

Saint Ansgar brought the light and warmth of the Risen Lord to our cold and dark part of the world. He did not have much success, though, but since then the Church of Christ has always been present in our Northern countries. He started the work of evangelization and today we too, all of us, take part in this effort to spread the gospel to our people. We are all messengers of faith, hope, and charity.

Evangelization must be an ongoing process. In the gospel of today we get a summary of how to do. Saint Mark (1:15-17) gives us a few keywords that can be very helpful. The first is the little humble word *now*. This present moment is important. Right now, we must start to spread the message of Jesus and help people to open their hearts to his love and mercy. We should not wait until everything is calm, then nothing will ever happen. The kingdom of God is nearby. God is present here and now. The second word is: *convert*. We must turn to Jesus with all our heart and turn away from our sinful and selfish way of life. Jesus wants to convert and transform us and make something new and beautiful of each one of us. The third word is: *believe*. We have faith in Jesus and surrender totally to him. Only in him we find what is true, just, and merciful. He shows us how to act and speak. The fourth word is: *come*. The Son of God has come to us and invites us to come to him. In him we can learn everything and receive everything. So, we leave the old man behind to be totally renewed in Jesus. It becomes our greatest joy to be close to Jesus. The fifth word is: *follow*. We follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We become pilgrims of hope, rooted in faith and overwhelmed by his love. Now we have become followers of Jesus, and we will remain for ever with him trying to help others to join us on our pilgrimage of hope.

“By faith we know God without seeing Him. By hope we possess God without feeling His presence... Hope seeks not only God in Himself, but it seeks God’s glory revealed in ourselves”. Hope and faith help us to live a life of constant love of God. Jesus unites us to his Father and gives us his Spirit who will help us to transmit the message of the gospel to those around us. Jesus called the fishermen and immediately they left their nets and followed him. Maybe, our own vocation cannot be realized so rapidly. Still, Jesus will always adapt to our circumstances and to our attitude. Not all of us can follow him immediately. He is patient, but we should not be too patient. Holy impatience can be a useful virtue if we tend to wait too long before starting our pilgrimage of hope. God certainly loves us, but he is very eager to get our response, our yes. Our Lady can help us to say yes to the Lord when he calls upon us to leave everything behind and follow him up to our last moment here on earth. Thus, we prepare for our heavenly destiny, the glory of God, thanks to the resurrection of Jesus.

During this jubilee year we are all supposed to become pilgrims of hope. What does that really mean for us contemporary Catholic Christians? Hope is always something related to the eternal Kingdom of God “Thy Kingdom come”. When the Son of God became one of us, he brought his kingdom with him. He brought eternity and glory to us, but in a hidden and invisible way. Still, thanks to the gift of hope we already get a foretaste of the eternal glory of God. The poor Child in the stable of Betlehem shows us the real and eternal glory. Since then, we know that the poor and destitute are closer to the Kingdom of God than those of power, might, and money. The Gospel of Jesus shows us the real values of life. In his life among us here on earth Jesus reveals what is important and true. We try to be true and faithful to him and follow his lifestyle, his way of thinking and acting. Most people in our countries will think that we are a bit crazy. Do not worry too much about that, some of them are really intrigued and curious or even fascinated. If we follow Jesus there will always be some people who will listen and open their hearts and minds to Jesus.

We all know that evangelization in our countries is not very easy, Anyway, it is wonderful when we discover that it is possible. An authentic Catholic will always be able to transmit hope to those in despair, faith to those in anguish and love to those in indifference. If we cannot achieve great things, we can always pray for those around us. I have asked all kinds of people: May I pray for you? Even the most outspoken non-believers have never denied me this favour. There is a lot of spiritual poverty in our countries. There is also a lot of good will. There is a lot of solitude and isolation. These facts imply that now, right now, there are souls awaiting the good message and ready to receive it. Fishermen and fisherwomen are badly needed. All of us are needed. All of us here in Rome, in the heart of the Church, are pilgrims of hope. All of us have his or her personal vocation and gift that we can share with someone back home.

Here in Rome, we unite ourselves with the universal Church and her Supreme Pontiff, Pope Francis, in prayer and thanksgiving. Here we are strengthened in our faith. Here our hope becomes alive. Here we get renewed in our love of God, of the Church and of our countries. Saint Ansgar came to us a long time ago and proclaimed the same faith that we profess. Much has changed since then, but the essence of our faith remains the same for ever. As people of our own time, we must find our way of transmitting faith, hope, and charity to our neighbours. Many of them will be interested to hear what we have experienced in Rome. This gives us a possibility to transmit the message that Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, is the only Saviour of the world, the only One who can give us the light of truth, the fullness of mercy and grace. We put all our hope in him alone.