



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 25 October 2023

[Multimedia]

Cycle of catechesis. The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer. 24. *Saints Cyril and Methodius, apostles of the Slavs*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I will talk to you about two brothers, very famous in the east, to the point of being called “the apostles of the Slavs”: Saints Cyril and Methodius. Born into an aristocratic family in Greece in the ninth century, they renounced a political career to devote themselves to monastic life. But their dream of a secluded existence was short-lived. They were sent as missionaries to Great Moravia, which at the time included various people who had already been partly evangelized, but among whom many pagan customs and traditions survived. Their prince was looking for a teacher to explain the Christian faith in their language.

Cyril and Methodius’ first task was therefore to study the culture of those people in depth. Always the same refrain: faith must be inculturated and the culture evangelized. Inculturation of faith, evangelization of culture, always. Cyril asked if they had an alphabet; they told him they did not. He replied: “Who can write a speech on water?”. Indeed, to proclaim the Gospel and to pray, one needed a proper, suitable, specific tool. So, he invented the Glagolitic alphabet. He translated the Bible and liturgical texts. People felt that the Christian faith was no longer ‘foreign’, and that it had become their faith, spoken in their own mother tongue. Just think: two Greek monks giving an alphabet to the Slavs. It is this openness of heart that enabled the Gospel to take root among

them. Those two had no fear, they were courageous.

Very soon, however, some opposition emerged from some Latins, who saw themselves deprived of their monopoly in preaching to the Slavs; that fight within the Church, always that way. Their objection was religious, but only in appearance: God can be praised, they said, only in the three languages written on the cross: Hebrew, Greek and Latin. They were close-minded in defence of their own autonomy. But Cyril responded forcefully: God wants all people to praise him in their own language. Together with his brother Methodius, he appealed to the Pope, and the latter approved their liturgical texts in the Slavic language. He [the Pope] had them placed on the altar of the Church of Saint Mary Major, and he sang the Lord's praises with them, according to those books. Cyril died a few days later, and his relics are still venerated here in Rome, in the Basilica of Saint Clement. Methodius, instead, was ordained a bishop and sent back to the Slav territories. He would suffer a great deal there, he would even be imprisoned, but, brothers and sisters, we know that the Word of God was not shackled, and it spread throughout those peoples.

Looking at the witness of these two evangelizers, whom [Saint John Paul II](#) chose as co-patrons of Europe and on whom he wrote the Encyclical [Slavorum Apostoli](#), let us turn to three important aspects.

First of all, *unity*. The Greeks, the Pope, the Slavs: at that time, there was an undivided Christianity in Europe, which collaborated in order to evangelize.

A second important aspect is *inculturation*, of which I said something earlier: evangelizing the culture and inculturation show that evangelization and culture are closely connected. One cannot preach the Gospel in an abstract, distilled way, no: the Gospel must be inculturated and it is also an expression of culture.

A final aspect is *freedom*. Preaching requires freedom, but freedom always needs courage. One is free to the extent that one is courageous and does not let oneself be shackled by many things that take away freedom.

Brothers and sisters, let us ask Saints Cyril and Methodius, apostles of the Slavs, to help us be instruments of "freedom in charity" for others — being creative, being constant and being humble, with prayer and with service.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from England, Ireland, Albania, Denmark, Norway, Zimbabwe, Indonesia, the Philippines,

Vietnam, Canada and the United States of America, in particular the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican from Louisiana, the members of the Association of State Catholic Conference Directors and a group of military chaplains. Upon all of you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

Lastly, I greet young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds. I urge everyone to pray the Holy Rosary every day, learning from the Virgin Mary how to live every event in union with Jesus.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

APPEAL

The grave situation in Palestine and Israel is always in my thoughts. I encourage the release of the hostages and the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. I continue to pray for those who suffer, and to hope for paths of peace in the Middle East, in beleaguered Ukraine, and in other regions afflicted by war. I remind you all that the day after tomorrow, Friday 27 October, we will have a day of fasting, prayer and penance. We will gather together to implore peace in the world, at 18.00, in Saint Peter's Square.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear Brothers and Sisters: In our catechesis on apostolic zeal, we have been reflecting on the spread of the Gospel through the witness of Christians of every time and place. Today we turn to Saints Cyril and Methodius, two brothers who are venerated as “the Apostles of the Slavs” for their outstanding missionary work among the peoples of Moravia. As part of their effort to proclaim and inculcate the word of God among the Slavic peoples, they developed the Cyrillic alphabet, which made it possible to preach God’s word and to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the language of the people. Encountering opposition, they came to Rome, where they received support from the Pope. Cyril died in Rome, while Methodius, now ordained a bishop, returned to continue the work of evangelization in the Slavic lands, where he died a martyr’s death. Saint John Paul II proclaimed Cyril and Methodius Co-Patrons of Europe in recognition of the abundant harvest of Christian faith and culture whose seeds they sowed. May the prayers of these two great Saints inspire among the peoples of Europe today a renewed commitment to the reconciliation, unity and peace that are the Holy Spirit’s gifts for the conversion of hearts and the building of a culture of authentic justice and fraternity.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana