

**Homily for the National Catholic Development Conference
Marriott Downtown, Chicago, Illinois**

**The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here for this celebration of the Holy Eucharist during your annual convention for the National Catholic Development Conference. As the Episcopal Moderator, I would like to extend my gratitude on behalf of my brother bishops for the important work that you do in assisting organizations to raise money to continue the apostolic mission of the Church.

A couple of years ago, Forbes Magazine held an online survey which mimicked the popular NCAA Basketball March Madness bracket by presenting readers with 64 phrases or terms from the business world. Two phrases or terms were pitted against one another and readers had the task of voting for which one they felt was the most annoying. The idea behind the survey was to draw awareness to the fact that many terms commonly used in the business world today lack any substantial meaning, and that

the people use them “as a substitute for thinking hard and clearly about their goals and the direction that they want to give others.”¹

Some of the competition includes phrases such as “core competency”, “bleeding edge”, and “best practices.” At the end of the competition, the ‘winner’ of the most annoying phrase of business jargon was: “drinking the Kool-Aid,” an expression which “means to blindly accept something, such as a company’s ‘mission statement.’” This survey reflects a reality that affects more than just the business world, but touches every walk of life where the vocabulary used for some area can be used in a way that it is not understood or no longer relevant. The Church is no exception.

I am certainly not trying to suggest that certain phrases or terms used in the Church are to be considered annoying or meaningless, but there is a tendency to use some of those expressions in ways that leave people with a lack of clarity as to what is really being expressed. One of the most popular phrases being used in the Church today is the ‘New Evangelization.’ This phrase really began with some of the ideas found in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The topic was built upon by Pope Paul VI, and it was Pope St. John Paul II who is credited for putting meat on the term. He described the New Evangelization as the centuries-

old work within the Church of spreading the Good News to all people, but undertaken in the new millennium in a way that is “new in its ardor, methods and expression.”²

Pope St. John Paul II’s successors have continued to stress the importance of the Church engaging in this task of the New Evangelization. One of the challenges that we face in using this term, though, is that many people find it hard to grasp the actual meaning of the phrase. Those familiar with theology are indeed comfortable with the meaning, but many who do not necessarily have a significant amount of theological training find this expression difficult to understand.

As I have been reflecting on this, I have begun to suggest that another way of speaking about this important work of the Church is to use a more accessible term. The term that I suggest as an alternative is growth. Growth is at the center of evangelization. The spreading of the Good News is meant to touch the lives of all people, wherever they may be, in accord with the Great Commission given by Christ to His Church when He told His Apostles to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

The growth envisioned by the New Evangelization is more than just quantitative. Equally as important is the qualitative growth that the Lord expects from His Church. He has entrusted the Holy Spirit to her to assist her in continuing to discover the wonderful riches of our Catholic faith and how those truths can lead us to experience lives of greater peace and happiness in this world as we look forward to the fullness of life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In our readings for today's Mass, we find a helpful reflection on the growth desired by Christ for His Church. The image of the vineyard is one that represents the Kingdom of God. Already in the Old Testament, God was giving the people of Israel the opportunity to cooperate with His plan to restore fallen humanity back to its original holiness. The people, however, under the direction of their leaders, rejected this opportunity and thus fell farther away from God.

The Gospel parable speaks specifically of the great lengths to which the Lord went in order to get His message across. Jesus speaks of the servants sent to the vineyard to collect the produce, only to be rejected by the tenants. These servants represented the prophets of the Old Testament who communicated the truth of God's plan to the leaders, but whose

message was ignored. Finally, the owner of the vineyard sent his son, who represents Christ, thinking that they would respect Him, the Incarnation of Truth. Instead, they killed Him and remained far from God.

Jesus concludes the parable by telling the leaders of Israel that what was originally meant for them would be taken away and handed over to tenants who would take care of the vineyard and produce the fruits expected. These new tenants were the Apostles and the vineyard entrusted to them was the Church, which is the “initial budding forth”³ of the Kingdom, a kingdom that is meant to grow toward its completion in the glory of Heaven. At the heart of the New Evangelization, then, is this notion of growth in every way, quantitative and qualitative.

One aspect of growth that is often not given much attention is that topic which is at the center of what many of you do, that is, the work of raising money to support various programs that are a part of the life of the Church. There is a misconception that fundraising is not an important part of evangelization because the initial evangelist, Jesus Christ Himself, did not spend time asking people for money. While this may be true, He did speak quite a bit about the proper use of money, particularly with regards to not turning it into an idol⁴ and using it to help the least among us.⁵ The

challenge we face, then, is how to connect the use of money with the overall picture of the message of growth in the Church.

In his short book on the spirituality of fundraising, Henri Nouwen offers a helpful suggestion when he writes that “[f]undraising is a very concrete way to help the Kingdom God come about.”⁶ When seen from this perspective, it becomes much clearer how the topic of money fits into the equation of growth in the Church. Money is a concrete way of promoting growth qualitatively by making possible the work of those who bring the Good News to the corners of the world on behalf of the Church, whether in person, or through other mediums. Money also contributes to the qualitative growth of the Kingdom by providing quality services to provide education, health care, and assistance for the poor in various ways.

This is, of course, more than just about wording our appeals so that they reflect this important connection between fundraising and helping bring about the Kingdom of God. It has to be paired with the related topic of stewardship, which reminds us that everything that we have, including our money, is a gift that has been bestowed upon us by the ever-generous God. In gratitude for those blessings, we are then invited to share those gifts with others out of love for God and our neighbor. As we hear in the

Gospel, this is not so much a suggestion as it is an expectation of those laborers in the vineyard who have been entrusted with the task of bringing forth fruit for the Kingdom of God.

The connection between money and the building of the Kingdom is also helpful in evaluating programs that are being proposed and which are in need of funding. The question should always be asked: "Is this project a part of the building up of the Kingdom?" If, after prayerful consideration, the answer is 'yes', then we can have confidence in inviting people to contribute to that program as a way of building up the Kingdom. If the answer is 'no', then we have an obligation to raise a red flag and reconsider the vision of the project. Trying to mask such programs as working for the building of the Kingdom when they are not is untruthful and poor stewardship of the mission entrusted to us.

In the end, since stewardship and building the Kingdom of God is based on the cornerstone of friendship with Jesus, I would like to close my homily with a song called, "I am a friend of God," written by Israel Houghton. The scripture that is the basis of this song is John 15:15, where Jesus says, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know

his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

Who am I that You are mindful of me?

That You hear me

When I call?

Is it true that You are thinking of me?

How You love me

It's amazing

* * *

I am a friend of God

I am a friend of God

I am a friend of God

He calls me friend

* * *

God Almighty

Lord of glory

You have called me friend

As we continue our celebration of the Holy Eucharist today, let us thank the Lord for His many blessings, especially for his divine friendship, and ask Him that we might be more mindful of the role entrusted to us in building of the Kingdom of God. May all of the work that we undertake be directed toward this one essential goal, and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, be brought to completion in the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Mallet, Max, et. al. "The Most Annoying, Pretentious, and Useless Business Jargon." www.forbes.com. 26 January 2012.

² John Paul II, Address to CELAM (Opening Address of the Nineteenth General Assembly of CELAM, 9 March 1983, Port-au-Prince, Haiti), *L'Osservatore Romano* English Edition 16/780 (18 April 1983), no. 9.

³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

⁴ Matthew 6:24.

⁵ Matthew 25:31-46.

⁶ Nouwen, Henri, *A Spirituality of Fundraising* (New York: Upper Room Ministries, 2004), 9.