

The joy of the Gospel and Christmas



Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation is a great comfort for those who seek to build bridges to each other, without fear of going against public feelings. The "mild light of Christ" can confound and ultimately cancel the artificial light of the world. Best wishes from AsiaNews to its readers and friends; that they may "work" with the Saviour who is born.

Rome (AsiaNews) - The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* Pope Francis drafted for the end of the Year of Faith and the Synod on the new evangelisation is the best possible Christmas gift for us Christians, but also for those who do not believe yet search reasons to hope. Written in an unassuming style, full of wisdom and panache - even with a touch of humour - the exhortation is nevertheless quite serious in proclaiming the Gospel and promoting "missionary outreach" as the "paradigmatic [bases] for all the Church's activity."

At point n.88 of the Exhortation, the pope says, "the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction."

The mission is this continuous risk, meeting people who are as far geographically and culturally from us as can be. All of this flows from Jesus' own "style", from He who at Christmas became "poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians, 8:9).

Evangelii gaudium is a great comfort for those of us who work in the mission that is AsiaNews. The ongoing process of building bridges of friendship in far-flung situations, of touching the efforts and the joys of the Churches of Asia, of increasing solidarity and sharing in so many tragedies but also in the miracles of conversion of so many, correspond to the mission's style.

"I am a mission on this earth," the pontiff says at point n. 273; "that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing."

Likewise, in his text the pope emphasises "The delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing". Although very often, out of love for the truth, we have to report oppression, violence, disasters, insults, and persecutions, this is but part of our work and of the "joy of evangelizing."

Hence, unlike many other media outlets, AsiaNews covered Typhoon Haiyan, which devastated the Philippines, by also speaking about the faith of its people, about their ability to get up the day after the disaster, about the solidarity shown by the poor to fellow poor, so that even the bitterest situations may appear illuminated by hope.

Even in the violence of the prison and the stifling of the Church in China, some martyrs show joy. This is the case of Mgr Peter Liu Guandong, underground bishop of Yixian, who died at the end of October. Even after nearly 28 years of imprisonment and hard labour, he is remembered as a 'jovial' father, steadfast in defending the freedom of the Church, capable of friendship with young and old alike.

This ability to be joyful amid misery and humiliations, something which is beyond man's reach, is the sign of a greater mystery that surrounds the life of the witnesses to the faith. It is also a source of wonder and desire for those looking for hope.

During one of his homilies at Domus Sanctae Marthae, a few months ago, Pope Francis said, "The light the world gives us is an artificial light. It may be strong, stronger than that of Jesus . . . strong like a firework, like a photoflash. By contrast, the light of Jesus is a mild light; it is a quiet light, a light of peace. It is like the light of Christmas Eve: unpretentious. That is how it is; it offers itself and gives peace. . . . It is a mild light, with the strength of gentleness; it is a light that speaks to the heart and a light that also offers the cross."

My dear friends, our wish for all of you is that, out of all the many seemingly powerful yet fleeting lights, the quiet light of Christ may shine and that we may all work together with him for the whole world. Merry Christmas.

