



Homily Catholic Formation and Leadership Conference, 2009
 Most Rev. Jose H. Gomez
 Archbishop of San Antonio

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

We gather once again at the Catholic Formation and Leadership Conference, this year to reflect on the Family as the Domestic Church.

The family, Pope John Paul II, said is the way of the church. How appropriate that Jesus should begin his earthly life in a “family”. The word “family” comes from the Latin word “*famulus*” which means “servant”. To be ‘family’ is to serve faithfully – as Jesus did.

The family, then, is a community of life, love, mission and service as the theme of our conference states. It is a school of virtues for both parents and children. It is a place to find God, to learn how to connect with God and with others. It is in the family where love is freely given without self-interest, it is where we learn to love, to pray and to practice the gift of charity.

But as the 1st reading of today’s Mass reminds us there is an ongoing fight between the law of the spirit and the law of the flesh.

Today we are asked to ‘live according to the spirit’ and be ‘concerned with the things of the spirit’, because ‘the concern of the flesh is death, but the concern of the spirit is life and peace’

My sisters and brothers we cannot forget that we were sinners, yet Christ died for us. More than that, though we are sinners, each of us is given a great calling.

St. Paul says that before the foundation of the world, God had a plan for each of our lives. We were chosen. Every one of us. Destined to be his sons and daughters.

The purpose of our lives is to be holy and to praise God. And we are called to help God in his plan for the world—which is to unite all peoples and all things in Christ (cf. Eph. 1).

Our calling, my sisters and brothers, is to love (Gal. 5:13; Rom. 13:8). And to love means we must share the great gift we have been given—the love and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and the good news of his Gospel. So that means that we are called to be apostles, missionaries, evangelists. To preach the Gospel with our lives.

And this is our particular responsibility as men and women of faith. We have to be missionaries, evangelists of our culture.

In today's passage of the Gospel Jesus tells us that he's expecting us to 'bear fruit'. The parable of the fig tree reminds us of God's patience with us, but no doubt that it is a call to actively 'bear fruit'.

And, that is exactly the reason for which we all are here today. We understand and are convince that God is calling us to be faithful and to share the beauty of the Gospel with our brothers and sisters.

This apostolic mission starts in the family and it is projected to the world from the family. It is essential for the future of the Church and society that families grow in strength and that they become missionaries, sharing the truths of the Gospel with other families, in a simple but enthusiastic witness.

People today are hungry for the good news that there is more than this life. They are hungry to know that God loves them, that he has a plan for them; that Christ died for each one us, that we are sons and daughters of God, that we call God our Father!

My sisters and brothers, the essence of the Church is mission. The essence of every Christian life is missionary. Every one of us, ordained or not, is called to be a preacher of the Good News, a witness to the resurrection. There are a lot of ways to preach—not only with words. But this is our common calling as Christians.

Following today's Gospel we can say that our mission is similar to the 'gardener' in today's passage of the Gospel. The description of the 'orchard' in the parable matches the reality of our society. God, the owner of the orchard, has come over and over again looking for fruits and it is becoming more and more difficult for Him to find them.

Sadly, some of our brothers and sisters think they've outgrown God or that they're too smart to believe in things they can't see or prove. Entire sectors of our society have been given over to religious indifference or skepticism. These people are no longer sure whether it's possible to know God and, even if it is, they're not quite sure it matters.

So, we can think of ourselves acting as the 'gardener' in today's parable: "I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future" So, today as we listen to the word of God and renew our apostolic zeal, let's ask for the grace to 'bear fruit' in our own personal life that we can be instruments of the Grace of God in our families, our Church and our society.

We'll be able to do it, if with humility, acknowledging our sinfulness, dedicate ourselves to help our brothers and sisters to 'discover' the love of God in their lives. It is not a matter of imposition, but of helping them, with our example and words, to 'encounter the living Christ' in their lives.

Today, we also celebrate the feast of St. Anthony Mary Claret, Bishop and founder of the Claretian missionaries. He wanted the missionaries “to reach the ends of the earth, from one pole to the other, in order to proclaim the word of God”

He also said: “The person who burns with the fire of divine love is a son (or a daughter) of the Immaculate Heart of Mary”

Today, we ask Mary, our blessed Mother, to rekindle the fire of the love of God in our souls that we pray and work to make our families a ‘real domestic church’ and from there, we will be able to reach the ends of the earth! Amen.