

Evangelization

Peter ... addressed them, ... "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.... This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear... Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."... So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

~ Acts 2:14, 22-24, 32-33, 36-38, 41-42

THE VERY nature of the Church is missionary. Just as Jesus called his disciples together in order to prepare them and later send them out to all the nations, the Church as the "called community" of believers is sent out to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). The Church has the same missionary mandate of Jesus. He was sent into the world to bring salvation and draw all the nations back into communion with the Father. The Church continues this same mission of her divine founder.

In the above passage, Peter inaugurates the

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Church's mission by proclaiming the Good News of Jesus on Pentecost. We, too, as members of this "called community" are commissioned to proclaim the saving message of Christ to all those we meet. This activity is called **evangelization** and one that bears witness to the Church's universality (catholicity). It is the faith that unites her members, not race, color, nation, or tongue.

Evangelization is not exclusively the work of missionaries. Although their work is invaluable to the Church's mission, the Church calls all her children (laity, religious, and clergy) to partici-

pate in this work. “For lay people,” the *Catechism* explains, “this evangelization ... acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world”¹ (CCC 905). This means that we should not be looking or waiting for a pulpit to preach from but should give witness to the saving knowledge and power of Jesus Christ at every opportunity.

In many of these ordinary circumstances, there is no opportunity to speak about Christ. This is not a difficulty, because the work of evangelization is carried out in both *word* and *deed*. Actions speak louder than words; the witness of our actions and the testimony of our Christian lives speak volumes to those around us. By our words and actions, we announce Christ and announce our faith in the ordinary surroundings of the world in which we live. For knowing Christ ourselves, knowing the great love and mercy of God and his plan for our salvation, we cannot help but share our joy with others. In fact, by telling others about Jesus we, like St. John, make our joy complete (see 1 Jn 1:4).

One way to proclaim Christ is by living the Christian life daily and by letting all see the light we are called to be: “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*

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and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven” (Mt 5:14-16). Our witness to the Christian life is essential to evangelization.

We are also called to tell others about Christ: “*So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in Heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in Heaven*” (Mt 10:32-33). Every person has a right to hear the saving truth about Jesus; God wants all people “*to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Tm 2:4). To accomplish this desire, he calls all of us into his work of salvation. God does not need us, but in his goodness and love he invites us all to share in the mission of his Son. The world is starving, “*not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord*” (Am 8:11). Jesus tells us, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Mt 4:4, citing Dt 8:3).

In proclaiming Christ, we must always respect the dignity of the human person. God has made each of us free and desires us to come to him in and through our freedom. God wants us to be free to choose him and to love him without coercion. The work of evangelization should be an invitation to those whom we meet and should be carried out in respect and with a profound sense of love and service.



St. Thérèse of Lisieux, by Rina Scafidì; St. Thérèse is one of the patron saints of missionaries

¹ *Lumen Gentium* 35 § 1, § 2



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“Our daily prayer should include time to pray for those we have met or will meet in the day.”

Prayer is the greatest work of evangelization. We must never forget that the work of salvation is *God’s* work. The Holy Spirit must be our constant companion when we evangelize, and our constant source of inspiration. Only he knows the hearts of those we meet, so prayer is essential. Only through prayer can we hear God speaking and direct our words and actions according to his will.

Also, evangelization cannot be separated from the promotion of social justice and the care for the poor. This means first and foremost that the needs of those we evangelize should be met. Our Lord saw to the needs of the five thousand and performed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes to feed them (see Mk 6:30-44). His compassion toward his listeners should inspire us to do whatever we can to help someone hear the message of salvation. This is not a call to be taken lightly, since our gift of ourselves is inseparable from the work of evangelization, as St. Paul tells us: *“So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us”* (1 Thes 2:8).

In conclusion, evangelization is a serious responsi-

bility that takes serious preparation. Our daily prayer should include time to pray for those we have met or will meet in the day. Many times, people are suffering and are in need of prayers. Praying for their needs is a great work of evangelization and can draw them back into friendship with God. Also, the Scriptures should be read, meditated on, and prayed over. *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”* (Heb 4:12). God’s Word alone has the power to change lives; we should know it well so that we become carriers of God’s Word for those we meet. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’ Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God”* (Is 52:7-10).

(CCC 767, 849-856, 904-907, 2632, 2835)