

**Homily for the Canon Law Society of America Convention
October 10, 2012 | Wednesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time**

**Hyatt Regency O'Hare
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Brother Bishops, Reverend Fathers, Deacons and consecrated religious, fellow canonists, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

“Go out to all the world, and tell the Good News!” (Mk 16:15)

This admonition, which we hear anew today, summarizes for us the work of the disciples of Jesus Christ. This word – disciple – is the subject of much interest today, with books and articles being written about how to form disciples through the Church’s evangelizing and catechetical work. But just what is a disciple?

I think I can suggest an answer to that question by singing a song for you. “How Deep Is Your Love” is a pop song written and recorded by the Bee Gees in 1977. It was used as part of the soundtrack to the film *Saturday Night Fever*, among music’s top five best selling soundtrack albums. In the United States, “How Deep Is Your Love” topped the *Billboard* Hot 100 on December 24, 1977, and stayed in the Top 10 for a then-record 17 weeks.

How deep is your love,
How deep is your love?
I really need to learn
Cause we're living in a world of fools
Breaking us down
When they all should let us be
We belong to you and me
I believe in you
You know the door to my very soul
You're the light in my deepest darkest hour
You're my savior when I fall
And you may not think
That I care for you
When you know down inside
That I really do
And it's me you need to show
How deep is your love,
How deep is your love?
I really need to learn
Cause we're living in a world of fools
Breaking us down
When they all should let us be
We belong to you and me
I believe in you

So what does this song from the *disco* era of the 1970's have to do with discipleship? Well, the lyrics suggest some answers if we consider the song as a conversation where we respond to God asking us the question, "How deep is your love?" Our answer is in the lines, "I believe in you ... You know the door to my very soul ... You're the light in my deepest darkest hour ... You're my savior when I fall ... And you may not think ... That I care for you ... When you know down inside ... That I really do."

Discipleship is our answer to the question that God asks us, "How deep is your love for me?" But the song also suggests another answer to me that comes from the word *disco*.

The word "disciple" has its roots in the word *disco* - not a genre of music from the 70s, but Latin for "I learn." The disciple is one who learns from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This learning is not from dusty tomes or ancient manuscripts, but from the very person of Jesus Christ, risen and alive today, through an immediate and personal relationship with him and his Church. This relationship does not - indeed, cannot - leave a person as he or she was before. The true disciple, then, is the one

who becomes such a student of the Master that his very life conforms to the life of Christ.

Of course, the lives of any two disciples will not be the same. In the first reading today we hear of St. Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, and St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. They were two very different personalities charged with two very different missions! Yet the ministry of each is undergirded by the person of Jesus Christ. Indeed, they were so committed as disciples – so conformed to the life of Christ – that they gave their very lives in martyrdom for the faith.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples what they should ask of the Father for this work of spreading the Good News: namely, that his Kingdom be established; for strength to carry out his will; for forgiveness; and for protection from the Evil One. (Lk 11:2-4) In teaching his disciples how to pray, Jesus is inaugurating them into his relationship with the Father so that they may know the Father just as the Son knows him. This apprenticeship in prayer serves as the foundation for the disciple's mission and life.

To our sorrow, today there seems to be fewer and fewer people willing to apprentice themselves to Christ, to learn from him the will of the Father and the ways in which we may live in his love. You have heard the statistic, no doubt, that the second-largest religious group in the United States is non-practicing Catholics. I am sure that many of us know personally the people and stories behind these numbers. They are our sisters and brothers, our nieces and nephews, our sons and daughters, our neighbors and co-workers.

What can we say to reignite in them the fire of faith? What is Christ inspiring us to do to proclaim the faith anew to these lost sheep?

“Go out to all the world, and tell the Good News!” (Mk 16:15)

Three days ago our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, opened the Synod on the New Evangelization. In announcing the synod, the Holy Father reminded the Church that the task of evangelization is not to bring about revolution in the world but to transfigure it, drawing power from Jesus Christ who ‘convokes us at the table of his Word and Eucharist, to taste the gift of his Presence, to form ourselves in his school and live more and more consciously united to him, Master and Lord.’¹

The New Evangelization – first proposed by Pope Paul VI² and taken up with great fervor by his successor, the great Blessed Pope John Paul II – is the task of inviting individuals to commit themselves as Christ’s disciples. This begins with a relentless focus on the person of Jesus Christ. It is he who stands at the center, not as some platonic ideal or set of pious sayings, but as a person, the Son of God.

It is only after we have intentionally dedicated ourselves as disciples – when the process of conversion has begun in our own hearts and we have taken up his cross – that we can in turn introduce Christ to others. Ultimately this leads to a complete transformation of a society which has embraced death, neglected the poor, and turned its back on the very source of our existence.

Some of you may be thinking: that is all well and good, but what has it to do with the work of canonists and advocates working in tribunals and curias? To which I answer with the words of our Lord: “Go out to all the world, and tell the Good News!” (Mk 16:15)

It is precisely as canonists and advocates working in tribunals and curias that we are called to bring the Gospel into the world today. Our

work is no less the work of the New Evangelization than that of the pastor, catechist, or missionary. If, as we profess, the supreme law of the Church is the salvation of souls (cf. c. 1752), we must always keep before us this question: how is the law helping the faithful to become more intentional in their discipleship? How do our juridical systems beckon those who have fallen away to come back to the Church? How do the canons demonstrate to an unbelieving and secular world the truths of the Catholic faith? In short: How do we make manifest the love of Christ in difficult and painful situations and demonstrate the Lord's steadfast kindness and fidelity?

In the spirit of the New Evangelization we must begin by recommitting ourselves as disciples of Jesus Christ and dedicating our lives to him. We must allow the life and teachings of Christ to inform our work – not in an unmeditated or silent way, but deliberately and explicitly. The secular culture portrays the Church as a rigid, unfeeling monolith; in response we must be able to explain how the laws of the Church reflect Christ's love and his desire for all people to come to him. If evangelization is truly the essential mission of the Church (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* no.14), then this must be reflected in our work as well.

This is no easy task. But each of us here is called as a disciple of Christ in the work of canon law. It is my fervent hope that, with the help and intercession of Mary, the Mirror of Justice who guides us toward Christ, our work may be a beacon to those in a darkened world, bringing them home to the light of Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, October 24, 2010.

² Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* no. 2.