1. *Ecclesia semper evangelizans*

You might have seen the stage or film version of *Les Misérables*. Our hero, ex-convict Jean Valjean, is freed from his chains but still trapped by the cynicism life has taught him. Then a bishop he has robbed delivers the Good News: “By the witness of the martyrs, by the passion and the blood, God has raised you out of darkness: I have bought your soul for God.” The film next shows us Jean Valjean kneeling in the bishop’s chapel after receiving absolution. He prays fervently that the ‘high plan’ to which he has been called might be realised for “Jean Valjean is nothing now. Another story must begin!”

From this night forward Valjean progresses in prosperity and sanctity, returning to the Church for sanctuary whenever he and his child are in danger. Few films today are as positive about Catholic prayers, sacraments, bishops and convents! It was daring enough when Victor Hugo wrote the story, for 19th Century France was recovering from a very anti-clerical period. But there was renewal in the air: 400 new congregations of sisters were founded in France alone; missionary-teaching orders such as the Marists played a major role as far away as Oceania; and lay movements flourished, such as the St Vincent de Paul Society of Bld Frédéric Ozanam, one of our WYD Patrons.

The call to a new evangelisation has been heard many times in history. New energies, structures and approaches have often followed, and the Church has flowered when least expected. Think of St Paul re-evangelising young communities already divided and lapsing in faith or morals. Or St Benedict and his monastic movement rising from the ashes of the Roman Empire. Or the medieval friars such as Dominicans and Franciscans responding to new ideas and affluence, as well as old heresies and needs. Or the Jesuits repairing the divided Old World of Europe and evangelising the exciting New World of the Americas.

New evangelisations, then, are the ordinary rhythm of Church renewal. So my first point today (of five) is this: *the Church has always had her new evangelisations, as wave after wave breaks upon the sands of human history.* You are the latest wave of missionaries Christ sends to our world. You must be tsunamis of faith and hope and love, coming from all directions, so that Christ might engulf the world in a perfect storm!

2. *Blessed John Paul II and the New Evangelisation*

Since Bld John Paul II first coined the term more than 30 years ago during his historic visit to Poland, ‘new evangelisation’ has been a buzzword in Catholic circles. John Paul made it his signature tune in speeches and letters. He was concerned that many were falling away from the Church. Many factors external...
to the Church made transmission of the Faith more difficult. But there was an internal problem too. Vatican II intended to give a new missionary impulse to the Church but in many respects the post-conciliar Church dropped the ball. Mission directed at conversion and catechesis was sidelined in favour of dialogue and collaboration. Now, I’m all for respectful dialogue with other believers and non-believers; we’ve got a lot in common, can do a lot together, and it’s much better to join forces than fight each other. But if we stop being an evangelising Church we stop being the Church. If we stop being evangelising disciples, we stop being Christians. Full stop – end of story.

That’s why John Paul II’s 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* was subtitled *On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*. “The moment has come,” the Pope said, “to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelisation ... No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.” (John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio* 3) John Paul identified three particular mission fields:

*preaching to the unconverted*: i.e. to anyone who has not yet received the Gospel or anywhere without established Christian communities;
*preaching to the converted*: i.e. to those who already believe, through faith education, pastoral support and community building aimed at deepening Christian faith and action; and what I call
*preaching to the diverted*: i.e. to ‘Christian’ individuals and communities that have lost their sense of faith and live “far removed from Christ and His Gospel”.

So my second point today is this: the New Evangelisation is directed at individuals, institutions and cultures that were formerly or are still formally Christian but who are little connected with faith and Church anymore – including, dare I say, some supposedly Catholic families, parishes, schools, hospitals, colleges, welfare agencies, individuals ... They might still identify as Catholic for census, marketing or tax purposes, but they live as practical atheists, i.e. as if there were no God or as if it hardly matters.

### 3. Pope Benedict XVI and the New Evangelisation

Soon after Benedict XVI was elected pope, he called a Synod on the New Evangelisation; he also established a Pontifical Council to promote it. The Synod noted that we can no longer expect to be carried by the culture. Many traditionally Christian countries have experienced such “a decline in sacramental and Christian practice” that many so-called ‘members’ of the Church might more honestly be called ‘non-believers’. Those are rather confronting words: clearly the Synod Fathers thought it was time for some plain speaking. But how has this happened?
Some aspects of contemporary culture inoculate people to religion. We all know how hostile some are to religion, how bored or distracted others are. Nihilism, individualism and secularism block receptivity to the Gospel and communion with God and the Church. These ideologies are, in effect, anti-Christ – anti Jesus as “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6) – because they repudiate any objective moral Way that enables human flourishing, they deny any universal Truth available to the human mind, and they reject any Life beyond getting one’s own way in the present. Some versions of secularism would confine religion to the private sphere, and then restrict it to an ever-shrinking part of that sphere — an hour of weekly or even annual worship. Christian understandings of faith and reason, science and religion, Church and state, clergy and laity get confused as a result. Pope Emeritus Benedict spoke to the new Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury of “a widespread deafness to the music of faith and a general weariness that shuns the demands of discipleship”.

There are many examples of this tone-deafness to faith. In 2009, the European Court of Human Rights banned crucifixes from Italian classrooms on the grounds that it violated free conscience; this was eventually overturned on appeal. In France so-called ‘gay marriage’ was enacted despite an extraordinary groundswell of opposition; the French President plans to impose euthanasia next. The US President wants to force Church employers to ensure employee access to contraceptives and abortifacients. Western secularism is shifting from a position of neutrality between religions to one of outright hostility, especially to Catholicism. Relativism has morphed from being the lazy morality into a kind of tyranny or dictatorship, as Cardinal Ratzinger famously tagged it. My third point is that New Evangelisation requires awareness of context, including forces supporting or inimical to the transmission and expression of the Faith.

4. Pope Francis and the New Evangelisation

The baton of the New Evangelisation passed from John Paul to Benedict and on to Francis. He’d already been a significant contributor to the 2007 Aparecida Document of this region’s bishops. It calls the Church to focus on “confirming, renewing and revitalising” the preaching of the Gospel, so as to bring about “a personal and community encounter with Jesus … We must all start again from Christ, recognising that being Christian is the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

As pope, Francis has emphasised the primacy of witness in winning people back to Christ: the example of just and compassionate lives is what best converts. Being too self-focused, he thinks, is unhealthy: as he put it, “A Church that stays too long in (dank) sacristies gets sick”. The Church must focus outwards, even to the geographic and existential margins, if she is to be a true mother, bearing and nourishing new children, rather than a baby-sitter nursing the faithful to sleep. Our laity must be ready to experience ‘the sweet if difficult path of
evangelisation’. And our pastors must be so close to their people that they smell like the sheep they shepherd, like the fish they catch – which is no comment on the hygiene of the clergy!

Yesterday the Holy Father gave an example of such closeness to the people by visiting a favela to meet the poorest of the poor. He might have preferred to go by bus but since the transport was a car he told the driver to sit in the back as passenger because he wanted to drive. Unfortunately, the Holy Father was pulled aside for speeding. When the policeman looked into the car he was understandably shocked. He contacted his superintendent to say he had pulled over a religious VIP and didn't know what to do. “Not a bishop again,” he asked. “No, higher than that,” the officer explained. “Not His Eminence the Cardinal surely.” “No, higher than that?” “Who then?” the exasperated official asked. “Well, I don't know who he is,” the officer explained, “but he’s got the Pope as his chauffeur.”

Our Pope is certainly very down to earth. One idea that has featured in Pope Francis’ talks to youth is what I call the Nemo dat principle: Nemo dat non quod habet: you can’t give what you haven’t got. You can’t make disciples without being one yourself. You’ve got to be solid in your relationship with Christ, grounded in Word and Sacrament, prayer and Church teaching. It’s not enough to be high on Jesus all the time or down on the world or the Church. Discipleship requires solid formation. No doubt that’s why you are here. You want to encounter Christ and His Church anew, more deeply, more permanently. Point 4 then: new evangelisers need foundations and formation.

5. The GMD generation

One of the remarkable things about God’s life is its fecundity, its generous, brimming, life-giving power. God’s love overflows into creative acts, bringing new life forth from the void. In JRR Tolkien’s book, The Silmarillion – let’s hope there’ll be a movie after Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit! – Eru the Creator sings creation into being and confronts through music the evil that Melkor the Satan figure introduces. Every time this anti-god introduces a discordant note, Eru weaves it into the music so that it becomes an even more beautiful composition – to Satan’s great frustration.

Our God, too, is musical. From all eternity He sung the Word His Son. Then in time He sung Him as a love song to humanity. St Paul says “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16). We might say: Woe to me if I don’t sing the Gospel love-song. In his brand-spanking-new encyclical, Lumen Fidei, Pope Francis insists that “those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith” (Lumen Fidei 21). That kind of love can’t be stored up selfishly: it has to be shouted from the rooftops; it has to be carolled as a love-song; it has to become the musical celebration of the triumph of the
miserable. Our life should be like a beautiful new setting of the *Gloria*, the *Credo* and the *Sanctus*.

God sends you forth, my young friends, to sing the song that is His Son to a humanity sometimes tone-deaf but actually craving such music. Whether as priests or religious, spouses and parents, or lay missionaries in our world, Christ must be your tune and lyrics. As Pope Benedict said in his message for this World Youth Day: “if you don’t give others God, you give them too little” (*Message for the 28th World Youth Day*, 5). Supersize them I say.

That’s what this WYD is for: *to make you the GMD generation, the go-make-disciples generation; to make each of you GMDs, go-make-disciplers. Do that and what a world we’ll have!* I know you can do it, by God’s grace! I am confident you will!