good News; if we take this challenge and prepare ourselves prayerfully, I am sure that people will go beyond welcoming the testimony of our life to personally experience the powerful encounter with Jesus which will make them tell us: "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world. Praise God!

ii). A Silent Faith Walk

Another beautiful way is to accompany at least one person in his/her faith walk. A silent walk in this troubled world. During the luncheon meeting on 12th Oct 2012, the Holy Father described this as a "shared walk"; "walking together" explaining the road to Emmaus. "The famous walk of the Lord with the two disciples who were going to Emmaus, who are to a certain extent an image of the agnostic world of today. Jesus, their hope, had died: the world was empty. It seemed that either God did not exist or that he had no interest in us. With this despair in their hearts, and yet with a little flame of faith, they walk on. Mysteriously, the Lord walks beside them and helps them to understand better the mystery of God, his presence in history, his silent walk with us." Today's youngsters need people to walk with them to recognize and understand the mystery of this silent walk of our Lord with them. Could all of us select one person for this 'walking together', accompanying silently, being with that person in his ups and downs, confusions and frustrations and feel the same pain as St. Paul "until Christ is formed" in them?

It is by believing with the heart that we are justified, and by making the declaration with our lips that we are saved. May the Year of Faith lead all of us to learn by heart the Creed and to say it everyday as a prayer, so that the breathing agrees with the heart. Let us confidently entrust ourselves to Mary, our Mother. For as stars shine more brightly at night in the desert, so the light of Mary, star of the New Evangelization, brightly shines in heaven on our way.

