

Book Review #1: The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic by Matthew Kelly
Kim Monson

Our small group began reading the book in June. You are welcome to join us any time. We meet most Mondays at noon in the blue room of the Parish Center.

I would like to share just some parts of the book. I recommend reading it for yourself. It talks about "How engaging 1% of Catholics could change the world". It is very exciting and inspirational.

We are all busy. Baby steps are possible, not overwhelming when it comes to engaging ourselves so that we can engage others. First step, set aside 1 minute each day for prayer. Prayer, no matter how brief, will start our day off right. It keeps us focused on what is really important. If you don't know how to start, just sit in silence. The more time we spend in silence the more clearly we will hear the voice of God. Or we can simply thank God for our many blessings and close with the Our Father. Or we can use the Examination of Conscience and ask "God, what do you think I should do?" There is no right or wrong way to pray. Prayer leads to peace and fulfillment. So try 1 minute each day. Then move to 2 minutes and so on, until you reach 10 minutes each day. It just might change or enhance your life in ways you can't imagine.

Book Review #2: The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic by Matthew Kelly
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Matthew Kelly talks about the Genius of Catholicism and "Relativism". Relativism is a theory that there are no absolute truths, but rather all truth is relative. In other words, something that is true for you may not be true for me. The real problem with relativism is that if there is no place for truth, there is no place for wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to discern or judge what is true, good, right or lasting. Relativism makes wisdom irrelevant and it takes wisdom to walk with God. Let's think about that for a while.....

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Matthew Kelly puts it best in his section entitled "People Deserve Answers to Their Questions". I will just give you a taste of this section so as to peak your interest.

We live in a time of moral and ethical confusion. We live in a time that is plagued by a crisis of purposelessness. We have stopped thinking about how we should live and have given ourselves over to living however we want to live. Yet, we have failed to employ even the most basic self-observation that would have led us long ago to the conclusion that doing whatever we want does not bring us any lasting satisfaction....

One thing that became abundantly clear through the research is that when you start talking to Catholics about their faith you discover an almost universal inferiority complex around how little they know about Catholicism. Most Catholics are afraid they are going to be asked a question by a colleague, a child, a relative, or even a stranger. We actually fear that wonderful grace-filled moment when someone has the courage to ask a question about or faith....

Most of us are not called to formally study theology, but all of us are called to grow each day in our understanding of the Catholic faith. Without this, we very quickly and easily become conformed to the world.....

Not surprisingly, the more people learn about the faith the more likely they are to be highly engaged. The reverse, of course, is also true. The less you know about Catholicism the easier it is to disengage and leave. Engagement is largely influenced by a working knowledge of the faith. The exodus we have seen from the Catholic Church over the past twenty-five years is in large part an exodus of ignorance. The great majority of those who leave have no idea what they are leaving behind....

So, the second baby step to becoming or maintaining our status as an "Engaged Catholic" is to read 1 page of a Catholic book each day. Then 2 pages and so on. Matthew Kelly says that reading just 5 pages a day would transform our parish if we could get everyone to participate. Most Catholics struggle to apply their faith to their every day lives. Easy baby steps....pray....read....live.

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We began chapter 4 the end of July. It is called "The Happiest People I Know". My favorite thought here would be that you cannot be in a bad mood and be grateful at the same time. The world wants us to be selfish. God wants us to be grateful for what we have and be generous with God's gifts. All that we have is a gift from God. Share it!

The happiest people I know are also the most generous people I know. Is that a coincidence? I don't think so. The world proposes selfishness as the path to happiness. God proposes generosity as the path to happiness. I know many selfish people, but I don't know any who have a deep and lasting happiness. Selfish people always seem restless and discontented. The happiness we experience through selfishness is fleeting because it is dependent on external circumstances. But I also know some very generous people, and their happiness is not dependent on things going their way or on getting what they want; their happiness is rooted in the life of God. This happiness, this joy springs up from something that is taking place within them. We are all invited to that life and that happiness, and generosity is the path that leads there.....

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"Live simply so that others may simply live." ~Mother Teresa

Matthew Kelly asks us "How Generous Are You?" in the three areas of stewardship: time, talent and treasure. He also asks us to consider other areas in our lives: marriage, patience and God. He suggests that we measure things that matter. Measurement creates awareness, awareness leads to intentionality, intentionality drives behavior. God's promise is that He will provide for our needs, not our greed. Whenever we give, we grow in the image of God. And this is my favorite one....*Generosity is not measured by what we give, but by what we have left.*

Remember the baby steps in my earlier reviews? Giving of our treasure, or tithing, can be approached in baby steps as well. We can increase our giving by 1% of our income each year until we reach 10%. Matthew Kelly did this. He laid his plan before God in prayer and felt at peace. Is this a baby step you could do? I know I can. Each of us must prayerfully consider what God is calling us to and set goals accordingly. We set goals in every other aspect of our lives, why not our generosity?

Book Review #6:
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Matthew Kelly is certain that we can change the world. I quickly became overwhelmed at the thought. It seemed like such a huge undertaking. But this book is written in such a way that the baby steps make it seem attainable. If you were able to change the world, what would you change?

"Perhaps you would eradicate poverty, disease and ignorance, or put an end to war, famine, and all the useless violence and destruction that we inflict upon each other. But changing the world is an inside-out job. When we look to change the world, too often we look outside ourselves. When God looks to change the world, he looks deep within us....."

Yep, changing the world begins inside you and me. Human behavior is changing the world constantly and how we live today makes our world the way it will be tomorrow. We may think that we are but one person. What difference can we make? But multiply that attitude times the world population and we've got a potential problem if our human behavior is negative. So take that same scenario with positive human behavior and we have changed the world for the better. Each and every one of us makes a difference in the lives of those around us, making a difference in the lives of those around our neighbors. It's the ripple effect.

God invites us to look to ourselves and make a fresh start today. He invites us to live by the Ten Commandments, making the world a better place for everyone. Imagine what the world would be like if everyone in the world followed these commandments. 1.) You shall love the Lord your God and serve him only. 2.) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. 3.) Keep holy the Sabbath. 4.) Honor your father and your mother. 5.) You shall not kill. 6.) You shall not commit adultery. 7.) You shall not steal. 8.) You shall not bear false witness. 9.) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. 10.) You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Book Review #7:
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We have learned that according to Matthew Kelly, changing the world must begin within each and every one of us. When you look at the mess the world is in, we can see that at least one of the Ten Commandments has been broken. The other issue at hand is the lack of accountability for our actions. We convince ourselves that the problems in the world are someone else's fault. And we convince ourselves that someone else will fix it. As Christians, we need to have faith in God and humanity. We need to believe that the good in the world can overcome the evil. We need to start with ourselves, then unite together towards a common mission.

"Our mission as Catholics is not merely to move through the world, leaving it unchanged. Changing the world is part of our mission, and throughout history we have done that in many ways. The Catholic Church broke the class barrier for education. We invented the scientific method to transform the sciences. We have always been a leader in caring for the sick and the poor. In almost every place and time for the past two thousand years, the Catholic church has played a powerful role in making the

world a better place. Catholics change the world.....”

“There are 77 million Catholics in the United States today. Catholics could determine every presidential election in this country.....Catholics could determine the success or failure of almost any product or company....and put an end to poverty in America. If we could get our act together....Those who oppose the Catholic worldview are afraid of how much influence we would have if we did ever actually get our act together...”

So how do we get our act together? Matthew Kelly says we need to focus first on becoming men and women of virtue and character and then leading others to do the same. Everything else will just fall into place. Changing the world is something worth getting excited about. Let's start with our own parish, with you and me. How often do you walk into our church and think to yourself, “This is a group of people focused on changing the world”? Let's work on that....together.

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The fourth sign of a Dynamic Catholic is Evangelization. But before we can change the world, we must first go through self-discovery. We must be comfortable in our own skin and how we live. Matthew Kelly gives us 3 principles common to all men and women of goodwill: Self-discovery, Virtue and Self-control.

Self-discovery is becoming the best version of ourselves. We need to say no to those things that don't help us be the best version of ourselves and yes to those that help us grow in our faith. Things like daily prayer, reading Catholic literature, sharing our God-given blessings with others, following the Ten Commandments and taking responsibility for our actions, to name a few.

Virtue is patience, honesty, generosity, courage, and goodness. The impact of virtue has a ripple effect. Our words and actions have real consequences on the lives of others.

Self-control helps us achieve success in life, business, relationships and spirituality. Our culture would tell us to do whatever feels good whenever we want. How long would that make us truly happy?

“There is no success without the ability to delay gratification. What happens to someone's personal finances if they cannot delay gratification? What type of relationships is a person likely to have if he or she is unwilling to delay gratification? What quality of work can you expect from a person who is unable to delay gratification? What will happen to the health and well-being of a person who refuses in every instance to delay gratification? And you simply cannot grow spiritually if you refuse to delay gratification....”

Notice that Matthew Kelly says to “delay” gratification, not deny gratification. To delay gratification is to create personal awareness. The answer to living the best way we can will change with the different stages of our lives. Therefore, to live the best way we can requires us to reevaluate ourselves every day for the rest of our lives. Now we are ready to evangelize.

Evangelization is the fourth sign of a Dynamic Catholic.

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Evangelization is the fourth sign of a Dynamic Catholic. *"Evangelization is the ultimate form of love of neighbor. Is there any greater way to love your neighbor than by helping him or her discover the best way to live?"*

"Do you believe that Jesus offers us the best way to live? If you don't believe that the life, teachings, and person of Jesus lead to the best way to live, who or what does? If you do believe that Jesus leads us in the best way to live, then isn't it a natural consequence that you want to share that best way with others?"

"Our relativistic culture says all ways of living are equal, but this is nonsense. We are told in this age of secularism that we should respect everybody's right to live however they wish, but how is that working out for us? Isn't this already a failed experiment? Relativism leads to a world where nobody is the best version of themselves. Were Mother Teresa's approach to life and Hitler's approach to life equal? I think not....."

I am really enjoying this section of the book. Matthew Kelly makes us really think about life and our faith. He has helped me see that life is just a dim reflection of the greater reality. Have you seen Heaven on Earth? I have in my marriage, in the eyes of my children, in all the happy moments of my life. How do you know there is a Hell as well? Just turn on the news to see all the violence and heart ache in the world. Or on a more personal level, the suffering of those I love in their last stages of life. Purgatory is real if you believe Heaven is our perfect paradise. We must go to purgatory to be purified before entering perfection or the perfect place is not perfect anymore.

So, what does Heaven and Hell have to do with Evangelization? If Heaven is the ultimate goal, our reason for living, then don't you want as many people as possible to experience it? I know I do. So we need to go out into the world and help others become the best versions of themselves. How you might ask? With God's help of course. God's plan for changing the world is to get as many people as possible to live the Gospel. All we need is a simple system for achieving our goal.

*"As it turns out, God has had a system in place from the very beginning. God wants to **win** you with his love and wisdom; God wants to **build** you up spiritually so that you have the knowledge and habits to live in his love and walk in his ways; and God wants to **send** you out into the world to share his love with others...."*

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God wants to have an intimate friendship with us. The more you pray, read and live Catholicism, the more you want to pray, read and live Catholicism. Matthew Kelly expresses Catholicism as "*absolutely fascinating and incredibly beautiful*" and I would wholeheartedly agree. Have you noticed that when you live the life Christ invites you to live that you are happier? I have. I also understand that we are human and as such have a tendency to disengage at times. When life gets busy, it becomes easy to let go of prayer & reading time. After a while I begin to wonder what's wrong with me. Why am I crabby and stressed? Only when I step back and re-prioritize my life and begin spending time on my faith does my heart begin to smile again. That is why I am spending time reading & sharing this wonderful book with you. God has **won** me over and is **building** me up so that he can **send** me out into the world to share his love with others: Evangelization. Do you feel the call to do the same?

One point that Matthew Kelly brings up in his "win" section that I found extremely interesting is that there is no moment in the development of a Catholic that was baptized as a child when we ask him or her to make a choice for Christ and his Church. Let's think about this. Many of us have been through these Catholic moments: Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage Preparation and RCIA. But at any point were we asked if we are committed to the Church?

"At every step along the way we assume that people are committed to Christ and his Church, but in too many cases that is a false assumption and it is hurting us enormously. Without a commitment of some kind, it is so much easier to walk away.....for most people it is not a conscious decision. Most people just drift away from the church.....That's how we're losing them. It's not because they delved into Catholicism and discovered it has nothing to offer.... This wouldn't be so rampant if our communities were stronger, because then we would notice they were drifting away and we would throw them a lifeline.....but perhaps the more disturbing point is that when we had the chance we never really won them. We never helped them to form an effective relationship with Jesus and his Church. They never really got it. If they did, they would never have left...."

Are you at a point in your faith where you would notice your absent neighbor? Are you at a point in your faith where you can throw him or her the lifeline to come back to the Church? If not, what do you need to get there? All it takes are baby steps....prayer, study, generosity. Every day is a new day to start fresh on your faith journey. Walk with Christ more and more every day and you'll get there in no time.

Evangelization is the fourth sign of a Dynamic Catholic.