

Witnesses Command More Attention Than Teachers

Late last month Pope John Paul II addressed a general audience with a meditation on the missionary nature of the Church. Following are excerpts from that talk.

Those whom the Lord Jesus sends — those who after the ten days following the Ascension emerged from the upper room at Pentecost, and also all the others, generation after generation until our times — bring with them a testimony which is the first source and the fundamental content of evangelization: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."



They are charged to teach by bearing witness. Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than teachers, or if he listens to teachers, he does so because they are witnesses."

When we re-read, both in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Letters, the recording of apostolic catechesis, we see exactly how the first executors of Christ's apostolic mandate incarnated this task in their lives. St. John Chrysostom says: "If the leaven, mixed with the flour does not transform the whole mass into the same quality, will it really have been a ferment? Do not say that you cannot sweep others along; in fact if you are a true Christian, it is impossible that that should not happen."

He who carries out the work of evangelization is not first and foremost a teacher. He is a messenger. He behaves like a man to whom a great mystery has been entrusted. And, at the same time, like one who has discovered personally the greatest treasure, like the one "hidden in a field" of Matthew's parable. The state of his soul, then, is marked also by readiness to share it with others. Even more than readiness, he feels an interior imperative, on the line of that magnificent "urget" of Paul.

We all discover this interior character by reading and re-reading the works of Peter, Paul, John and

others, in order to know from their works, from the words spoken, from the letters written, who the Twelve really were. The Church was born "in statu missionis" in living men.

And this missionary character of the Church was subsequently renewed in other individual men from generation to generation. We must walk in the steps of these men to whom the Gospel was entrusted, in the different ages, as the work of the salvation of the world. We must see them as they were internally; as the Holy Spirit moulded them; as the love of Christ transformed them. Only then can we see from close up that reality which the missionary vocation conceals.

In the Church, where each one of the faithful is an evangelizer, Christ continues to choose the men he wants "that they might be with him so that he might send them to preach to the nations." In this way the story of the sending of the Apostles becomes the history of the Church from the first to the last hour.

The quality and the number of these vocations are the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, because it is the Spirit "who shares his gifts as he wills for the common good;" for this supreme good he "implants in the hearts of individuals a missionary vocation."

It is certainly the Spirit who inspires and moves the men chosen, in order that the Church can assume her evangelizing responsibility. The Church being, in fact, the mission incarnate, she reveals this mission of hers first of all in the men of the mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

In the Church, the presence of Christ, who calls and sends as during his mortal life, and of the Pentecostal Spirit who inflames, is the certainty that missionary vocations will never be lacking.

These people, "marked and designated by the Spirit," "have a special vocation, whether they are natives of the place or foreigners, priests, religious or laypeople. Having been sent by legitimate authority they go forth in faith..."

The arising and multiplication of people consecrated for life to the mission is also an indication of the missionary spirit of the Church: from the general missionary vocation of the Christian community there

springs up the special and specific vocation of the missionary. Vocation, in fact, is never singular, but touches the man through the community.

The Holy Spirit, who inspires the vocation of the individual, is the same who "raises up in the Church Institutes who take on the duty of evangelization, which pertains to the whole Church; and make it as it were their own special task." Orders, Congregations and Missionary Institutes have represented and lived the missionary commitment of the Church for centuries, and they still live it fully today.

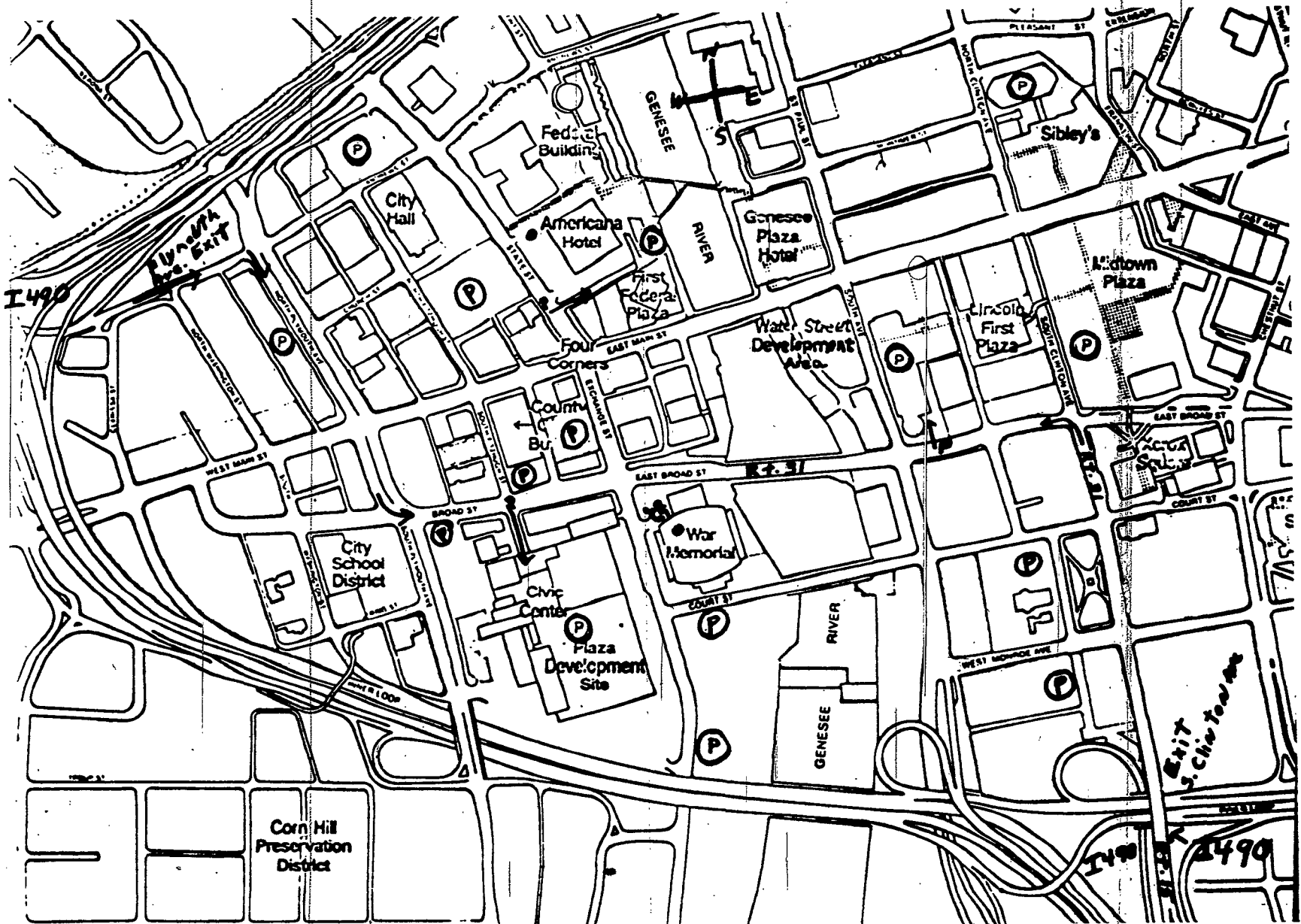
The Church, therefore, confirms her trust and her mandate to these Institutes, and greets with joy and hope the new ones that arise in the communities of the missionary world. But they, in turn, being the expression of the missionary spirit also of the local Churches from which they have sprung, in which they live and for which they operate, intend to dedicate themselves to the formation of missionaries who are the real agents of evangelization on the line of Christ's Apostles. Their number must not diminish; on the contrary, it must adapt itself to the immense necessities of the not distant times in which the peoples will open up to Christ and to his Gospel of life.

Furthermore no one can fail to see a sign of the new missionary age which the Church is expecting and preparing. The local Churches, old and new, are vivified and shaken by a new anxiety, that of finding specifically missionary forms of action with the sending of their own members to the nations, either on their own account or cooperating with the missionary Institutes. The mission of evangelization "which falls on the whole Church" is increasingly felt as the direct commitment of the local Churches, which therefore give their priests, men and women religious and laity to the mission fields. Pope Paul VI clearly saw and described it: "An evangelizer, the Church begins by evangelizing herself... That means, in a word, that she always needs to be evangelized if she wishes to keep freshness, élan and strength to proclaim the Gospel."

Consequently, every Church will have to put itself in the perspective of that apostolic vocation which Paul recognized himself as having among the Gentiles and because of which he groaned: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel."

How To Get To Rites

There are more than 4000 parking spaces available near the Community War Memorial, site of next Tuesday's rites of installation for Bishop Matthew H. Clark. The parking costs range from 25 cents to one dollar for the evening's rites. Travelers from Thruway exit 47, take I490 East to the Plymouth Ave. exit, right on Plymouth Ave., go two blocks and turn left onto Broad (Rte. 31) Travelers from Thruway Exit 45 take 490 West to South Clinton exit, north on South Clinton Ave., left onto East Broad (Rte. 31). Travelers from Thruway Exit 46 go north on Rte. 15 (Mt. Hope to South Clinton), turn left onto East Broad (Rte. 31) Travelers from the Southeast go West on Monroe Ave to South Clinton Ave, and left on East Broad.



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