

## Evangelization

# Being a witness to God's love is hard, scary

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COLUMNIST

Some images that come to mind when one hears the word evangelization are door-to-door missionaries, street corner preachers or those in foreign mission lands. While these are certainly a part of proclaiming the good news, they do not make up the whole of it. They are the more extraordinary forms of evangelization, not the normal day-to-day ways we are called to witness to others about Christ.

The first way we witness to others is through the witness of life, which is the initial act of evangelization, and is indispensable. As Pope Paul VI said, "Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness."

The witness of the Christian life is done by conforming our human will to the divine will of Jesus. In living out our faith daily, we point to the one who gives us the strength, joy and love that draws people to seek the source of our joy and love. This cannot be

done without growth in holiness, prayer, conversion and continually seeking grace in the sacraments. It is rarely seen in grand acts of holiness, but rather quiet and humble acts of love. A saying, commonly attributed to St. Francis says it well, "preach the Gospel always. When necessary, use words." Yet, we must remember this phrase does not give us an excuse not to talk about Jesus.

The kerygma, or preached Gospel, is also a necessary part of evangelization. In fact, evangelization is incomplete until the declaration of the saving message that Jesus commands us to proclaim to others is pronounced. This is, of course, the part of evangelization that is most intimidating to the majority of people who become frightened when called to vocally witness to others.

I am one of many modern Catholics who grew up in the church, fell away and who now has come to love the faith after an initial conversion as an adult and later through an intense study of Catholic teachings. This study

of the faith helped me to understand what the church taught, but like many Catholic evangelists, I made many mistakes when I answered the call to share my faith. The mistake I can most readily identify with is using the truth as an offensive weapon to beat others into submission.

This is the antithesis of true evangelization. Archbishop Fulton Sheen evangelized according to the fitting motto, "win the argument, lose a soul." If we aim to win, we are not sharing our faith out of love but out of pride.

I am blessed to be able to see numerous young adults fall in love with Jesus and the Catholic faith. Many of them take hold of their faith, like other Catholics, and then feel the need to share and defend it. Nevertheless, many continue to fall into the trap that I did.

We mistake offensive volleys against others as a defense of the faith. Yet, most need to be loved into the church, not argued into it. I am certainly not saying that there is not a great need for defending the faith or being able to "give a reason for your

hope" (2 Peter 3:15), but we must not forget the second part of the passage that says to do it with "gentleness and reverence."

St. Paul tells us that he was an "ambassador for Christ." (2 Cor 5:20) An ambassador was a person given the full authority of the leader they represented. As an emissary for Christ, Paul now carries the saving message of the Lord with him and is empowered to give it to others. Yet, it is not only St. Paul and the other apostles who were given this charge, but all who are baptized into Christ. We have all been created to share in the ministry of Christ to all souls on earth. Let us pray that Christ will give us both the opportunities to witness to his truth in our everyday lives and the grace to share the saving message of Jesus with love.

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Saints for our times

St. Ignace increases many luminous traditions