



## **VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - Identity and communion, the root of all apostolate**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - At the end of the Summer break, as 'pastoral activities' resume, we usually face important decisions regarding both the overall direction of our energies, and the specific elements to which pastoral programmes of the priest and the community should give priority. What criteria should we adopt for our decisions to bear fruit and respect the real good of the Church?

Firstly, over and above contingent circumstances, it should be said that the priest never stops being a priest, not even during the Summer holidays, just as the community remains the same: perhaps less numerous, or perhaps, in a holiday area, even larger, but always the place in which to encounter and to celebrate the ever Present, Risen Lord.

In this sense the first mistake to avoid is the idea that the planning and organisation of "pastoral activities" coincides with the apostolic mission of the Church and the priest. Certainly this planning and organisation can be an element of the mission, but if the life and the journey of a community were to coincide with a list of activities however long and varied, there is a danger of activism also in the Church, which certainly does not coincide with an effective, well balanced missionary spirit.

The first criteria to follow in thinking about, or better, living, this "fresh start", is to opt as far as possible for opportunities (activities) which strengthen the Christian faithful in their identity. If it is true that "no one can generate unless he is generated", it is clear that for every community Christian formation, faithful to Holy Scripture and to Church tradition and Magisterium, especially using the valid aids of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and its relative Compendium, represents a necessary and essential priority. Unless it focuses first of all on formation, an indispensable condition for motivated and effective action in the world, our "planning" will be always be lacking.

Another essential criteria is communion. First of all communion of sincere and effective faith. If Christianity presents itself to the world as a "vocation campaign", clearly, the element communion must take absolute priority, declining itself as communion with the Church, with the Pope and with the bishops, themselves in communion with him, and with all the clergy. Every priest will come to see that the more he refers to the Holy Father in his preaching and instruction to his people, the more his ministry will be effective and fruitful, because it will shine with visible communion, indispensable for all witness.

Identity, nurtured with formation and communion, nourished with prayer, are the criteria to choose, to ensure that what we term "pastoral work" will be authentic apostolate, resembling more and more the activity of the Apostles who announced with parresia Jesus Christ, sole Saviour of the world and of history, called for the conversion of hearts and established communities capable of evangelising, in obedience to a reality rather than to plans and programmes.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church recalls: "God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth";(1Tm 2,4). that is, God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth. Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary." (CCC n. 851). (Agenzia Fides 11/9/2008)