



Homily given by  
His Eminence Cardinal  
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**FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF EASTER**  
*Saint Anselm, Abbey Church, Manchester, New Hampshire,*  
*April 24, 2015*

***“ New Life for Us and for the World ”***

Dear brothers and sisters,

The Easter Season continues to fill our hearts with the amazing fruits of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every new page proclaimed from the Acts of the Apostles surprises us ! It puts before our eyes the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciples who begin to live out the missionary mandate they received from Jesus : *“Go and make disciples of all nations”* (Mt 28:19).

As we journey with the Church that is beginning to grow and spread to the known world of that time in history, we also see the resistance to the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Apostles encounter many obstacles, difficulties ; sometimes from the outside world that does not yet know Christ, and also sometimes from within the community of disciples that struggles to allow the grace of God to reconcile them in Christ.

And yet, through all of this, one thing is sure : death, hatred and evil no longer have the upper hand and will never again have the last word. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has opened humanity to new Hope, a trustworthy Hope as Pope Benedict so beautifully wrote in his Encyclical *Spe salvi* : *“Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present : the present, even if it is arduous,*

*can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey”<sup>1</sup>.*

I find that every year during the Easter Season, the readings from the Acts of the Apostles renew us, bringing to light God’s faithfulness in walking with His People and sustaining His Church. The Acts of the Apostles reveal to us the courage and the apostolic zeal of the Apostles and disciples of Jesus, but they also reveal to us how God intervenes and accomplishes much more than we could ever do.

Today’s reading is a breathtaking example of this. It portrays so clearly how an encounter with the Risen Lord changes a life. *“Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord...”* that is how the story begins. Here is how it changes for the better. *“Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him : “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me ?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord ?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting”. And later in the text we see how Ananias met up with Saul: “He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

What a change an encounter with the Risen Lord can make in the life of someone ! From breathing threats and murder to breathing New Life when filled with the Holy Spirit! From persecutor to promoter ! That is the reason we cannot keep quiet or keep to ourselves the Good News of Jesus Christ. I truly believe that this missionary spirit is something we Catholics need to discover or rediscover. We have been much too shy about our faith, about our belonging to the Lord. We have forgotten how powerful witnessing is and how important it is to share how the Lord has touched our lives and changed them for the better.

Pope Francis is very insisting when he writes in his recent Apostolic Exhortation : “Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization ; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully : “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for ?”<sup>2</sup> We need to pray every day so that the Lord will put our Church back on the rails of the mission, on the tracks of evangelization. In these difficult times that we are experiencing, the temptation is very strong to shrivel up and take care of ourselves, forgetting that the world is in dire need of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict, *Spe salvi*, 2007, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 2013, No. 120.

In my Diocese of Quebec, we struggle with this every day. Surrounded by the pounding effects of secularism, it would be so easy to concentrate our efforts and our pastoral ministry on the few who remain in our pews, a meager 3 to 5% of Catholics, as not to have to reach out to the 95 to 97% who have gone astray or are indifferent. But we cannot allow that to happen ! We would be unfaithful to our mission and to the missionary mandate we received from the Lord Jesus. Our world needs more than ever to hear about God's love and mercy. I often reflect on the parable of the shepherd who leaves behind the 99 sheep to go out and search for the one lost sheep. Well now, it's the contrary, we need to leave the one sheep that is in the sheep pen and go out to search for the 99 who are lost... until we find them !

The upcoming Holy Year, a Jubilee of Mercy that Pope Francis has just announced, could become a marvelous opportunity to reach out to our brothers and sisters. The Holy Father's words are very inspiring : "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy : the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy : the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy : the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness"<sup>3</sup>.

The second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles reminds us of how the Church grew and lived out its' mission in the early days after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost : "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*"<sup>4</sup>. Why would we look elsewhere for insight or for guidance ? Here is the key to a healthy community life that leads to a meaningful missionary life.

Gathered today in this inspiring Abbey Church, where a community of Brothers live, work, pray and strive to live the Gospel in the midst of thousands of students on the Campus of Saint Anselm College, we come to the Lord's table to be fed by His Word and by the Bread of Life. For we know that without Him, we cannot continue our lives nor can we accomplish our mission.

We have opened our hearts to God's Word. Let us now prepare our souls to receive "the bread that comes down from heaven, not like the one that our ancestors ate and died, but the one that the Father gives, His Son Jesus. For we believe that one who eats this bread will live forever"<sup>5</sup>. And that is what we hunger for : life, abundant life. Here it is for us to receive ! May the Bread of Life renew us and put us even more on the path to holiness and on the road to evangelization. That is our call. May it become our passion and our joy !

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*, April 11, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2 : 42

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jn 6 : 52-59