

Final Blessing

In #27 Francis begins with “I dream of a missionary option” for the Church. Let us join Francis in dreaming, with faith that with God’s grace we can be a Church of Missionary Disciples despite our flaws and weaknesses. Let us proclaim together:

We believe and belong to a Church that hear God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration (#28)

We believe we are a Church of many faces, of people belonging to different cultures (#115)

We believe we are a Church of Evangelisers that take on the smell of the sheep and are willing to hear their voice (#24)

We believe we are a Church that is permanently in the state of mission (#25)

We believe that our Church is a Mother with an open heart and the house of the Father with doors always wide open (#43)

We believe we are a Church that goes to wherever the need for light and the life of the Risen Christ is greatest (#30)

Close with the song “Earthen Vessel” by John Foley

Published and developed by the Archdiocese of Wellington, New Zealand. For questions on the use of this prayer resource, you may email any of the developers:

Maya Bernardo – m.bernardo@wn.catholic.org.nz;

Sharon Penny – sharon_penny@xtra.co.nz;

Barbara Rowley – browley@xtra.co.nz

Photographs by Mary-Ann Greaney

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Bridget Taumoepeau – Reviewer

Ann Williams - Layout and Design

ⁱRedaction from the developers

ⁱⁱSome texts were redacted to suit as intercessory prayers

Evangelii Gaudium

Prayer Module 4

‘A Church That Goes Forth’



A Church that goes forth

Prayer-reflection on the Challenges of the Church
(Chapter 2, 4 and 5)

Scripture Reading:

2 Corinthians 4: 7-11 (Earthen Vessels)

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.



Reflection:

Close your eyes and imagine a clay jar and hold your attention on that image. Paul likens the Church to an earthen vessel, gaze into that earthen vessel in your mind for a minute. Close by reading the scripture passage again. (If you have a clay vase in the prayer focus you may want to pass this around for people to touch before you end the reflection period).

We pray for Francis, our Pope, may he put into practice what he asks of others, and to continue to heed the call for the Church's pastoral conversion. Grant him the grace to carry the heavy responsibility of leading the Church (#32). E te Ariki...

Response: Whakarongo mai ra kia matou

We pray for, John Dew, our Bishop and all Bishops that they foster missionary communion in their dioceses. Grant them the wisdom to know when they must go before us to point the way and keep hope vibrant, or to simply be in our midst with unassuming and merciful presence. And yet at other times, walk after us, helping those who lag. Above all, allow us, the flock to strike new paths (#31). E te Ariki...

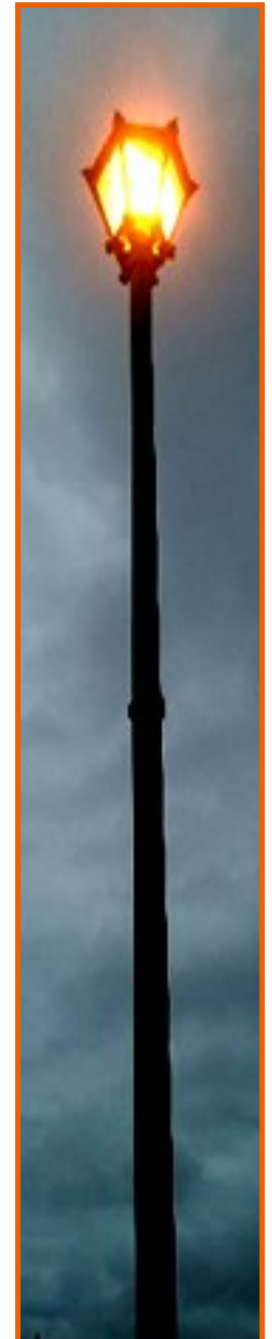
Response: Whakarongo mai ra kia matou

We pray for all those who work in pastoral ministry, that we be ever aware that we are missionary disciples, and as such we are called to mission that is open, bold, and creative. And that we are to discern and walk together alongside our bishop and the clergy (#33). E te Ariki...

Response: Whakarongo mai ra kia matou

Let us share our personal intentions.
E te Ariki...

Response: Whakarongo mai ra kia matou



Reflection

- Take a moment of silence to let the readings sink in. Pick a challenge mentioned above that disturbs you the most, why?
- What are the other challenges you would like to name?

Intercessory Prayersⁱⁱ

(Assign a person to read each prayer:)

As Church may we be aware of ecclesial structures that can hamper evangelisation. Grant us the courage to strive to be a Church that is constantly driving, sustaining, and assessing itself (#26). E te Ariki

Response: Whakarongo mai ra kia matou

All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal. May we always remember that as we struggle to correct our flaws and our structures, genuine transformation, comes from our personal conversion and that can only come from grace (#25). E te Ariki

Response: Whakarongo mai ra kia matou

Lord, it is not always easy to trust in the unseen, and at times we feel disoriented, feeling like we are plunged into the deep not knowing what we will find. Grant us the grace to taste the greater freedom of letting go of the need to control and allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us know what it means to be mysteriously fruitful (#280). E te Ariki

Response: Whakarongo mai ra kia matou

Wisdom from Evangelii Gaudium

Reading the Joy of the Gospel can be confronting and even disturbing. Francis did not mince words when he explained the problems the Church is facing. We are a wounded Church in need of healing (#25). We are a Church seeking for God's mercy. In facing our brokenness honestly as a community, we give space for hope.

Below are some of the problems of the Church Francis discussed. These concerns are classified as those coming from the wider world that affects our way of being Church, and the other one is our own internal problems, those caused by our own weaknesses.

Challenges from the wider world (#60-75)

➤ Culture of relativism:

We should recognise how in a culture where each person wants to be the bearer of his or her own subjective truth, it becomes difficult for citizens to devise a common plan which transcends individual gain and personal ambition (#61)

➤ Culture of superficiality, quick results and influence of social media:

In the prevailing culture, priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional. What is real gives way to appearances... the negative aspects of the media and entertainment industries are threatening traditional values, and in particular the sacredness of marriage and the stability of family". (#62)



- **Proliferation of new religious movements:**
The Catholic faith of many peoples is nowadays being challenged by the proliferation of new religious movements, some of which tend to fundamentalism while others seem to propose a spirituality without God... We must recognise that if part of our baptised people lack a sense of belonging to the Church, this is also due to certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of parishes and communities, or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems, be they simple or complex, in the lives of our people.. (#63)
- **Secularization:**
The process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism. (#64-65)
- **Weakening of family bonds:**
The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children (#66).
- **Challenges from urban cultures:**
In many parts of the world, cities are the scene of mass protests where thousands of people call for freedom, a voice in public life, justice and a variety of other demands which, if not properly understood, will not be silenced by force (#74)... in cities human trafficking, the narcotics trade, the abuse and exploitation of minors, the abandonment of the elderly and infirm, and various forms of corruption and criminal activity take place (#75).

Challenges of the Church from within (#102-109)

- **Role of the laity:**
There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church... However,ⁱ lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches, room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making... (#102)
- **Roles and rights of women:**
Demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded... (#104)
- **Involvement of the youth:**
Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand... (#105)
- **Priesthood and consecrated life:**
Many places are experiencing a dearth of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. This is often due to a lack of contagious apostolic fervour in communities which results in a cooling of enthusiasm and attractiveness. Wherever there is life, fervour and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise... (#107).

