

You Will Be My Witnesses:

A Pastoral Letter to the People of God of San Antonio on the Christian Mission to Evangelize and Proclaim Jesus Christ

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To my brother bishops and priests, my first collaborators in the priestly ministry; to my brother deacons, co-workers in the ministry of service, to my brothers and sisters in consecrated life, living testimony of faithful commitment and apostolic life; to all the faithful, called to holiness and mission in ordinary life:

1. I greet you all with affection and joy! Every day I thank God for your friendship as we share in the beautiful mission of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ here in San Antonio and throughout our nation, our continent, and our world.

We are so blessed, my friends! To know Jesus Christ. To know the love of God our Father. To know that we are children of God. What love our Heavenly Father has shown to us! I find myself returning often to the wonderful teaching of St. Paul: Before the foundation of the world, God “destined us in love” to be his sons and daughters through Jesus Christ. He made us “to live for the praise of his glory.”¹

2. *We exist for the praise of God’s glory.* This is the true purpose of our lives. How often do we think about this? We have many responsibilities in our families, in our work, in our neighborhoods and communities. But what we are truly here to do is to give praise to God. These things are meant to go hand-in-hand. We are meant to praise God throughout all the days of our lives, in the midst of all the things we do that fill our days.

In another place St. Paul writes: “Through [Christ], let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.”² Everything we do is meant to be a sacrifice, something that we offer to God, to thank him and to praise him.

We praise God for the blessings he has bestowed upon us, for the gift of life, the gift of faith, and the promise of eternal life. We should praise him every time we pray. But we are also called to talk about God to our family, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. God wants us to tell others about Jesus Christ, in whom we see the face of our Father and experience his love and tender mercy in our lives.

This is the mission that Jesus Christ gave to his Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, the last words that Jesus speaks to his disciples are these: “You will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.”³ Today more than ever, Christ needs witnesses. He needs disciples who know and love him to testify to the truth of his living presence among us. To testify to the Good News that this troubled world of ours has a Savior.

3. St. Paul said that God “was pleased to reveal his Son to me *in order that I might proclaim him.*”⁴ He speaks here, not only of his own experience, but of the essential responsibility of every Christian.

God revealed his Son to each of us for our salvation, but also so that we might share the Good News of our salvation with others. He revealed his Son to us *in order that we might proclaim him*—that by proclaiming him we might spread the blessings we have received

to everyone we come in contact with.

There are many ways to proclaim Christ, and not only with words. It is not only a matter of speaking or preaching or what is negatively considered “proselytizing.” Proclaiming Christ includes everything that we do, in word or in deed, to bear witness to our faith in him. We proclaim Christ by our way of life.

The important point is this: the proclamation of Christ is not an option or an obligation reserved for bishops, priests, deacons, and religious. It is the duty of every believer.

4. I am more and more convinced, my friends, that we need to rediscover this fundamental dimension of our Christian life and identity. That is why I am writing this letter to you to mark the fifth anniversary of my installation as your Archbishop.

In my first pastoral letter, which I wrote to you on my first anniversary, I shared my thoughts on how important it is for us to grow in our knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.⁵ In my second pastoral letter, I wrote to you about the promise of forgiveness and reconciliation with the Father that lies at the heart of the Gospel that Christ came to preach.⁶ In this letter, I would like to continue our reflection on the Christian life by talking about our duty as disciples to bear witness to Christ and his Gospel.

To know Jesus Christ and his love causes us to want to share that knowledge and love with everyone we meet. To be reconciled with the Father and to know ourselves as his beloved children fills us with the desire to tell the whole world of the gift of his salvation. Evangelization begins in the heart that has been evangelized, the heart that has heard the Good News and been converted; the heart that has known God’s mercy and love. We cannot be silent about what we have seen and heard and felt. We cannot help but to proclaim and testify to the great difference that Jesus Christ has made in our lives.

5. We have a duty to bear witness to God. It is a duty of delight, a duty we carry out with joy and thanksgiving. We want the world, beginning with those nearest to us, to share in what we have been given—the free gift of God’s grace and the joy that comes with knowing the truth that sets us free.

This duty of proclaiming Christ falls upon every one of us in the Church—clergy, laity, and religious. However, I address this letter in a special way to you who are lay men and lay women. I am conscious that I am writing in the midst of the universal Church’s celebration of the Year for Priests. To mark this special year, I have recently published a book about the great mission of the priesthood in God’s plan for the new evangelization.⁷

And it is true: our priests are my first co-workers in the mission that Christ entrusted to his Apostles and their successors—the mission to preach salvation to the ends of the earth.

However, in this letter I want to speak especially to you who live out your faith in the midst of the world and all its secular affairs. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, lay people are given the “duty ... to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth. This duty is all the more pressing when it is only through them that men can hear the Gospel and know Christ.”⁸

“That I may preach ... for that is why I came”

6. To better understand our duty to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, we must reflect once more on the beginning of his public life and ministry. Christ came into this world to preach the Good News.

We hear his words at the very beginning of the Gospel: “Let us go on to the next towns,

that I may preach there also. *For that is why I came.*”⁹ He gave his first disciples that same mission: “He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal.”¹⁰

At the end of the Gospel, we hear the Risen Lord address these words to his Church: “Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.”¹¹ We see this mandate begin being fulfilled in the Acts of the Apostles. We see the Twelve, along with priests, deacons, and lay people, joined together in the mission of “proclaiming the Good News of the Lord Jesus” and bringing great numbers to Christ.¹²

7. The first Christians, even under the threat of persecution and death, preached and taught in homes and in the marketplace. They proclaimed the Gospel in great cities and in rural areas. They preached the Good News to the rich and the poor; to the sick and handicapped; to young and old; single and married; to families; and to foreigners and slaves; to philosophers and intellectuals and to the uneducated; to kings, governors, and religious leaders; to workers, artisans, and people of commerce.

The apostolic preaching did more than create individual converts to Christ. The encounter with Christ was always an encounter with his Church. The proclamation of Christ aimed to bring men and women into communion with Christ in his Church through the power of the sacraments.

When they heard the Apostles’ preaching, people were moved to ask: “What shall we do?” The Apostles replied directly: “Repent, and be baptized!”¹³ Always and everywhere the apostolic preaching led to baptism and incorporation into local churches,¹⁴ each with its own bishop and priests,¹⁵ each united to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.¹⁶

8. In this great missionary effort, lay people evangelized alongside the Apostles and assisted them in their priestly and sacramental ministries. Married couples, such as Aquila and Priscilla, were engaged in missionary work and apologetics.¹⁷ St. Paul’s letters include the names of lay men and lay women he described as “fellow workers” and collaborators in his ministry,¹⁸ including those who helped him write his letters to the faithful.¹⁹

St. Paul said that the Gospel was “the power of God for salvation.”²⁰ And within the lifetime of the Apostles, the Gospel of Jesus Christ had spread to every corner of the then known world. Within three hundred years, the Roman Empire had been converted and the foundations of a Christian civilization, the civilization of Europe and the West, had been laid. All by the proclamation of the Word of God by men and women who had been touched by that Word and were zealous for others to hear it as well.

My brothers and sisters, in the Church today we need that same faith in the power of the Gospel, that same apostolic zeal for souls. We need to renew in ourselves the conviction and the sense of duty that animated St. Paul, who said: “For necessity is laid upon me. *Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.*”²¹

The “priestly soul” of the lay apostolate

9. From the beginning it has been understood that the whole Church is “apostolic” and that every baptized believer shares in the “apostolate” by being sent out into the world to preach the Gospel.²² Yet in the unity of the Church’s mission there are varieties of service, all under the leadership of the bishops who are the successors of the Apostles.

The bishops are entrusted with the office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing in Christ’s name. They carry out this mission with their co-workers, the ordained priests, and with the assistance of permanent deacons. In addition to the ministerial and sacramental priesthood in the

Church, there is “the common priesthood” of all believers, made up of all the baptized and including the laity and those faithful specially consecrated to God.²³

The early Church understood herself to be the new Israel, a kingdom of priests. Using the language of the Old Testament, St. Peter wrote to the first Christians: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, so that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”²⁴

10. Every one in the Church shares in Christ’s priesthood, his offering of himself in love for the life of the world.²⁵ Each of us who has been baptized has a “priestly soul.” As lay people, you are called to offer your daily work and prayer as a spiritual sacrifice of praise to God. You are called to live and work for God in a spirit of love, with a desire to serve him in all things and to do everything you can to help the souls around you.

In the words of the Second Vatican Council, you are to be “witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind.”²⁶ This is what makes the lay vocation so crucial to the mission of the Church. By definition, the laity are on the front lines of the culture, living in the very heart of the world.

The people you meet in your community or in your daily work may not hear the Gospel if they do not hear it from you. They may not see an example of Christian living unless they see it from you.

You are to be Christ’s witnesses. You are given this vocation by your baptism and empowered for it by your confirmation.²⁷ To assume responsibility for evangelizing is a mark of Christian maturity, a part of fully growing up in your relationship with Jesus Christ in his Church.

11. The primary apostolate of lay people, since the early Church, has always been to spread and defend the faith among their families and neighbors and to bring the teachings of Christ to bear on the issues facing their communities.²⁸

This is important to remember. Since Vatican II lay ministries have flourished, along with many fruitful forms of collaboration between lay people and their pastors in all areas of pastoral care and parish life. This collaboration is indispensable; without it the work of pastors cannot be fully effective. The service of lectors, cantors, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, catechists, and other parish ministers is a beautiful expression of love for our Lord.

Lay ministries are crucial to building up the community of the Church. However, we need to always keep in mind the essential distinction between the ordained priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful. Priests and lay people have their own distinct identities and missions in the Church. We need to promote positive cooperation by laymen and women in the life of the parish while at the same time avoiding any confusion or blurring of the lines between their roles and the activities proper to the ordained priesthood.²⁹

It is especially important for us all to remember the teaching of the Council: “The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church. Before men and women can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion.”³⁰

As lay believers possessed of a “priestly soul,” your primary mission is in the world, not inside the sanctuary of the church or inside a Church office. Your first duty remains to heed the commission every one of us receives at the end of every Mass—to go out into the world to love and serve our Lord.

Nourished by the gift of his Body and Blood, you are called to bear witness to this gift by

making your lives a form of worship to God.³¹ Your evangelization must always be *profoundly ecclesial* and *intensely Eucharistic*. You are calling people to Christ and to his Church—and to the heart of the Church, which is the Eucharist.³²

12. Many of you will carry out your duty to evangelize in the context of your ordinary jobs. There are many ways to share your faith naturally in the workplace. The most obvious way is simply to lead a good Christian life—to show courtesy, concern, and respect for your co-workers; to perform your work well, and to always radiate the joy of Christ with a cheerful and positive attitude.

During the ordinary course of your work, you also have opportunities to share your faith. In talking with co-workers about the issues of the day, you can offer the perspective of the Church and Catholic thinking; if you encounter questions or challenges to the Church's teachings, you can provide a reasoned response and perhaps suggest certain readings from the *Catechism*, Church documents, or resources from the websites of the Vatican, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, or the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

With renewed awareness of your “priestly soul,” I urge you, my friends: seek to serve God and your brothers and sisters every day, through all that you do and say, through the way that you live your life. People respond more to example than to “teaching.” Testify to your faith through your daily habits and actions. You will find that your witness to the Christian life will be attractive to others and will afford you regular chances to talk about the “source” of your happiness in Jesus Christ and your Catholic faith.

“San Antonio will be ... the heart from which we will go out”

13. It is our proud legacy as the Church of San Antonio to have been a pioneer in the first evangelization of America. “The faithful men and women who brought the Gospel here were true pioneers. Through them, the Good News of God’s love was preached on this soil, took root in the hearts of our ancestors, and continues to bear fruit in this community of faith.”³³

In 2006, we commemorated the 275th anniversary of the founding of San Fernando Cathedral, one of the oldest Catholic churches in our country. And next year, in 2011, we will mark the 320th anniversary of the first Mass said here—one of the first celebrations of the Eucharist on the soil of what is now the United States of America.

As Pope John Paul II reminded us during his historic visit to San Antonio in 1987, from this land where the Gospel was first preached in America, we are called to raise up a new generation for the new evangelization of our country: “Today it is your turn to be evangelizers of each other and of all those whose faith is weak or who have not yet given themselves to the Lord. May you be no less zealous in evangelization and in Christian service than your forbearers!”³⁴

14. Our legacy is our mission. The historic missions that still stand along the banks of the San Antonio River are a testament to our proud past, and a summons to step confidently toward our future.

Venerable Antonio Margil de Jesús, the heroic Franciscan missionary who founded our San José Mission in 1720, said: “San Antonio will be the headquarters ... the heart from which we will go out to establish additional missions.”³⁵ My brothers and sisters, let us make that true once more! Let us make San Antonio the great heart from which the new

evangelization of our nation goes out with renewed fervor.

15. I issue this call to every one who serves in any capacity in our parishes and schools; in our formation and religious education programs; in our seminary, colleges, and institutes for religious and consecrated life; in our hospitals and in all the wide variety of our charitable outreaches; in all our archdiocesan offices: You must be evangelists!

No matter what job you perform in the Church, your mission is to tell people about the God who loves them. You must proclaim the God who has come to be our friend. The God who has come to save us from our sins and lead us to eternal life.

The time has come for every one of us to examine what we are doing, personally and institutionally, in light of the imperative of the new evangelization. We all need to ask ourselves: “How is my work leading men and women to Jesus Christ? Is Christianity spreading to those around me?”

16. I am very enthusiastic about the growth of evangelization teams in parishes throughout our Archdiocese. This is just the kind of pastoral initiative we need! The parish exists in order to spread the Good News.

I call upon pastors and parish leaders, in cooperation with our Office for Evangelization, to become even more committed to equipping parishioners to defend their faith and to give account for the hope that is in them.³⁶ Our people must know their faith well, including the social teachings of the Church, and they must know the urgency of the duty to evangelize.

Now is the time for us to increase our commitment and zeal. The Apostles implored our Lord, “Increase our faith!”³⁷ This must be our daily prayer, too. Let us deepen our knowledge of the Word of God through daily prayerful reading and sustained study. What a great idea it would be for individuals and families to read a little each day from the Scriptures and the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.³⁸

Let us cultivate an interior life so that we grow in our appreciation of all that God has done for us. Let us grow in our desire to be better communicators of our praise and gratitude for the blessings we have received.

Let us study anew the important documents of the new evangelization—Pope Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi*;³⁹ John Paul II’s *Ecclesia in America*⁴⁰ and *Redemptoris Missio*;⁴¹ Vatican II’s *Ad Gentes*,⁴² the U.S. bishops’ *Go and Make Disciples*⁴³ and *Encuentro and Mission*,⁴⁴ and the Concluding Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean.⁴⁵

We must come to an ever greater understanding of what Pope Paul VI taught: “The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. *Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists to evangelize.*”⁴⁶

“To lead men and women to ... the God who speaks in the Bible”

17. The task before us is not easy. The culture we are called to evangelize is in many ways more hostile to the Gospel than that faced by Ven. Antonio Margil and America’s first evangelists.

We are called to proclaim Christ in a “de-Christianized” culture, a culture in which powerful interests have been at work for some decades now, patiently erasing the influence and memory of our nation’s Christian heritage from our laws and public policies, from

our arts and literature, from our schools and media, our language and customs, from our entire way of life.

The result of this deliberate strategy of secularization is that more and more of our brothers and sisters today live without any awareness of their need for God. Even believers face the stark reality that in order to participate in the economic, political, and social life of our country, we are increasingly compelled to conduct ourselves as if God does not exist.

18. Pope Benedict XVI has described our cultural moment—and the challenge we are confronted with—in these poignant terms: “The real problem at this moment of our history is that God is disappearing from the human horizon, and, with the dimming of the light which comes from God, humanity is losing its bearings, with increasingly evident destructive effects. Leading men and women to God, to the God who speaks in the Bible: this is the supreme and fundamental priority of the Church and of the Successor of Peter at the present time.”⁴⁷

To lead men and women to the God who speaks in the Bible, to the God who has shown his face to us in Jesus Christ! This must be our highest priority, too, my brothers and sisters. There can be nothing more urgent to our mission as the Church of San Antonio. This must be the measure by which we judge everything we do.

The need for a new evangelization of culture

19. What is required, my friends, is a new dedication to the evangelization of culture.⁴⁸ As Pope John Paul said in his millennial plan for America: “The new evangelization requires a lucid, serious and ordered effort for the evangelization of culture.”⁴⁹

This is a complex subject that requires diligent study and planning, especially by lay people in all the many fields of culture, to identify challenges and find new means to make the mystery of Christ’s salvation understood in our culture today. Here I want to suggest only some broad avenues for our reflection and action.

We must start always where Christ started. As individuals and as a Church, our evangelization should always announce good news to the poor, recovering of sight to the blind, release to those in captivity, liberty to the oppressed, and the time of the Lord’s grace and favor.⁵⁰ We must proclaim the Gospel as liberation, as the truth that sets men and women free from the bondage of sin and death.

Following the example of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, we must also be bold and forceful critics of the idols, injustices, and immorality we find in our culture. We need to expose and root out cultural factors that make it hard for people to have faith in God and to live a just and moral life. These factors include: prevailing value assumptions, patterns of thought, and lifestyle models that are contrary to the Gospel and the dignity and vocation of the human person.

20. The Gospel is not a political program or an ideology. It is far more powerful than that. It is the revelation of the living God concerning the truth about the human person as created in the divine image and likeness. In the mystery of his becoming man, Christ showed us what humanity was meant to become. He showed us the transcendent dignity and destiny of each human person as a child of God.

In our culture today, we confront a powerful “anti-Gospel,” a widespread cultural attitude that denies any special significance or dignity to the human person. This attitude is reflected in our laws and social policies, which deny to the weakest and most vulnerable among us the most basic right, the right to life.

21. In the face of this cultural denial of the Gospel, all of us in the Church are called to testify to the God-given sanctity and dignity of the human person from conception to natural death. In our evangelization efforts as individuals and as institutions, we must defend the family, the vital cell of society, and the divine institution of marriage as between one man and one woman, which is under attack in our culture and legal system. And we must resist every pressure to relegate religious faith to the realm of the subjective and to reduce morality and truth to the status of private opinion.

Our evangelization must aim to build a culture of respect for human life and dignity. We need to inspire our brothers and sisters to seek God's Kingdom and his justice, to build a new world where life is cherished and welcomed—from the child in the womb to the elderly and the handicapped, to the immigrant who comes to our land seeking a new life for his family.

“To us has been sent the message of salvation”

22. It is also vital that we gain a greater understanding of the influence of the mass media and information technology in our culture. Pope John Paul has said, “The very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media.”⁵¹ Again, to study this is most properly the task of lay people with expertise in these fields. I would like to suggest several considerations for your reflection and action.

We have moved from a culture founded on the printed word to a culture dominated by electronic and digital technologies. “Personal” media—communication devices that we carry with us on our persons, such as cell phones and so-called personal digital assistants (PDAs)—have become pervasive. Any individual with access to this new media is capable of sending and receiving images and sounds, texts and data to and from anywhere in the world instantly.

23. This is a revolution in human communication that is already having implications in our political system and other areas of society. In terms of evangelization, we need to understand that these new digital media have their own logic, their own values, and their own “psychology.”

Pope Benedict rightly reminds us that these social communication technologies have “anthropological” implications. They are more than simple tools or entertainment devices. In making possible new kinds of relationships they also change our relationship with ourselves and our understanding of ourselves and others.⁵²

Some questions I have are these: What does it mean for people to be always “plugged in,” always accessible to others through e-mail, text messaging, social networking sites, and cell phones? What does it mean if we begin to “text” people more than we talk to them? With the rise of social networking media, do we risk reducing ourselves to a “face” that we present to others, as if we are creating advertisements for ourselves? In a culture of so much media, do we risk becoming people who can no longer stand to be alone with our thoughts, a people with an almost compulsive need to be distracted or entertained?

24. I do not prejudge the answers to these questions. But it is vital for our evangelization that we in the Church begin asking them. How are we to proclaim Christ in a culture that is awash in so many powerful competing “messages”? Is the sheer volume of information in our culture crowding out our capacity for contemplation, for prayer and conversation with God, for true community?

I do see great possibilities in the new social networking technologies to promote conversation about God and to share our love for Christ. The popularity of these new forms of communication reflects an intense desire for immediacy and contact; for friendship, connections, and community. These are desires that can be fulfilled, ultimately, only by Christ, in the communion we find with him in his Church.

What we must do, as a Church and as individual believers, is to find ways to use these technologies to help our friends see that Jesus Christ is the “message,” the Word that everyone is waiting to receive. Through these new media, we need to help our friends see that in Christ, “to us has been sent the message of salvation,” as St. Paul preached.⁵³

25. In order to carry out the Church’s mission of evangelization, we need to be better students of our culture. We need to understand our culture from the inside out—its values and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses, its positive and negative aspects.

We need to always be on the lookout for new inroads, new avenues and openings for the Gospel, new ways to communicate Christ and to infuse the spirit of Christianity into our culture. We need to always be looking for the “language” that best communicates the Gospel.

26. My brothers and sisters, I urge you: we need Catholics who are living their faith and proclaiming it in every profession and walk of life. Through you we can take the truths of the Gospel to every corner of our culture—to the world of arts, politics, and media; to the areas of business, science, and technological research; even to the fields of sports and entertainment.

Proclaiming Christ in these areas does not mean “proselytizing.” It means performing your work in these fields to the highest possible standards and with a Christian perspective. It means demonstrating, through your work and friendships with your colleagues, the harmony between faith and reason, and the new insights that are possible if we think of creation and discovery as something we do in partnership with our Creator.

You must resist every pressure to practice a “privatized” religion, to keep your faith to yourself. We cannot allow our culture to shut itself off from the voice of Christ. And you are the key to preventing that from happening.

Our culture today is dominated by materialism, by a sense that “this world,” the things we can see and touch, is all that there is. Our culture is governed by a philosophy that says that there are no higher truths, that concepts like beauty, good, and evil are “relative,” and that the only standards that matter are those of efficiency and practical utility. Through your patient witness to Christ, you can help open our culture to the purifying force of the Gospel. You can help people see how their work should participate in the transcendent purposes of God.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” Jesus says.⁵⁴ Let us strive, my friends, to open every door in our culture to Jesus Christ and his voice.

“For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”

27. Christianity has always been spread by ordinary men and women, in ordinary and everyday circumstances. When St. Peter and St. John began preaching in Jerusalem, they were dismissed at first as being “uneducated, common men.” And it is true, they were men of labor, former fishermen; they were not noble, powerful, or wise according to worldly standards. But after the people heard their preaching, they realized that these disciples “had been with Jesus.”⁵⁵

This is how it should be with us, too. By our proclamation, by our words and the witness of our daily lives, the people we come in contact with should know that we are “with Jesus.” They should know that we are living for Jesus and with Jesus and that we want to share the joy of this way of life with everyone.

The state of life that you find yourself in—student or worker, young or old, married or single, raising children or enjoying grandchildren—this is the mission territory that God has given you. Wherever you find yourself is where God has called you to proclaim Jesus Christ. We must be filled with apostolic commitment: “*For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*”⁵⁶

28. You will find yourself called to proclaim Christ to people in different states of life and at different levels of religious formation. Some will be believers of other religions or of different Christian faiths. Many will be those who have no faith or who are in doubt; the numbers of atheists and agnostics, unfortunately, are growing in our culture today.

In trying to evangelize, we confront powerful cultural pressures towards religious relativism; the dominant idea today is that “any one religion is as good as any other,” and that people should keep their religious beliefs to themselves. In practice this outlook translates into a religious indifferentism or a vague religiosity; it leads people to either not care about religion or to treat religion as something that is only a matter of personal experiences or preferences.

Despite these challenges, we are still called to be disciples and missionaries. We are called to testify to our faith in humility and with sincere respect for the beliefs of others. In this culture where religion is treated indifferently or with hostility, we need to foster real friendships and practical alliances with others who believe in God, especially our fellow Christians, our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters, as well as with followers of Buddhism and Hinduism.

How do we talk about Jesus Christ with those who have not yet heard or received the Gospel? We should do so with sincerity and all honesty, knowing that our personal witness and acts of love will tell people as much as our words.

I have always admired the approach taken by Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She was able to share her faith in the most beautiful way in a culture where Christianity was a tiny minority. Mother Teresa would say: “I love all religions but I am in love with my own. Naturally I would like to give the treasure I have to you, but I cannot. I can only pray for you to receive it.”⁵⁷

This is a good attitude for us to have. Let us never be ashamed of the Gospel.⁵⁸ Nor should we allow our respect for others’ freedom of conscience to be an excuse to remain silent about Christ.⁵⁹ The greatest love and service we can show to others is to share the Good News that they are loved by God and offered his salvation. We cannot neglect to tell others that in Jesus Christ they can find the answers to their questions about the fundamental meaning of existence and the purpose of life.

29. I am particularly concerned about two groups in our society today. First, the millions of Hispanic immigrants in our midst. I am deeply concerned that growing numbers of our Hispanic brothers and sisters are in danger of drifting from the Catholic faith to other religions or to no religion at all.

There are many complicated reasons for this situation. It is very difficult under any circumstances to begin a new life in a foreign country. It is even harder for Hispanics, who

often come here in poverty and under great personal stress and facing other pressures. More often than not, they experience discrimination and misunderstanding as they try to assimilate into American society. It is not easy for them to “fit in” to our parishes, and their lack of faith formation can make it difficult for them to distinguish between the Catholic Church and other ecclesial communities that aggressively try to reach out to them.⁶⁰

To my mind, however, the deepest problem we face is the “secularization” that I talked about earlier. The tendency under secularism is to reduce religious identity to a kind of “cultural Catholicism.” I am concerned that Hispanics’ Catholicism not simply become a kind of cultural background, a personality trait, a part of their upbringing that shapes their perspective on the world but compels no allegiance or devotion to the Church.

So I issue this appeal directly to my Hispanic brothers and sisters: My friends, as you become more and more successful, more and more a part of the American mainstream, you must continue to keep your faith. Do not allow yourselves to drift away from the true faith of our mothers and fathers. You must keep a strong relationship to the Catholic Church and to our Mother, Our Lady of Gaudalupe. *¡Somos Católicos!* This is who you are. Christ needs you and his Church needs you for the new evangelization of this land.

The task before all of us is to find new ways to evangelize the Hispanic population, which has always been a people of strong Catholic faith and identity, a people of prayer with deep values of family, friendship, and the culture of life. We must reevaluate our ministries and our approach. This is not only a matter of effective pastoral programs, it is also a matter of personal witness and charitable assistance, especially to families and children.

In our mission to Hispanic immigrants, we need to be mindful that our work is part of a *continental mission*—to spread the faith not only here in America but throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Let us purify our aims and means in light of the Gospel to ensure that in everything we do for these new Americans we bring them to an *encuentro*, the encounter with Christ, “who has filled our lives with ‘meaning,’ truth and love, joy and hope!”⁶¹

30. The second group I am deeply concerned about is baptized Catholics who have fallen away from the practice of their faith and from the sacraments of the Church. Again, for a variety of reasons, some have turned to other Christian faiths and still others have abandoned any living sense of the faith. We must make it a priority to reach out to these brothers and sisters of ours and invite them to come home. Let us rededicate ourselves to healing the wounds caused by sin and division.

Let us talk to our brothers and sisters about what is keeping them from the Church. Let us talk to them of Christ’s living presence in his Church and in his sacraments. The happiness we all seek is found only in communion with Christ in his Church. Let us then issue a compassionate call for our lapsed Catholic brethren to return to the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and welcome them back to the Eucharistic table.

31. It must be said: we need great courage to witness and “we must obey God rather than men.”⁶² We are called to proclaim the Word urgently in season and out of season.⁶³ Jesus himself has given us this command: “Teach them to observe *all* that I have commanded you.”⁶⁴

The people of the world today are tired of the easy answers, half-truths, and temptations to self-delusion that are offered to them by our secular culture. They long and need to know the real truth, the truth that will set them free.⁶⁵ Our love for our brothers and sisters demands that we tell them this truth—the whole truth, all that Jesus Christ teaches and commands.

The Gospel does indeed contain “hard sayings”⁶⁶—teachings that run counter to the drift

of our culture, teachings that challenge our sinfulness, selfishness, pride, and weakness. But Christ alone holds the words of eternal life and we are called to proclaim his words and way of life to every man and woman we encounter.⁶⁷

There will always be some, like the rich young man in the Gospel, who turn away from the Lord in sadness because he demands of them more than they are willing to give up.⁶⁸ But there will be many more like Zacchaeus, the deceitful tax collector, who wish to see Jesus and will receive the truth joyfully and gratefully, and will change their lives and find salvation.⁶⁹

“Go quickly and tell ... that he has risen”

32. My friends, we must be convinced of the truth that the Apostles knew, that everyone in some way is searching for Christ.⁷⁰ People used to seek out the Apostles and say to them: “We wish to see Jesus.”⁷¹ The men and women of today still want to see Jesus. You are the disciples they will come to with their questions and doubts, interests and needs. You are the ones who must lead them to our Lord.

We cannot preach the Gospel to others unless we have first experienced its Good News in our own lives. Only the heart that has been converted can lead other hearts to conversion. So we need to pray always for the grace of a new, deepened, life-changing conversion. Conversion is not something that happens only once in our lives. Every day, we have to make a new effort to turn our hearts once more to the Lord.

33. Before I close this letter, I want to talk to you about my own personal approach to evangelization and proclaiming Christ. I was blessed to be able to spend a good number of years in pastoral ministry and providing spiritual direction to lay men and lay women. Those were happy and joyful years for me. I learned a great deal from the men and women I ministered to. I came to admire their deep faith and apostolic zeal.

During those years, they helped me to appreciate two things. First, that evangelization flows from our love for Christ; we proclaim the love that we feel in our own hearts. Second, that proclaiming Christ is more than handing on a set of doctrines or a philosophy of life. Proclaiming Christ means bringing men and women into a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. It means bringing people to Jesus and Jesus to people. It means telling people who Christ is, what he teaches, and how we can come to know him better in our lives.

My priesthood and episcopal ministry have also been deeply shaped by the teachings and witness of Pope John Paul II. I had been ordained only three months when he was named Pope in 1978. And I was a young priest when he made his historic pastoral visit to San Antonio in 1987. I will never forget the experience of joining many of my brother priests to concelebrate Mass with the Vicar of Christ for 350,000 faithful here. I was humbled and grateful in 2001 when he called me to be a Bishop, and again in 2005 when, shortly before his death, he called me to be your shepherd and Archbishop.

I have always felt a spiritual bond with Pope John Paul. And personal apostolate and the new evangelization were key themes of his pontificate. He taught me that the mission of the Church must be carried out by every Christian. As he wrote: “Humanity is loved by God! This very simple yet profound proclamation is owed to humanity by the Church. Each Christian’s words and life must make this proclamation resound: God loves you! Christ is for you the way, the truth, and the life.”⁷²

Finally, my approach and understanding of these matters owes a great deal to my appreciation

of the spirituality of St. Josemaría Escrivá. I continue to find St. Josemaría's teachings on sanctity and apostolate to be both profound and practical: Don't take the easy way out. Don't say, "I'm no good at this sort of thing; there are others who can do it; it isn't my line."...If you could get away with that argument, so could everyone else. Christ's plea is addressed to each and every Christian. No one can consider himself excused, for whatever reason: age, health, or occupation.

"...Besides, whoever said that to speak about Christ and to spread his doctrine, you need to do anything unusual or remarkable? Just live your ordinary life; work at your job, trying to fulfill the duties of your state in life, doing your job, your professional work properly, improving, getting better each day. Be loyal; be understanding with others and demanding on yourself.

"...This will be your apostolate. Then ... you will find that people come to you. Then you can talk to them, quite simply and naturally—on your way home from work, for instance, or in a family gathering, on a bus, walking down the street, anywhere. You will chat about the sort of longings that everyone feels deep down in his soul, even though some people may not want to pay attention to them: they will come to understand them better, when they begin to look for God in earnest."⁷³

34. When we reread the New Testament narratives about the first Easter, we notice a common theme. Everyone who comes in contact with the risen Lord comes away from that encounter with the urgent desire to run and tell others what they have witnessed.

St. Mary Magdalene, upon encountering the risen Lord outside the empty tomb, ran to tell the Apostles, "I have seen the Lord!"⁷⁴ The words spoken to Mary Magdalene and the women at that empty tomb are now spoken to us: "Go quickly and tell ... that he has risen from the dead."⁷⁵

We are called to testify to the power of the resurrection in our lives. The resurrection is always the essential "content" of Christian preaching. "If Christ has not been raised then our preaching is in vain," St. Paul said.⁷⁶

35. My brothers and sisters, the beautiful work of proclaiming Jesus Christ and the new life of the resurrection now lies before us. We are called to be witnesses of his resurrection to a new generation.

The people of our day long to know what we know—the love of God, the love that leads to life and life abundant, the love that is stronger than death. They long to meet the One who can give them the living water they thirst for. But how can they meet him, how can they find him, unless we show them the way?

The first Apostles were overjoyed to share their discovery of Christ: "*We have found him! .. Come and see!*"⁷⁷ From that moment, faith in Christ has always been spread person to person, from one loving heart to another that is open to love, truth, and beauty.

It is time for us to reclaim the excitement and joy of those first disciples, and to tell the world that we have found the One for whom we are all searching—the one true source of all happiness and hope. Let us fall in love again with Christ and spread his joy, life, and love with our neighbors. Let us rediscover the mission of proclaiming Christ as the fundamental dimension of our identity as his disciples. Let us give praise to God with our lives for the gift of Jesus!

36. I pray that with St. Paul, you will make it your "ambition to proclaim the Gospel," in everything that you do.⁷⁸

I ask especially the intercession of our patron, St. Anthony of Padua, the great preacher and evangelist. And finally, I pray that Our Lady of Guadalupe, Queen of Apostles and

Mother of the Americas, will give courage to your heart as you carry out the great mission of serving her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Given in San Antonio,
at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center,
February 15, 2010, the fifth anniversary of my installation as Archbishop of San Antonio,
Most Reverend José H. Gomez, S.T.D.
Archbishop of San Antonio*

¹ See Eph. 1:3–14.

² Heb. 13:15.

³ Acts 1:8.

⁴ Gal. 1:16.

⁵ *To Grow in Knowledge and Love of Jesus Christ*, Pastoral Letter (February 15, 2006). My pastoral letters and other writings, homilies, and addresses are available on the Archdiocesan website, www.archsa.org.

⁶ *The Tender Mercy of Our God*, Pastoral Letter on Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Christian Life (February 21, 2007).

⁷ See Archbishop José H. Gomez, *Men of Brave Heart: The Virtue of Courage in the Priestly Life* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2009).

⁸ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd. ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 900.

⁹ Mark 1:38; compare Matt. 4:23; 9:35.

¹⁰ Luke 9:2; compare Luke 9:6, 11; Mark 6:12–13; Matt. 10:7–8.

¹¹ Mark 16:15.

¹² Acts 11:19–21.

¹³ Acts 2:37–41.

¹⁴ Acts 14:13; 15:41; 1 Thess. 2:14.

¹⁵ Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28.

¹⁶ Acts 5:11; 12:5; 15:22; Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23–32.

¹⁷ Acts 18:2–3, 18–19, 26.

¹⁸ Rom. 16:3, 21; Phil. 2:25; Phil. 4:3.

¹⁹ Rom. 16:22.

²⁰ Rom. 1:16.

²¹ 1 Cor. 9:16.

²² Compare *Catechism*, nos. 863, 900.

²³ See *Catechism*, nos. 1268, 1547, 1591–1592.

²⁴ 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; compare Exod. 19:6.

²⁵ Compare John 6:51.

²⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (December 7, 1965), 43.

²⁷ See *Catechism*, no. 1305.

²⁸ 1 Cor. 16:15, 19; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:19–21.

²⁹ See Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ, the Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America (January 22, 1999), 44.

³⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963), 9. See also, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and other Vatican Dicasteries, *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests (August 15, 1997).

³¹ Compare Rom. 12:1.

³² See Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission (February 22, 2007), 79, 84, 85.

³³ Archbishop José H. Gomez, Homily, Holy Mass Celebrating the 275th Anniversary of the Establishment of San Fernando Cathedral (March 9, 2006).

³⁴ Pope John Paul II, Address to the Spanish-Speaking Community at Our Lady of Guadalupe Plaza, San Antonio (September 13, 1987).

35 Mary Ann Noonan Guerra, *The Missions of San Antonio* (San Antonio: Alamo, 1982), 5.

36 1 Pet. 3:15.

37 Luke 17:5.

38 *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

39 Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation On Evangelization in the Modern World (December 8, 1975).

40 Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*.

41 *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (December 7, 1990).

42 Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (December 7, 1965).

43 U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (November 18, 1992).

44 U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry* (November 13, 2002).

45 Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean, Concluding Document, (Aparecida, Brazil, May 13–31, 2007).

46 Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

47 Pope Benedict XVI, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Concerning the Remission of the Excommunication of the Four Bishops Consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre (March 10, 2009).

48 See Pontifical Council for Culture, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture* (May 23, 1999).

49 Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 70.

50 Luke 4:16–21; compare Isa. 61:1–2.

51 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 37.

52 Pope Benedict XVI, “The Media: At the Crossroads between Self-Promotion and Service, Searching for the Truth in order to Share it with Others,” Message for 42nd World Communications Day (May 4, 2008).

53 Acts 13:26.

54 Rev. 3:20.

55 Acts 4:13; compare 1 Cor. 1:26.

56 Acts 4:20; 1 John 1: 1-5.

57 David Scott, *A Revolution of Love: The Meaning of Mother Teresa* (Chicago: Loyola, 2005), 140.

58 Rom. 1:16; Luke 9:26.

59 Mark 16:15.

60 See generally, Archbishop José H. Gomez, “The Encounter with Christ and the Future of Hispanic Ministry,” Address to the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry Symposium on “Paradigmatic Changes in Hispanic Ministry” (August 28, 2007); see also Gomez, “*La predicación y la enseñanza: Evangelization, Education, and the Hispanic Catholic Future*,” Address to National Symposium on the Present and Future of Catholic Hispanic Ministry in the United States (June 8, 2009).

61 Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean, Concluding Document, (Aparecida, Brazil, May 13–31, 2007), 548. See generally, U.S. Bishops, *Encuentro and Mission*.

62 Acts 5:29; see also Acts 4:20; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26.

63 2 Tim. 4:2–3.

64 Matt. 28:19–20.

65 John 8:32.

66 John 6:60.

67 John 6:68.

68 Luke 18:23.

69 Luke 19:1–10.

70 Mark 1:37.

71 John 12:21.

72 Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (December 20, 1988), 34.

73 St. Josemaría Escrivá, “That All May Be Saved,” in *Friends of God: Homilies* (Princeton, NJ: Scepter, 2002), 267–268.

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75 Matt. 28:7.

⁷⁶ 1 Cor. 15:14.
⁷⁷ John 1:45–46.
⁷⁸ Rom. 15:20.