“Come to me”

Catholic Leadership in an Epochal Change

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The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has given us a genuine roadmap for spiritual and pastoral navigation through these complex times. It is titled *Venite ad me. Considerations on the Transmission of the Faith in an Epochal Change.* Those of us committed to Catholic leadership in public, social, political, and economic life cannot afford to overlook the depth of this text. Within its pages, an extraordinary and providential ecclesial bridge takes shape: it gathers and builds upon Pope Francis’s tireless longing for a “Church that goes forth,” envisioned as a field hospital capable of healing the wounds of the contemporary world, and carries that vision forward into the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV. It is, indeed, a fundamental roadmap that prepares us for the historic horizon of the Extraordinary Jubilee of the Redemption in 2033. We are looking at a document that challenges us to look in the mirror, shed our institutional inertia, and ask ourselves what it truly means to be a Christian leader in today’s public square.

The diagnosis presented to us by the Vatican is neither sugarcoated nor couched in euphemisms. It acknowledges, with a realism that is painful but ultimately deeply healing, that we are immersed not merely in an epoch of change, but in a genuine change of epoch. The natural, organic transmission of faith that once flowed from grandparents to parents and from parents to children, sustained by the ecosystem of the family and the fabric of parish life, has suffered a profound rupture, amounting in many parts of the world to an almost complete breakdown. We find ourselves thrust into a new globalized culture and

a digital ecosystem that permeates everything, reshaping not only what we think, but the very ways in which we structure our brains and our affections. Yet, in the face of this reality, the Church does not advocate a defensive retreat. It does not indulge the bitter complaints of those who yearn for idealized versions of the past, nor does it issue futile condemnations of modernity. On the contrary, it beckons us to recover the radical essence of Christianity itself: the proclamation of the *kerygma*.

The very title of the document encapsulates an entire theological and pastoral thesis: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). Why choose this exact passage at this moment in history? Because humanity today, despite its tremendous technological advances, is profoundly exhausted. We live in hyperconnected societies marked by epidemics of loneliness, anxiety, fragmentation, and existential emptiness. Amid this pervasive exhaustion, Jesus Christ presents himself as the one true source of rest. He is the unfading light through which the unconditional love of the Triune God shines forth. This is a God not scandalized by our failures or our misery, but who actively goes forth to meet humanity and restore its lost dignity.

This is where the text speaks directly to us as the *International Academy of Catholic Leaders*. For a long time, we have run the grave risk of believing that our mission in the public square consisted exclusively of the uncompromising defense of a particular moral code, of winning exhausting culture wars, or of upholding the *fides quae* at all costs, that is, the doctrinal, objective, and institutional framework of our faith. However, *Venite ad me* offers an immense theological lesson by reminding us that, before assimilating doctrine, there must first be an experience of, and an opportunity to encounter, *the fides qua*: the lived, intimate, surprising, and transformative experience of believing. Before teaching the catechism, we must be able to inspire wonder. Jesus of Nazareth did not impose unattainable requirements on those He encountered, broken along the roads of Galilee. He did not demand a certificate of moral purity before touching them. He simply loved them first, healed them, and, through that overwhelming encounter, their lives changed forever.

For a leader with public responsibilities, this approach changes everything. It calls for a profound examination of our motivations. Our leadership in politics, corporate

management, social activism, or healthcare administration must be a direct extension of Christ's inclusive vision. Too often, Catholics in public life act as gatekeepers of grace, putting up filters where God has opened doors. The document emphasizes how Jesus challenged the patterns of discrimination of His time, reaching out to those on the margins, those from whom no one expected anything. Authentic Catholic leadership is not measured by the degree of temporal power we manage to retain in parliaments or corporate boardrooms, but by our ability to shape policies, economic structures, and social models that restore hope to the "last," bringing them back as the "first" in our hierarchy of priorities.

The text also lays out the "how" and courageously addresses the immense challenge of language. How do we speak of an eternal God to a generation that consumes information in fragments of seconds through a screen? The Vatican reminds us that digital technologies are today's new and vibrant frontiers of evangelization. It is not enough to simply be present on the internet; we need to translate the mystery of God into the existential categories of today's people. To this end, the document invites us to rediscover the *via pulchritudinis*, the way of beauty. In a world saturated with discourse and polarized debates, art, beauty, and culture are not mere embellishments: they are arrows pointing directly to the human heart, awakening its longing for eternity.

Even more powerful than aesthetic beauty is embodied witness. Words, on their own, have lost their credibility; the contemporary world listens to teachers only if they are first witnesses, as Paul VI had already warned. And it is precisely at this point that *Venite ad me* reaches its most moving culmination. It is quite extraordinary and revolutionary that a text emanating from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith culminates in a reflection of an entire chapter devoted to real-life testimonies submitted by bishops from the five continents. In those final pages, there are no theories: there is flesh and blood. There are heartbreaking and illuminating accounts of people rescued from the blind pit of addiction, of shattered families that have rediscovered peace through prayer, and of astonishing conversions brought about by the simple impact of witnessing Christian charity in action. That is theology made flesh, the empirical and

irrefutable proof that the Gospel retains its full salvific power in the very heart of the twenty-first century.

As members of the Academy, as committed laypeople, as men and women who walk the corridors of the earthly world, our vocation is crystal clear. We are not called to lead the nostalgia for a Christian world that no longer exists, nor to entrench ourselves in ideological fortresses. We are called to be bearers of light amid weariness. Our decisions, our businesses, our treatment of our political adversary, and our defense of the most vulnerable must become clean and transparent channels. Only in this way, through our own lives of self-giving, will the men and women of our time, weighed down by the burdens of this accelerated epoch, be able to continue hearing, with complete clarity and consolation, that eternal “Come to me” which still has the absolute power to save our lives.