



National Cursillo® Movement

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Kerygma and Cursillo

Presented by Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J., National Episcopal Advisor, at the 26th National Cursillo Encounter held at Lewis University in the Diocese of Joliet, IL – August 6, 2016

Introduction

I lived my Cursillo in the Diocese of Yakima which is located in Central Washington State. There are three points of reference in the Diocese of Yakima that helped me find the graces I needed in my Cursillo. I'd like to use them as explanatory symbols that will help me develop this keynote on Kerygma and Cursillo. The three points of reference are: first, the Cascade Mountains which form the western boundary of the Diocese of Yakima; second, the Columbia River which is the easily identifiable boundary of the Diocese of Yakima to the north, east and south, as well as finally, and third, St. Joseph Mission Church where the gospel found its earliest permanent home in the Diocese of Yakima. As a way of exploring the relationship between Kerygma and Cursillo, I'd like to offer this presentation to you highlighting the three topic areas I just mentioned: the Cascades, the Columbia River and St. Joseph Mission.

I. The Cascade Mountains

A flight over these mountains from Seattle east to Central Washington and the city of Yakima provides a marvelous view of the eastern part of Central Washington State, its high desert landscape as well as its cities, towns, hills, fields, orchards, valleys, dams and rivers. But closer to the experience of most of us, we know how wonderful it is to be at the top of a mountain, hill or tall building, enjoying the perspective it gives us of what surrounds us and the way it helps us understand the total reality of which we are a part. That's why it's important to look closely at what we call Cursillo and Kerygma.

A. First, Cursillo

As we know Cursillo de Cristiandad is a unique form of evangelization and a totally committed way of living out the Good News that is the substance of that evangelization. To be consistent with the content of the Good News that is proclaimed, that Good News needs to be proclaimed in a way that is designed to elicit positive responses of conversion and commitment from those to whom it is addressed.

B. Second, Kerygma

1. Kerygma is a Greek word from ancient times which, without translation, has been transferred into modern languages without any change from its original meaning, which is proclamation, declaration, edict, or announcement. This word is used more than 70 times in the New Testament, to mean the joyful and appealing announcement of the saving event accomplished by Jesus.

We are talking about dynamic, impassioned preaching; something that takes into account the fact that doctrine can have its full meaning only as a way of life. This bursting forth of the living content of Christianity by its nature includes a personal invitation to live with joy what is believed.

Kerygma is then an appealing proclamation, directly and constantly linked to conversion. Every kerygmatic announcement should directly and immediately tend to spark a desire for a change that permeates everything – one's principles, one's behavior and one's whole life. If a proclamation is not alive with that compelling incentive toward conversion, it is not the kerygma that defines Cursillo.

So kerygma does not look simply to the proclamation of the important truths of our Catholic Faith like the Trinity, the Paschal Mystery and the Church as the Body of Christ. Kerygma looks to the acceptance of the life giving and transforming ways in which God has and continues to reveal and impart His mercy to us so that we can embrace the Divine Life He wants to share with us.

The Good News of the Kerygma needs to be proclaimed first, with conviction. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mt 28, 19) and then it also needs to include testimony “Be my witnesses in Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1, 8)

- C. Finally, let's look at what it means for the Cursillo to be a kerygma that is proclaimed with joy. What do we mean by joy?

First of all, in this context, joy is a technical term, a gift of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't necessarily refer to a feeling of great delight or happiness as when we do something especially good or experience a glad feeling or keen pleasure when someone is especially kind to us or when an important celebration is taking place. We can cause pleasure for ourselves by our own initiatives. We cannot cause joy by our own initiative. It is God's gift.

Joy related to Cursillo is a reality that comes from the Holy Spirit and is given to us when we possess or are possessed by a desired good and, in that experience, we find spiritual satisfaction and peace.

Here are a few examples from the gospels of how joy radiates from the Good News that comes from the Lord:

“Rejoice!” is the angel’s greeting to Mary (Lk 1:28). Mary’s visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother’s womb (cr. Lk 1:41). In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Lk 1:47). When Jesus begins his ministry, John cries out: “For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled” (Jn 3:29). Jesus himself “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (Lk 10:21). His message brings us joy: “I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11). Jesus promises his disciples: “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (Jn 16:20). He then goes on to say: “I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (Jn 16:22). The disciples “rejoiced” (Jn 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ.

The proclamation of the Good News, Kerygma, needs to be joyful since, at its core, it is rooted in the conviction that we possess and are possessed by the One who makes the Good News a reality, namely, the God who is love.

As a summary, I hope I’ve given you an overall understanding of the intimate relationship between Kerygma and Cursillo by inviting you to look at the nature of Cursillo and, by definition, the joyful proclamation of the Good News that we call Kerygma.

II. The Columbia River

Now let’s leave the Cascade Mountains, grateful for the symbolic overall perspective they provide of the horizon that defines Cursillo, and turn to the Columbia River as the second important symbol of the graces I experienced in my Cursillo.

The Columbia River has as its wellspring a small stream in the Canadian Rocky Mountains and flows into the US from the northwestern corner of Montana through Idaho, Washington State, the northern boundary of Oregon and finally into the Pacific Ocean after a journey of about 1200 miles, most of them through Central Washington State and the Diocese of Yakima, making an astonishingly powerful and wide ranging impact on the people of the Pacific Northwest. The river is a source of multifaceted life and a wellspring of wellbeing as well as an irreplaceable treasure.

What are the wellsprings of abundant life for the joyful kerygmatic proclamation that is Cursillo? It’s important to name them so that we can nurture and embrace them and, in so doing, identify the spiritual genealogy of Cursillo.

I think there are three major spiritual wellsprings of Cursillo that we must rely on and from which we need to continuously nourish ourselves, not as memories of past events, but as present realities that challenge us to live out more authoritatively and fully the personal relationship with the Lord that His mercy makes possible for us. Those wellsprings are the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance and Eucharist.

First of all, let's give thanks for the new life brought to us by Baptism, the primary source without equal of the joyfully proclaimed Good News that Cursillo makes available to men and women of good will.

What is the new life that comes to us in Baptism? St. Luke tells us in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles that Baptism washes away all sin. St. Paul tells us in his letters that by being baptized we share in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Paschal Mystery, which means that we died to sin and are victorious over death. St. John tells us in his gospel that Baptism is the same as being born again. In the language of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, when we are baptized we become sons and daughters of God the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and temples of the Holy Spirit. We are made sharers in Christ's identity because we have become members of His Body, the Church.

In other words, God's love for us comes through Creation, Redemption and Sanctification! His name is truly Mercy! Pope Saint John Paul II in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, assures us that although to be Pope is a magnificent grace, and to be a bishop a August 11, 2016 marvelous blessing, neither of them compare to the incredible outpouring of God's love that embraces us when we are baptized. Undeniably, the joy with which a cursillista proclaims the Kerygma is rooted fundamentally in Baptism because through it we know that God is with us and loves us and that we can always trust Him.

Secondly, the Eucharist is, in my opinion, the second wellspring of the joy with which we proclaim the Good News because at the Eucharist we become one with the thanksgiving, the English translation of the Greek word eucharistia, offered by Jesus to God the Father for the Paschal Mystery of His death, His resurrection and sending of the Spirit which, in the Father's loving wisdom, resulted in our salvation and union with the Most Blessed Trinity.

At every Eucharist we are present at Calvary as Jesus dies on the cross for us and in the garden tomb when Jesus is raised from the dead for us and in the upper room with the apostles and Mary when the Holy Spirit is sent to dwell in the hearts of all of us who believe. That's the truth that is made clear to us by the word memorial which occurs in every Eucharistic prayer as a technical term to engage our faith and love. The transformation of Jesus in His Paschal Mystery is our transformation as well as He offers Himself and us to the Father, especially when we are nourished by the bread and wine which have been transformed into His Body and Blood. That transformation means that we are God's possession and He is ours. Given that marvelous truth how could we not find in the eucharist the dynamic source of our joy?

Finally, the third wellspring of the joy with which we proclaim the Good News should be, in my opinion, the Sacrament of Penance, often called the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession. This sacrament is a wellspring of joy because in an ongoing way throughout our lives, it assures us that though we are and will always be sinners for as long as we live, God's mercy is always available to each of us, no matter what. In a way, our basic identity is that we are sinners who are still loved by God who is always ready to forgive us. And forgiveness, with the reconciliation that follows from it, should always fill us with joy.

That forgiveness is most beautifully available to each of us in the Sacrament of Penance. I'm sure you'll remember that when Pope Francis was asked by a journalist just after his election as Pope, "Who are you?" He replied "I am a sinner." And the Pope has also said that the most memorable grace of his life took place when as a young man searching for his future, he went to confession and received the Lord's transforming and merciful forgiveness. That moment transformed his life forever.

Perhaps that experience planted the seed from which Pope Francis could say in a homily, "Every saint was a sinner and every sinner can be a saint."

In the Sacrament of Penance, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the priest, Jesus is really present with his forgiving mercy just as certainly as when He met with sinners during His life on earth and forgave them.

I remember one of the first confessions I heard as a recently ordained priest. It was in a newly established parish which did not yet have a church. Sunday Mass was celebrated in the gym of a public high school. Daily Mass was in the garage of the pastor's tract home which was transformed into a chapel with an adjacent full bath which became a confessional. As I entered into the bathroom/confessional on my first visit I saw a kneeler with a screen and a drape that concealed what was behind the screen and covered the space to the left until it provided an entrance for the priest to find his place behind the screen. I opened the drape to the left of the kneeler and saw a bathtub in front of me. Turning to the right, I saw the chair in which I could sit to hear confessions. The chair replaced the plumbing fixture that would normally have been there. Shortly after I was seated, a boy of about 8 years of age found his way to where I was waiting for the first penitent. The boy asked me "Are you the Father?" I said "Yes." He then decided to sit in my lap so he could begin his confession. That experience continues to be for me a convincing sign, fifty years later, of how the mercy of God is so available to each of us, His children.

In this Year of Mercy we should look forward, in a special way, to the joy that comes to us from the Sacrament of Penance.

III. St. Joseph Mission

The gospel found its permanent home in the Diocese of Yakima in St. Joseph Mission thanks to the Native American people of the Yakama Nation who had heard about men they called "blackrobes" who spoke compellingly to peoples of other native nations far away about a divinity whom the Yakamas considered to have characteristics remarkably similar to the divinity they worshipped.

Those blackrobes were Catholic priests who came as missionaries to the Yakama Nation and established the first permanent Catholic community in 1847 at St. Joseph Mission in what is now the Diocese of Yakima. That effort, like all Catholic missionary efforts, is an expression of Kerygma which, as I stated earlier in this conference, is the jubilant and appealing announcement of the saving event accomplished by Jesus.

Our Catholic faith should, in addition to clergy and religious, make all Catholics into missionaries who give themselves wholeheartedly to the spread of the gospel. Unfortunately, we know that is not the case. That's why it seems to me that Cursillistas need to be models of the Kerygmatic evangelization that should be the DNA of every Catholic. According to Pope Francis, the most novel feature of Cursillo is its entry in the prophetic and pastoral nation of the Church. In my experience of Cursillo and of you, my Cursillista sisters and brothers, that is true. This National Encounter is the proof of that.

But let us not be satisfied with all that Cursillo is and what it has done for us. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to continue to fill us more and more with the joy that will help us serve the Church even better. If that is true, say "De Colores"! again "De Colores"! and again "De Colores"!!!