

THOUGHTS ON EVANGELIZATION

These twenty-six “Thoughts on Evangelization” have been written to help Catholics understand evangelization more fully from a Catholic perspective. They are intended for use in a parish bulletin over consecutive weeks. A simple heading, “Thoughts on Evangelization” and a graphic will make the reflections stand out. Reinforcement of these “thoughts” in the preaching helps people to remember and appropriate them. Permission is granted to use these thoughts in parish bulletins provided that the author is acknowledged. © 2001 David Thorp

Evangelization is Catholic

The call to evangelize is not something new in the Catholic Church. In fact, it goes all the way back to Jesus Christ Himself who said, “*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.*” (Matthew 28:19) This Great Commission was spoken first to the apostles. But it is given as a command of Jesus Christ to each and every one of us. Pope John Paul II had repeatedly exhorted Catholics to a “new evangelization,” to an evangelization that is new in its zeal, new in its expressions and new in its methods. In what ways are you part of this new evangelization by sharing your faith and fulfilling what Christ directed us to do?

It’s Not My Job

Whose “job” is evangelization, anyway? Vatican Council II said that “the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is the basic duty of the People of God.” If you are baptized you are part of the Church. If you are baptized you are part of the People of God. As one of the members of this People of God, how are you fulfilling this basic duty of sharing your faith with others?

It’s YOU!

It’s easy to consider the work of spreading the Good News to be the responsibility of only the clergy or of only a few who have the time to volunteer for this work. Jesus says, “*You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and have appointed that you should go and bear fruit.*” (John 15:16) The “you” to whom the Lord is referring is each and every one of YOU! Just think of the great privilege you have: Jesus Himself has chosen you; Jesus Himself has appointed you; Jesus Himself is sending you. Let’s GO!

Good Messengers

An Evangelist? ME!? The word “evangelist” literally means a messenger (angel) of the good. Do you know anyone who is experiencing the “bad” in his or her lives? Are they feeling alone, depressed, anxious, confused, in pain? You have a message of good that you can bring. You have the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus will never abandon us, gives peace, is the Way and the Truth and the Life, is strength in every trouble, is the healer. Share with others the good things that Jesus has done in your life when you have experienced the “bad” and you will be an evangelist.

Like A Beggar

Someone described evangelization very simply: *“Evangelization is one beggar showing another beggar where the bread is.”* This description says a lot about attitude. I am just a beggar – not the owner of the bakery who out of the goodness of my heart will give to the beggars something from my surplus. I am a beggar like everyone else, but I’ve been shown the bread that gives life. Having discovered where the Bread of Life is, will you now reach out to fellow beggars and help them find this Living Bread who is Jesus?

As A Sinner

Evangelization could also be described as one sinner showing another sinner where to find love and forgiveness. So many people think that they have done unforgivable things. They carry guilt and shame; they feel dead inside. Having discovered the comfort and mercy of God, how can you help others meet the Father of all mercy and the God of all comfort? God’s power to forgive knows no limits. His mercy is renewed with each new day.

Caring

People won’t care how much we know until they know how much we care. As we reach out to share with others our faith in Jesus Christ, let love be the first Gospel we “preach.” What a wonderful “conspiracy of kindness” there would be if we took every opportunity – small and big – to show to others the love that Jesus would show. This wordless witness will stir up irresistible questions in others: Why are they like this? Why do they live this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Let these acts of kindness be the first Good News that others “hear” from us.

Show and Tell

We all remember this from our early school years or those of our children. It wasn’t good enough to just talk about some favorite toy; you had to bring it to school and show it. Nor was it good enough to just stand up and silently show it to others; you had to talk about it. Living our faith in Jesus Christ is “show and tell.” We have to show others the difference that Jesus has made in us. We have to live in a way that is different because Jesus lives in us. And we have to tell others about Jesus who has made the difference in our lives so that they can know Who can make their lives different too.

Full-Time Evangelization

“I’m a full-time evangelist,” the young woman said, cleverly disguised as a physical therapist at the hospital. I try to bring the peace and love of Jesus to every patient.” Being a person of faith is not just for Sunday, not just for inside the walls of the Church building or the Adoration Chapel. Jesus calls us all to be full-time evangelists and He has cleverly disguised us ~ as teachers and students, as Moms and Dads, as nurses and secretaries, as landscapers and engineers, as clerks and retired persons, as accountants and electricians, as managers and ...

Witnesses

Before Jesus ascended to heaven He said, “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, in Samaria and even to the ends of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8) Having been baptized into Christ and confirmed in the Holy Spirit, we are witnesses to Jesus Christ. There’s no doubt about that. The only questions are: Having received power what kind of witness am I to Jesus? How am I witnessing to Jesus in Natick and Framingham and Wellesley, at home and at work, out in the community?

Have I Got News for You!

Good news, so people say, travels fast. We freely tell our friends about a good book we’ve just read or a great restaurant we’ve enjoyed or a great bargain we’ve got. So why is it that sometimes the best news of all travels so slowly? Why are we reluctant to share how God is at work in our lives, lightening our burdens and giving us new strength? We’ve heard from the Good Book, feasted at the Table of the Lord, received the best “bargain” of all – the free gift of new life at the “cost” of the death of Jesus. Are you ready and willing to share Christ with others?

We’re Too Programmed

Evangelization is not principally a program or a process. Programs have a beginning and an end; processes can be finished. Evangelization, sharing my faith with others, never ends. It is a way of life, a state of mind, an attitude of heart. Evangelization leads people to care for others like a shepherd, testify like a witness, obey like a child, wait on others like a servant and love like a brother or sister. What attitude adjustments can you make so that you can better share your faith with others?

Be Salty

Salt has many different effects. Salt adds flavor to food; it makes things zesty. Salt is also as a preservative; it keeps things from going bad. Salt makes people thirsty. Jesus said, “*You are the salt of the earth.*” (Matthew 5:13) As we live and share our faith we can have many effects. We are to add a zest for living, make our environments more flavorful with the grace of God. By living and sharing our faith we preserve our culture, we help it to be more fully a culture of life. And, as people rub shoulders with us they should become more thirsty for Jesus, the Life-giving Water. But to have the effects salt – all of us – needs to get out of the saltshaker. Let’s get out and be salty.

Shine Out

Darkness makes people hesitate. Their steps are cautious and unsure because they don’t want to bump into anything or fall down. Darkness makes people nervous and afraid. If the light of Jesus Christ shines brightly in and through you, others around you will be attracted to the light and will be able to leave whatever darkness they experience. With Jesus Christ as your Beacon and the Holy Spirit as your Power Source, you can set about illuminating the whole world, one friend, one family member, one neighbor or one stranger at a time. You can help remove the darkness so that others can walk in peace, unafraid and with the confidence of the sons and daughters of God.

Success?

Evangelization is not something that can be measured on a success/failure scale. Our “success” is determined by our obedience to God’s direction, “Go and make disciples of all people.” It is not determined by whether people change immediately when we share our faith with them. In fact, it often takes several different hearings of the Good News before someone actually makes of new commitment to or renews their commitment to Jesus and His Church. Scripture reminds us that “one plants, another waters.” Are you about the work of planting? Are you adding water to the seeds someone else planted?

Called and Sent

Just as Jesus was sent by the Father to proclaim Good News of Salvation, so we are called to be imitators of Christ in spreading His word: “*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*” (John 20:21) YES ~ YOU! God is sending you – home, to your place of work, to your neighborhood, to your family and friends to live and share Good News. Jesus is sending you to be His hands, and feet and mouth in all the places to which you are being sent so that others may know of the Good News of Salvation.

Faith Comes From Hearing – and Speaking

“How can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach? Faith, then, comes through hearing, and what is heard is the word of Christ.” (Romans 10: 14-17) Studies have shown that most people do not believe simply because of the shining example of others. It takes the oral sharing of the word of God. You already know the One who is that Word. You know Him in the Scripture and you know Him from His presence in your life. Are you serving as a transmitter of the Word of Christ to help others hear and believe?

Harvesting the Crop of God

Jesus chose the 72 and sent them out ahead of him. “*There is a great harvest,*” Jesus said, “*and the laborers are few.*” (Luke 10:1-2) The Lord Himself has prepared a great harvest. He has planted the seeds of His Word into the soil of people’s hearts and spirits, watered them with His grace, shined His Light on them. Will you be a laborer for the Lord, “harvesting” someone for the Lord by sharing with him or her the good things that the Lord has done in your life and by inviting them to attend Mass with you?

Witnesses of God

Pope Paul VI wrote: “People today listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” The most effective witnesses communicates what they saw with their own eyes, heard with their own hears, touched with their own hands, know to be so from their

own experience. What have you seen and heard, touched and experienced of the goodness of the Lord? Be a witness of these things to others. Such witnesses cannot be refuted. Good witnesses of the Good News are also those whose lives reflect the words they speak, who “walk the talk,” who practice what they preach. Live the peace of Christ, the love of Christ, the mercy of Christ. Then your words about Christ will be even more believable.

Evangelizing As I Go

It's not so much that I need to “Go and Evangelize” as I need to “Evangelize as I Go.” That is, I don't have to wait to go to some other place before I can share my faith. I am already going to many places; as I go I can look for opportunities to share my faith. Think of all the places you are going in the next week: to work, to the mall, to school, walking around the neighborhood, to a party, to a meeting, to the hospital...? How can you carry the Light of Christ with you wherever you are already going so that others may know warmth and glow of His presence?

What Difference?

Someone once asked a group of churchgoers, “What difference would it make in your life if, suddenly at midnight, you ceased to believe in Jesus Christ?” How would things be different in your life? How has faith in Jesus Christ and participation in the life of the Church made a difference in your life? Share the hope, the joy, the peace, the new life ~ share the difference that Jesus has made in your life with someone who finds life hopeless, painful, stressful, who feels like life is over. Then they will know where they can turn to have a different life.

Be Prepared

St. Peter says, “*Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that is in you, but do it with gentleness and reverence.*” (1 Peter 3:14-16) Why do you have hope? Joy? Peace? Courage? Faith? Love? Remember all the ways that the Lord has touched your life, remember those specific and unmistakable and unforgettable moments of His grace for you. How would you tell someone about these? Are you ready ~ and willing ~ to share these with others so that they can have hope, joy, peace, courage, faith, love? Are you ready ~ willing ~ to share with them the difference that God has made in your life? And can make in theirs?

Stepping Into The Open Door

Review the conversations that you have had over the past few weeks. Has anyone asked you to tell him or her about Jesus? Probably not ~ in those words. But haven't you heard recently, “I don't know what I'm going to do about...?” “Sometimes I have fears and worries about...” “There are days when I wonder if it's all worth it.” In saying these things people are opening their lives. And not just to have you see a struggle. They are looking for a way out or looking for strength in the middle of their pain. They are telling you these things because they think you have an answer. And you do! After listening and offering support, why not point them to Jesus whom you know can provide the hope, life, peace and meaning for which they are looking?

I'll Pray For You

It happens a lot. People tell you about something difficult that they are going through – health concerns, job situation, family troubles, worries and fears. Like a good friend you listen and then say, “I’ll pray for you.” Have you ever forgotten to pray? Why not pray right there and then. Why not take the opportunity to bring the person to Jesus whom you know is the source of all help? The prayer could be simple: “Dear Lord, (the person’s name) needs Your help with (the person’s concern). We ask that you be present right now with Your peace, Your strength, Your love. Amen.” Your prayer gives them a model for their own prayer. Your faith in Jesus lets them know they can trust Him too. And, don’t forget to pray for them later as well.

What Did You Do Yesterday?

Jesus declared, *“I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.”* (Luke 12:8-9) Has someone ever asked on Monday morning, “So, what did you do this weekend?” Is “I went to Mass yesterday and heard a great homily.” or “I spent an hour in our Adoration Chapel.” ever a part of your response? Such simple statements can be door-openers to let others say something about their faith. Or about some need in their life. How are you readily and publicly owning up to Jesus as your Savior and Lord?

Ambassadors for Christ

Saint Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him, *“I am an ambassador; pray that I may be bold in speaking about the Gospel as I should.”* (Ephesians 6:19-20) Ambassadors represent the homeland in a foreign country. Seeing the ambassador you should get a good idea of what the people of his/her land are like. Ambassadors live in embassies, a piece of the homeland on foreign soil. Enter the American Embassy in Paris and you are no longer in France but in the United States. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have our citizenship in heaven. Let’s represent our “homeland” in such a way that everyone will want to immigrate. Live in “moveable embassies,” being a little patch of heaven wherever you are so that by stepping into your life others may step into the peace of God’s Kingdom. Will you serve as Christ’s ambassador? And represent Him boldly to others?

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