

Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again, rejoice! These are striking words, words which impact our lives. Paul tells us to rejoice; he practically orders us to rejoice. This command resonates with the desire we all have for a fulfilling life, a meaningful life, a joyful life. It is as if Paul could hear what each one of us is thinking in his or her heart and to voice what we are feeling, what we are experiencing. Something deep within us invites us to rejoice and tells us not to settle for placebos which simply keep us comfortable.

At the same time, though, we all know the struggles of everyday life. So much seems to stand in the way of this invitation to rejoice. Our daily routine can often lead us to a kind of glum apathy which gradually becomes a habit, with a fatal consequence: our hearts grow numb.

We don't want apathy to guide our lives... or do we? We don't want the force of habit to rule our life... or do we? So we ought to ask ourselves: What can we do to keep our heart from growing numb, becoming anesthetized? How do we make the joy of the Gospel increase and take deeper root in our lives?

Jesus gives the answer. He said to his disciples then and he says it to us now: Go forth! Proclaim! The joy of the Gospel is something to be experienced, something to be known and lived only through giving it away, through giving ourselves away.

The spirit of the world tells us to be like everyone else, to settle for what comes easy. Faced with this human way of thinking, "we must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and for the world" (Laudato Si', 229). It is the responsibility to proclaim the message of Jesus. For the source of our joy is "an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of our own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy" (Evangelii Gaudium, 24). Go out to all, proclaim by anointing and anoint by proclaiming. This is what the Lord tells us today. He tells us:

A Christian finds joy in mission: Go out to people of every nation!

A Christian experiences joy in following a command: Go forth and proclaim the good news!

A Christian finds ever new joy in answering a call: Go forth and anoint!

Jesus sends his disciples out to all nations. To every people. We too were part of all those people of two thousand years ago. Jesus did not provide a short list of who is, or is not, worthy of receiving his message, his presence. Instead, he always embraced life as he saw it. In faces of pain, hunger, sickness and sin. In faces of wounds, of thirst, of weariness, doubt and pity. Far from expecting a pretty life, smartly-dressed and neatly groomed, he embraced life as he found it.

It made no difference whether it was dirty, unkempt, broken. Jesus said: Go out and tell the good news to everyone. Go out and in my name embrace life as it is, and not as you think it should be. Go out to the highways and byways, go out to tell the good news fearlessly, without prejudice, without superiority, without condescension, to all those who have lost the joy of living. Go out to proclaim the merciful embrace of the Father. Go out to those who are burdened by pain and failure, who feel that their lives are empty, and proclaim the folly of a loving Father who wants to anoint them with the oil of hope, the oil of salvation. Go out to proclaim the good news that error, deceitful illusions and falsehoods do not have the last word in a person's life. Go out with the ointment which soothes wounds and heals hearts.

Mission is never the fruit of a perfectly planned program or a well-organized manual. Mission is always the fruit of a life which knows what it is to be found and healed, encountered and forgiven. Mission is born of a constant experience of God's merciful anointing.

The Church, the holy People of God, treads the dust-laden paths of history, so often traversed by conflict, injustice and violence, in order to encounter her children, our brothers and sisters. The holy and faithful People of God are not afraid of losing their way; they are afraid of becoming self-enclosed, frozen into élites, clinging to their own security. They know that self-enclosure, in all the many forms it takes, is the cause of so much apathy.

So let us go out, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 49). The People of God can embrace everyone because we are the disciples of the One who knelt before his own to wash their feet (*ibid.*, 24).

The reason we are here today is that many other people wanted to respond to that call. They believed that "life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort" (*Aporecida Document*, 360). We are heirs to the bold missionary spirit of so many men and women who preferred not to be "shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security... within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 49). We are indebted to a tradition, a chain of witnesses who have made it possible for the good news of the Gospel to be, in every generation, both "good" and "news".

Today we remember one of those witnesses who testified to the joy of the Gospel in these lands, Father Junípero Serra. He was the embodiment of "a Church which goes forth", a Church which sets out to bring everywhere the reconciling tenderness of God. Junípero Serra left his native land and its way of life. He was excited about blazing trails, going forth to meet many people, learning and valuing their particular customs and ways of life. He learned how to bring to birth

and nurture God's life in the faces of everyone he met; he made them his brothers and sisters. Junípero sought to defend the dignity of the native community, to protect it from those who had mistreated and abused it. Mistreatment and wrongs which today still trouble us, especially because of the hurt which they cause in the lives of many people.

Father Serra had a motto which inspired his life and work, a saying he lived his life by: *siempre adelante!* Keep moving forward! For him, this was the way to continue experiencing the joy of the Gospel, to keep his heart from growing numb, from being anesthetized. He kept moving forward, because the Lord was waiting. He kept going, because his brothers and sisters were waiting. He kept going forward to the end of his life. Today, like him, may we be able to say: Forward! Let's keep moving forward!