

*IN CELEBRATION OF THE YEAR OF FAITH
October 11, 2012 – November 24, 2013*

*AT THE CATHEDRAL PARISH OF SAINT RAPHAEL
in Madison, Wisconsin*

This Year of Faith occurs on the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. The Year of Faith commemorates that Council, and comes with an invitation to revisit the documents produced by Vatican II so we may better understand the authentic teaching of that Council and put it into practice.

**DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY
(*APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM*)**

A. Title = “Apostolic Activity”

The first sentence of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, from which the Latin title is taken, is:

To intensify the apostolic activity of the people of God the most holy synod earnestly addresses itself to the laity, whose proper and indispensable role in the mission of the Church has already been dealt with in other documents. (AA 1)

1. A small point: *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and all the documents of the Council, use “apostolic activity” or “apostolate” to refer the indispensable work of the faithful in taking the Faith beyond the walls of the Church, into the world.

The documents of Vatican II use the term “ministry” only to refer to the sanctifying and teaching functions of the ordained. And so the claim we sometimes hear that the Council intended to blur the distinction between the clergy and the lay faithful is not really accurate.

It is true that both the ministry of the clergy and the apostolate of the laity are seen as essential to the life of the Church, and that the clergy and the faithful are called on to be mutually supportive of each other’s work.

2. The larger point is this opening sentence of the document is that the “*indispensable role in the mission of the Church has already been dealt with in other documents.*”

Indeed, this is a theme treated in many other conciliar documents, and we have seen one of the most important of those: *Lumen Gentium*, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*.

B. The Three-fold Mission of Christ and Christians (*Lumen Gentium*)

When we looked at *Lumen Gentium*, we saw the theological basis for talking about the apostolate of the laity.

To put it in a very succinct way:

- By virtue of our Baptism, we have been united to Jesus Christ, and have a share in His life.
- The Lord Jesus had a three-fold identity as Priest, Prophet and King – which He fulfilled in a perfect and definitive way.
- But every member of the Church (being a member of the Body of Christ) also has a share in the mission that comes with each of those identities.
- The lay faithful:
 - share in the *priestly* identity of the Lord by virtue of the sacrifices they offer in the course of their daily duties;
 - share in the *prophetic* identity of the Lord by virtue of proclaiming Him in the midst of the world, by word and action;
 - and share in the *kingly* identity of Christ by shaping the life of the world in a way that reflects the wisdom and beauty of the Kingdom of God.

C. Two Crucial Points of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

1. Centrality of Jesus Christ

Obviously, this point is present in the logic that I just recapped from *Lumen Gentium*. It is because of Jesus Christ that we have a mission – it all begins with Him and depends on our union with Him.

This is a point re-emphasized strongly in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. And it's very important that this document do that.

This document, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, is about activity.

What happens when we get involved in “activity”?

In my experience – of myself and others – it's all too easy to become focused on the details of the task: what's the task? what do I need to get that done? what's my time frame? is there anybody who can help me with that?

Those are all necessary questions, of course, but the temptation is that we focus on the details of a task and forget to ask: why are we doing this? what is the ultimate goal here? is this particular project really serving the ultimate goal as well as it can?

In my experience, this is a huge challenge in parish life. We're doing this because this is what we've always done . . . but it has been a long time since anybody stepped back and asked whether this is really a good use of our time and energy, and whether it is really the best way to serve the mission of the Church.

Well . . . that's just one of my “pet peeves.”

But the point here is: *Apostolicam Actuositatem* does not want us to plunge ourselves into activity just for the sake of doing something.

The spirit of the document is: This is all about Jesus Christ. Whatever I do must begin in my union with Him. “Job One” is to be united with the Lord, to be attentive to His Word, to become more like Him.

What I *do* must flow from my friendship and union with the Lord Jesus.

And so, this is what *Apostolicam Actuositatem* says:

Since Christ, sent by the Father, is the source and origin of the whole apostolate of the Church, the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ, in keeping with the Lord's words, "He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). (AA 4)

And the passage goes on to mention in particular the importance of the sacramental life:

This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy. These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while correctly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate union with Christ from their life but rather performing their work according to God's will they grow in that union. (ibid)

This is in accord with an old scholastic dictum: action follows being. What a thing does depends on what it is. What we are is more important than what we do.

(This point is also made strongly in *Lumen Gentium*, when it talks about the Christian life in terms of the "Universal Call to Holiness." That theme is discussion in my fourth homily on *Lumen Gentium*, which was posted on line but never preached.)

2. Activity in the World

In that foregoing passage, there is also reference to a second pivotal point of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* – that the particular place that the lay faithful exercise their apostolate is “in the world,” outside the doors of the Church, in society.

This was also stressed in *Lumen Gentium*. Here is how it is put (at least in one place) in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*:

All those things which make up the temporal order, namely, the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations, and other matters of this kind, as well as their development and progress, not only aid in the attainment of man's ultimate goal but also possess their own intrinsic value. . . .

The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church and motivated by Christian charity, they must act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere. . . . The temporal order must be renewed in such a way that, without detriment to its own proper laws, it may be brought into conformity with the higher principles of the Christian life and adapted to the shifting circumstances of time, place, and peoples. (AA 7)

As in *Lumen Gentium*, the point is made that the most powerful witness we can give to the truth and value of the Faith is to show forth in our daily lives the good fruit that it produces.

Again, this is how *Apostolicam Actuositatem* puts it:

The laity fulfill this mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light of the world as well as by practicing honesty in all their dealings so that they attract all to the love of the true and the good and finally to the Church and to Christ. (AA 13)

Certainly, we know that this is true. If a gentleman of our parish is known to be:

- a thoughtful and generous husband;
- a devoted father – who spends time with his children and is constantly concerned with their formation;
- a man of his word, who is fair and honest in his business dealings;
- and among the first to come to the help of a neighbor in need . . .

. . . that is what will convince others (at least, people of good will) that there is something valuable there.

D. A Particular Point of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

The witness we give as to the fruit that the Christian life produces in us . . . the is the greatest and the most powerful thing.

But *Apostolicam Actuositatem* makes another point, that I particularly want to mention this week:

However, an apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ

by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. (AA 6)

And again, a bit further on:

True apostles however, are not content with this activity alone but endeavor to announce Christ to their neighbors by means of the spoken word as well. For there are many persons who can hear the Gospel and recognize Christ only through the laity who live near them. (AA 13)

How do we do that?

Apostolicam Actuositatem says we should have courses. I hope that doesn't mean like the Jehovah's Witnesses . . . that we should have a spiel. I'm sure it doesn't.

This brings us to this week's bulletin.

The Cathedral Parish is now on Facebook!

I'll be the first to admit that I resisted this a bit. People are too tied to their devices, etc. And I have been a little hesitant because it gives people a chance to react, and there could be some malicious or deliberately inappropriate things posted.

But I have been persuaded in the end that this does serve a real need.

We have a church full of people who want to be here. I'm reminded of that so strongly whenever I am away from the parish for a weekend and attend Mass elsewhere . . . the level of engagement and enthusiasm here just cannot be taken for granted.

So we have a lot of people who want to be here . . . presumably because they experience that there is something valuable here. I think that there are a lot of people here who would like to share

We want to give you a way to do that.

We want to do that on the level of the parish, too. Providentially, one member of last year's RCIA group is doing an internship with Google

this summer. He is using the discretion that his job affords to get Google Ads for this year's RCIA process in front of people who are likely to be interested. Most things on our Facebook page have received 100+ "hits." The RCIA notice has received 1100+ "hits." We will see what comes of that.