

The Why and How of Evangelization

When I say the word, “evangelization” what do you think about?

I used to think about someone standing on a corner and screaming out some part of a scripture. As kids, we used to call them “Bible Thumpers”. We’ve all probably seen them on tv, mostly because people are complaining about it because it makes them uncomfortable; or because they are frightened by the yelling and threatening tone. I’ve seen it on tv as well as in person and yes, it made me uncomfortable. In fact, I either walked by the person without acknowledgement or crossed to the other side of the street.

Some of you who lived your Cursillo prior to 2006 may have heard this termed as action rather than evangelization. Regardless, that is our mission, to evangelize through action.

I read this book, “On Evangelization in the Modern World” and I want to share part of it with you.

According to the book, evangelization is defined in terms of proclaiming Christ to those who do not know Him, of preaching, of catechesis, of conferring Baptism and the other sacraments.

For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News to all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: In **(Rev.21:5)** it says, “Now I am making the whole of creation new.” But there is not new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change. **(John Paul II)**

For the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but making mankind uncomfortable through the power of the Gospel. In Cursillo it talks this poking or “stabbing” where we see the truth and also see ourselves not living the truth.

So why should we evangelize?

All Christians are called to be witnesses. Jesus Himself commanded us to evangelize.

Here are some places in Scripture that address our call to evangelize:

1 Peter 3:15 “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

Listen: He’s telling us how to do it!

2 Corinthians 5:20 “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf. Be reconciled to God.”

In other words, we're not doing this on our own... God, through the Holy Spirit, is always guiding us.

2 Timothy 4:5 "As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." Again, He's talking to us.

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Remember... This was His plan from the very beginning.

Matthew 28:19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you always, to the very end of the age." **We never stop.**

Evangelization is the primary mission of the Church and we **are** the Church. There is no way that the mission of the Church can succeed without every baptized Catholic taking an active role. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep Him for themselves, they must proclaim Him! And what a gift we have to be able to do this!

All around us are people who have never heard that God loves them and desires abundant life for them. Our country and the world are under a powerful assault by secularist and anti-Christian forces. Many of our fellow believers may still call themselves Christian or Catholic but are no longer living as disciples of Christ. This shows up in declining church attendance and the lack of morality in our world, even among those who still do attend.

Many of our fellow Catholics, as well as believers in the wider culture, look at these matters today, as "Broad and wide is the way that leads to salvation/heaven and almost everybody is on that way. Narrow and difficult is the path that leads to condemnation/hell and very few, if any are on that road."

This is the exact opposite of what Jesus tells us about our situation in the Gospel:

Listen to what **Mt. 7:13-14** states: "Enter by the narrow gate... for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life and those who find it are few."

In our time it is clear that the main river of culture is flowing ever more swiftly towards destruction. However, we know that people who are on the wide path could leave it and set out on the narrow path before they die and be saved. That is our mission: Inviting people to believe and repent and leave the wide path and set out on the narrow path that turns out to be Jesus Himself.

Christianity is not just an optional enrichment possibility for human life-but a message that is truly a matter of life or death, heaven or hell. If we truly love our family members, our neighbors, our fellow parishioners, we're not only going to pray for them to find good jobs, stay healthy, etc.; but we're going to pray, suffer, love, and witness to the One who can save, for the sake of their salvation.

So why don't we do it?

Is it because we don't view the Gospel as true or we don't view people as worthy to hear it? In other words: I don't believe it or I don't love you enough to tell you. Think about that.

This is a quote from Tim Tebow. I'm sure you know who he is. I admire him because he is not afraid to demonstrate his faith. And in front of a national stage. He often states: "I'm a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, and that is first and foremost the most important thing in my life. For me it's about having a relationship with Christ. And that's pretty much it." That is where we need to begin. We need to truly have a personal relationship with Christ and not be afraid to display it in all our environments before we can bring others to their own relationship with Jesus.

Who Should We Evangelize?

There are several groups of people that need to be drawn closer to the love of Jesus Christ:

Those who have never heard the Good News of Jesus.

Those who have been baptized but who live quite outside the Christian faith.

People who have a certain faith but an imperfect knowledge of the foundations of that faith.

Those who feel the need-to-know Jesus Christ in a light deeper from the instruction they received as children.

And many others.

Did you fit in one of those categories before living your Cursillo? Do you know of people in your square meter who may fit into one of those categories?

The world despite innumerable signs of the denial of God, is nevertheless searching for Him in unexpected ways and painfully experiencing the need of Him. Think about the weekend, Christ is the answer to all our problems.

How should we evangelize?

PRAY (Piety): Pray for strength and courage. Live your life praying, speaking, and living the Gospel-God will put the right people in the right place at the right time. Evangelization is not possible without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at the moment of his baptism when the voice of the Father, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" manifests in an external way the election of Jesus and His mission.

Jesus is led by "the Spirit" to experience in the desert the decisive combat and supreme test before beginning his mission.

It is in the power of the Spirit that He returns to Galilee and begins His preaching in Nazareth, applying to Himself the passage of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me", and He Proclaims, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled."

To the disciples who He was about to send off, He says breathing on them, "Receive the Holy Spirit"

It is in the “consolation” of the Holy Spirit that the Church increases because the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church.

The Holy Spirit places on the lips of the evangelizer words which he could not find himself and at the same time the Holy Spirit predisposes the soul of the hearer to be open and receptive to the Good News and the Kingdom being proclaimed.

Like everyone, God has given me crosses to bear. Recently the cross I have been given has been extremely challenging. At first, I did not handle it well. I did a lot of crying, I became very angry, I tried to “fix it” on my own and even put other people in the middle of it. Finally I did what I should have done in the beginning. I gave it to God. I prayed and continue to pray to the Holy Spirit for help and guidance. Now I have more peace about it. I still have difficult days where I am tempted to handle it as I did initially but I now know that I have a choice. I can let my pride get the best of me or I can humbly carry the cross with the help of Jesus Christ.

KNOW THE FAITH (Study): In **1 Peter 3:15**, he states, “Reading the Gospels is the best way to know your faith.”

“Evangelization is not complete if it does not take account of the interplay of the Gospels and of man’s life. We cannot know everything about Catholicism but we need to be ready to answer typical questions that get asked to Catholics or know where to find those answers.

St. Jerome stated that “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” It is in the Scriptures that we encounter our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have been in the position where someone close to me challenged my faith. This person is very smart and strong-willed. I did not have the courage nor the knowledge to defend my faith appropriately. I knew I needed to study the Scriptures more deeply so that I could with confidence and fidelity answer the questions and disagreements that this person would throw at me. I know that I have to keep on studying the Scripture in order to be an effective evangelist.

LIVE THE FAITH JOYFULLY: (Action) Praying and always being grateful brings out your joy. You complain less and think of God and others more. Those who are joyful feel blessed because they are blessed. They recognize that God has given them an incredible gift. They work on responding to God’s grace to make changes in their lives so that they become freer from sin and worldly attachments, which makes them even more joy-filled.

PRAYER + FREEDOM FROM SIN + THANKFULNESS = JOY

SHARE YOUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY: (Action) BE A PERSONAL WITNESS. We must be authentic witnesses, always ready to answer the question, “Why are you Catholic?” This answer needs to have something to do with Jesus Christ and your personal relationship with Him; and how He has impacted your life positively. As witnesses we need to show our capacity for understanding and acceptance, our sharing of life with other people, and our solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. We should radiate our faith in values that go

beyond current values, and our hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. We should be stirring up questions in the hearts of who see how we live such as: Why are they like this? Why are they in our midst? What or who inspired them? How can I be like them? This is the initial act of evangelization.

Remember our actions express our very being.

At the roots of evangelization is one's very being, not the way in which we proclaim our faith, not the methods, not the technical means of communication nor the choice of language. We must begin with who we are: with **being** Christian, and with being the Church; and not in "doing Christian things".

"People listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." Therefore, we need to be living witnesses of our faithfulness to the Lord Jesus.

INVITE: (Action) Look in your environments for people who are searching for more. Spend time with these people. Get to know them by listening and asking questions affirming what is important to them without judgement. Later, share what is important to you, not to correct them but just to share. This is a good way to build trust and make friends. **(Pause)**. Once you have become friends, invite them to a church function such as a Fall Festival, parish picnic, movie night, and finally, a Mass.

I have been studying the Catechism of the Year with Father Mike Schmitz. One day in discussing Tradition he used the analogy of running in a relay race. I changed it around a little for the purpose of evangelization. Imagine evangelization as a never-ending relay race. The finish line is bringing people to God. We, as Cursillistas, are constantly studying, practicing our faith and being witnesses to our faith. In turn we hand "the baton" to those in our environments who are lacking faith in some way, shape, or form. We share our faith with them and then they study, practice and live the faith handing off the baton to people in their environments. Since none of the racers will ever understand everything about our faith, we all need to continue our study, our piety and action, and our living the faith and then keep on passing the baton. As Father Mike states, "I want to take that baton and run with it and I want you to run with it too so we can pass it on to the next generation...that is what is entrusted in us."

In summary, evangelization is your action. It is living your faith as an authentic witness and sharing it joyfully with others so they can understand what you know and feel. That God loves them and desires abundant life for them. In a way we could be considered a type of "Bible Thumper" but instead of yelling and threatening damnation, we make friends and share our faith from the heart with gentleness and respect.

De Colores!

