

In our gospel this evening/morning, Jesus says, *“I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me; I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.”* What Jesus describes here could be called, in a nutshell, effective evangelization. God’s word is spoken, heard, touches the heart and inspires one to follow. This is the mission of the Church. During the pre-conclave meetings for the last Papal election, the soon to be Pope Francis, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, gave a speech outlining this very thing, especially the challenges facing the Church in her ongoing mission. In light of this World Day of Prayer for **Vocations**, I’d like to visit his thoughts for a moment so that we might gain better insight to the Church’s call (and thus our call) to evangelize and be the voice of Christ for the world.

The first thing Pope Francis said was this: “The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.” This is certainly a challenge. But the key to it all, as Francis says, is that the Church has “to come out of herself.” We, the Church, from the hierarchy on down, have to be more present to the world, through ministry and witness. In other words, our faith cannot be confined to the walls of this church. We have to go **out** of ourselves and engage the world with the Good News. For too long our attitude has been that “we have the truth; others need to come and discover it.”

Pope Francis says, no, this can't be our attitude. In fact, he says, "When the Church **does not** come out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referential and then gets sick." No wonder many people leave the Church or Christianity altogether in our day and age. Who wants to be part of something that demands conformity first and engagement second? This is not the way Jesus exercised his ministry. He first met people where they were at, without judgment or condemnation. Only after he had made a connection with them, did he invite them to go deeper. This must be our attitude too if we want to fulfill our mission to help God bring His people home.

Pope Francis goes on to say that “In Revelation, Jesus says that he is at the door and knocks. Obviously, the text refers to his knocking from the outside in order to enter but I think about the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out.” This is the great challenge for the Church and for us. Jesus is knocking, perhaps banging, on the doors of the Church to let him out; to let him into the world to proclaim the good news that death has been conquered and that freedom from the trappings of this world has been overcome for those who follow him; that God’s forgiving love has been unleashed upon all who feel enslaved to sin and their destructive ways; that there is a way out; that there is a path to forgiveness and freedom from the sins that keep us chained down and bottled up.

We are the recipients and sharers of this good news. This is the Church's message and we are to be heralds of it. It's not enough for us to be just "hearers" of the Word; we are meant to be witnesses and instruments of God's word and will. As God reminds us in SS:

*"I have made you a light to the Gentiles,
that you may be an instrument of salvation
to the ends of the earth."*

Those who received this message from the Church "were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord." May this be so throughout the world, and may each one of us embrace our vocation (our particular call) to let Jesus out, to be His Good news for someone else, so they might in turn hear, know, and follow the Good Shepherd to happiness and eternal life.