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## Let me find another way to say it...

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July 2021

### **Proclaiming Christ in freedom and in the midst of diversity**

If there is a text that par excellence expresses the missionary spirit from the point of view of the New Testament, this text is the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 19-23, where Paul writes: “Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

In this passage, Paul gives to his work of evangelization a clear catholic (universal) character. In these verses Paul also unveils three important elements that support such a universalistic approach to his ministry. First: Paul’s work of evangelization is universal because the evangelizer is free, as stated in the first part of verse 19: “Though I am free and belong to no one [...]”. Second: Paul’s work of evangelization is without “boundaries” because the evangelizer finds his motivation in the gospel: “I do all this for the sake of the gospel [...]” (v. 23). Third, Paul’s work of evangelization is universal because the evangelizer has only one purpose or goal, i.e., “so that by all possible means I might save some” (v. 22). These three elements explain both the “why” and the “how” Paul was able to “[...] become all things to all people” (v. 22). That is why, for example, when in Athens, Paul is first found reasoning “in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks” and then in “the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17) and also in the Areopagus (Acts 17:22). These few passages are enough to show the great “catholic” pastoral approach that inspired and guided Paul’s ministry and work of evangelization. It looks like, for Paul, there were not “suitable” and “unsuitable” situations; or “suitable” and unsuitable” people to preach the Good News. Every situation and every people were, potentially, the right situation and the right people to proclaim the “[...] good news about Jesus the Messiah [...]” (Mark 1:1).

Despite what we might think, Paul was not the first one to embody and give life to this way of spreading the Good News. Before him, Jesus of Nazareth did the same. Before Paul, the One who was the “Apostle” of the Father approached his mission with the same attitude. In fact, during his public ministry Jesus of Nazareth, motivated by a “burning fire” for both the Kingdom

of God and “the things of the Father”, announced the Good News to both men and women; to both the Pharisees and the Sadducees; to the rich as much as to the poor and marginalized of that time; to the pious Jews as well as to the Samaritans and the Gentiles. Jesus’ ministry knew neither religious or cultural limits, nor ethnic or social boundaries. His deep commitment to the mission entrusted to Him by the Father made Him an extremely free preacher, teacher, and redeemer.

Interesting enough, we can find the same spirit in the Apparition of Our Lady of La Salette. Indeed, it is suggested, for example by the clothes that the Beautiful Lady of La Salette wore when she appeared to the two little shepherds, Maximin and Melanie. The memories of the two children tell us that Mary, at La Salette, was dressed as the every-day women in the area of the small village of La Salette were used to be dressed during those days. Similarly, the same can be said when Mary changed her language from French to Patois, the dialect spoken by the common people of that geographical area at that time.

Jesus of Nazareth, Saint Paul, and the Beautiful Lady of La Salette: three challenging examples that invite and inspire us to live in our ministries, beyond our preferences or ideologies, the “catholicity” of the mission that the Mother, through the Son, has entrusted to each of us.

### **The language of love**

It is out of love that Jesus has taken upon himself our human condition, even though this magnificent act would cost him extreme suffering to the point of crying out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

“I will tell you in another way” which touches very well on evangelization as the primordial mission of the Church, since it is the continuation of Christ's saving action. The Christian message has inserted itself into the language of all peoples in such a way as to supplant even cultures! It is like saying that all cultures allow themselves to be enlightened by the authority of Christ as their common denominator: “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved” than the name of Jesus Christ.

John XXIII’s pontificate assumed the *aggiornamento* of the Church by giving continuity to the movement of liturgical, theological, biblical, pastoral and social renewal, in search of a new position in harmony with the great desire of the Mother of God to make the message of her Son increasingly understood.

St. John Paul II, in his encyclical, *Redemptoris missio* proposed, for the first time, the expression “new evangelization”. This does not arise because a new dicastery had emerged and been established in the Holy See, but rather a provocation to the Church to recognize the urgency and necessity of evangelization as a mission of the Church herself, which has been going on for

two thousand years, which in any case must find a new language, have new lifestyles, also made up of profound identity, but also of respect. Therefore, the saint of our time has intended to awaken us to a new language in the proclamation of the faith of all times, and we understand that Mary, not wanting to change the direction of her Son's Church, only wants to remind us of our duty as always it is, first of all, our submission to God. "I will tell you differently", is nothing more than making explicit the permanent and eternal truth; that is, the mystery of Jesus who died and rose, the cause of our salvation. "I will tell you differently" is, as Cardinal Tagle says, to accept the current challenge of discerning how to present the Gospel, which is always the same, in a changing world.

In the proclamation of the Good News of salvation, the language that has no boundaries must be understood, the language of love whose legacy Jesus left us in the last moment of his life in this world must be implied: "That you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). The Gospel proclamation in these days, the language best understood by humanity today is that of love which is the maternal love of Mary in tears at the foot of the cross and in La Salette, not that of the great theological explanations.

It is out of love that Jesus has come into the world; it is out of love that Mary remains caring towards us, and it is out of love that we, the missionaries of La Salette, accept the challenge of the Church's evangelizing mission.

### **La Salette - communication of sensitivity that goes beyond language and culture**

History has attributed a missionary character to our Congregation. After 175 years since the apparition in La Salette, we know that our task is to evangelize the world in the spirit of the Message given to us by the Beautiful Lady. This entails the need to open ourselves to other languages and cultures in which we find ourselves working. The entire congregation is responsible for this and not just the individual provinces anchored in a single culture and language.

It makes us reflect that Maria, speaking with Melania and Maximin, uses two languages. French is the language of the State that tradition has dubbed the First Daughter of the Church. In this language, Mary delivers her most compelling recommendations concerning the Eucharist and the respect due to her Son. When she instead speaks of the prosaic problems of the region of La Salette, she begins to use a dialect that even children understood. Melanie's perplexity forces Mary to revise the method of communication and makes it more accessible. In this way, she conquers not only the mediators of the communication of the Message, but also the listeners who understand her.

We must remember that very often, and not only today, in some situations it is necessary to "start speaking differently." This is reconciliation: the initiative is on the side of the one who

knows that the other person has something against him. It is I who must begin to speak differently, even if someone sees me in a bad light. Jesus also speaks of the need for a change in attitude and in the way we communicate: “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23-24). If we want to be reconciled with our fellow human beings, nothing is more useful than changing the tone, the mode of interaction, but first of all changing the narrative, that is, moving from an accusatory and judgmental narrative to one that expresses the request for forgiveness and reconciliation. This is now another language: that of love and mercy. And God speaks precisely this language. This task is difficult for us, but we are unceasingly helped by the love and grace of Jesus, so it is possible to accomplish it.

We must take the attitude of the Apostles Paul and Barnabas, of whom the Acts of the Apostles say that in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch [today central Turkey] they “revived the disciples and exhorted them to remain steadfast in the faith, for, they said, it is necessary to go through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). A curious fact about that region: its inhabitants spoke their own dialect, Lycaonia (cf. Acts 14:11).

And so Mary, after communicating to the children her personal reflections in dialect, switches again to French and says: “Make this known to all my people”. She repeats this twice, so this recommendation also contains the phrase to be communicated: “You do not understand French. Then I will tell you differently.” We must convey the entire Message, with all the elements contained in it. This is not just a hint or a parenthesis made by Mary. Indeed, the phrase: “I will tell you differently” is an example of the use of language derived not from the experience of this world, but from the experience of Heaven which is our true homeland. Only the intimacy of the heart and the sensitivity of the mind in love and reconciliation are valid, and people of all times and cultures expect precisely that language, because they have always been thirsting for love and are touched by a profound crisis of faith and identity.

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