

evangelization & vocation

WHAT IS EVANGELIZATION?

In the midst of our day-to-day lives, we meet a lot of people. We meet people who share our faith, but we also meet people who disagree with our faith. We meet people who are joyful and filled with life, and we also meet people who are sad and angry. Each of these people, wherever they come from and whatever they have been through, have been created in the image and likeness of God and therefore, have an inherent dignity. Today, we are going to discuss how we encounter those people – how and why we should share the Gospel with them.

ROMANS 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

The process of sharing the Gospel is called “evangelization”; evangelization means to share the Good News. When we evangelize, we share the Good News of Christ with those we encounter.

The Church exists to evangelize. Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical letter *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, confirmed that this is what the Church is about: to preach and share the Good News. From the time of the Great Commission, the Church has always understood this as a central part of her identity; she exists to preach and to share the Gospel. Each of us, as members of the Church, are called to share in this mission in a real and intimate way.

Ultimately, evangelization is the sharing of the basic proclamation of the Gospel over and over again. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, echoed this sentiment, stating, “On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: ‘Jesus Christ loves you;

He gave his life to save you; and now He is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you' ... nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation."

As we move forward in our lives as disciples of Christ, we must place this initial proclamation at the center of our lives and trust in the fact that it is the very Good News of the Gospel for the world.

CONFIRMATION & EVANGELIZATION

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, we are sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and are sent forth in grace to share the faith. In our baptism, each of us was claimed as a son or daughter of the Father. The Sacrament of Confirmation confirms that identity and sends us forth to bring Jesus and His Church to the world. In Confirmation, we are confirmed in our mission to bring Christ to the whole world and are given the strength to fulfill that mission. It is in our confirmation that we are affirmed in our call to share in the call of the Church, that of spreading the Good News to the whole world.

GO, THEREFORE, AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, & THE HOLY SPIRIT. (MATTHEW 28:19)

discussion questions

Why is it important to share the Gospel with others?

LIVING OUT OUR TESTIMONY

First and foremost, people will know our encounter with the Gospel by our lives. The way that you love those around you – through service, friendship, and giving – is the main way that you can preach to those around you. When you encounter someone, they will first take note of the way you act. Do you want to interact with them? Do you have genuine concern for those around you? If you are not genuine in your encounters, you will lack credibility. We must be doers of the Word and not simply hearers, meaning we love all of those we encounter and by calling them all to holiness.

GIVING A TESTIMONY

As important as the witness of our lives is, it is vitally important that we do not stop with our actions, but rather, continue the process by

sharing what God has done in our lives. We are meant to not simply use our actions to preach the Gospel but, in many circumstances, to share the Gospel with our words. In fact, as St. Paul said, we have an obligation to preach the Gospel.

Our testimony is the story of what God has done in our lives. For each of us, God has worked in marvelous ways. God created us in His image and likeness and He has not stopped working in our lives since. Our testimony is the most effective means we have to share the faith. No matter the intellectual arguments we make, people can always argue with what we have to say. When we share our testimony, however, no one can argue as it is simply what God has done in our lives.

Sharing our testimony is simple and easy, but we ought to prepare it. As Saint Peter tells us, it is important that, at all times, we are ready to share with others why we believe what we believe and where our hope comes from.

A testimony has three main parts: the time in our lives before we encountered Christ, the moment that we encountered Christ, and the change in our lives since that encounter with Christ. In the first part of our testimony, we have the chance to share who we were before our encounter with Christ. Then, in the second part, we give a detailed account of what

God has done in our lives. Finally, in the third part of our testimony, we share how our lives have changed since we met Christ and the ways that we are striving to grow and become a better disciple of Christ.

Our testimony is simply the story of what God has done in our lives. Throughout our lives, each of us will have many different moments that we can share as testimony of what God has done. God is active in our world today and if we are continually seeking a relationship with Him, we will have many moments to encounter Him. In sharing these moments, we have the chance to share Jesus, whom we have encountered and know, with a world that desperately needs Him.

discussion questions

How have you shared your faith with other people in the past? Was it received well? Why or why not?

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

In all of this, the goal is simple: to proclaim Christ to the person we encounter. In sharing our story, we have the chance to proclaim the person of Christ, testify to what He has done in our hearts and our lives, and invite the person to encounter the living God. No matter what we do, we must remember this fact: Jesus is alive and well and we have the ability to bring Him to those we meet in our daily lives.

READ MATTHEW 28:16-20

THE COMMISSIONING OF THE DISCIPLES

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

READ THE FOLLOWING QUOTE:

POPE FRANCIS

"Every Christian is challenged, here

and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love."

Brothers and sisters, as we prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation – a sacrament that sends you forth with the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to be Christ's witness in the world – know that we are called in that same grace to bring Christ to the world each and every day.

discussion questions

What is the most effective way to share your faith with others?

How can you grow in your willingness to share what God has done in your life with the world? How can you be bolder in your faith?

WHAT IS A VOCATION?

Part of our testimony is our vocation. What does the word “vocation” even mean? In the Catholic world, we talk a lot about vocations. We use the word when we talk about the vocation of a priest, religious, or married person. But it does not end there. Vocation also means God’s call for how He wants you to live out His will.

UNIVERSAL VOCATION

Many of us might be able to easily envision what our life will be like ten years from now, but sometimes it is harder to figure out who we are meant to be in this moment. Many of us are not even asking the most important question: Who does God want me to be right now? We each have the same universal vocation, the same call to holiness. The call to holiness is that God “calls man to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him with all his strength.” It is my call, it is your call, and it is the call of every person in this group. We are called to seek, know, and love the Lord. “But as He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.”

You are not meant to answer this call in ten years – it is time for you to respond right now. But how do

you live a holy life in this moment, as a teen in high school? An easy way to gauge if you are living out holiness in your daily life is to look at how you treat people. Do you take away people’s dignity by talking badly about them? Have you taken time to get to know the lonely student at school? Do you go out of your way to help those in need?

Another important part of living out holiness is being the best student you can be by completing your homework, behaving in class, and taking your education seriously. This does not necessarily mean you have to be a straight A student, but it does mean that you always do your best.

As Catholics, we have been given the great gift of the sacraments to help us live out our universal call to holiness. By going to Mass every Sunday and receiving the Lord in the Eucharist, we become more like Him. By partaking in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we are able to more fully live out our call.

discussion questions

How are you living out your vocation to holiness well? How would you like to improve?

PARTICULAR VOCATION

We are all called to live out our universal vocation, but we are also called to live out our particular vocation. This is the vocation that was meant specifically for you. Look around at the people in the group. You all have different gifts.

The Lord made each of you unique and thus, He has a specific way for you to live out your particular vocation here on Earth. There are many times in our lives when we think God is trying to trick us. These are the times when we cannot figure out what He is calling us to do. The reality is that God is calling us to something specific, but sometimes we do not listen to Him. One of the gifts of the Sacrament of Confirmation is that you will become more firmly united to Christ. This gift allows you to hear His call more clearly, but only if you truly listen to what He is telling you to do.

TYPES OF VOCATIONS

We have all probably experienced married couples living out the Sacrament of Marriage and our parish priests living out the Sacrament of Holy Orders, but these are only two of the many vocations within the Catholic Church.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders includes our diocesan bishop, parish priests, and deacons, but it also includes religious priests who are living out a different charism in their ministry, such as the Franciscans, Norbertines, and Dominicans. The Sacrament of Marriage includes couples who are married in the Church. Consecrated life includes people who have chosen to live a life of virginity for the Lord. Some examples of consecrated life are religious sisters, consecrated virgins living in the world, and secular institutes.

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, marriage is the intimate, exclusive, indissoluble communion of life and love entered by man and woman at the design of the Creator for the purpose of their own good and the procreation and education of children; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised to the dignity of a sacrament. When a man and woman enter into the Sacrament of Marriage, they make very specific vows.

VOWS OF SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE

FREE & TOTAL

Have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely, and wholeheartedly?

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FAITHFUL

Are you prepared, as you follow the path of marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?

FRUITFUL

Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church?

CONSENT BEFORE GOD & HIS CHURCH

I, take you to be my husband/wife. I promise to be faithful to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and to honor you all the days of my life.

There are many obstacles in today's world that present challenges to God's intent for marriage - for it to be free, total, faithful, and fruitful. If we are called to marriage, the following questions can help us to examine the ways in which we are prepared for or living out the Sacrament and the ways in which we can seek to follow God's will more closely.

FREE

Is the marriage consensual? Are you free from force or ultimatums? Are you free from external pressures or addictions (such as alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling)? Are there any things prior to marriage chaining you to the relationship?

TOTAL

Are you marrying only one person? Will you give yourself fully to the other (your body, your mind, your fertility, your finances)? Have you hidden something from the other?

FAITHFUL

Have you guarded your heart, mind, and body? Have you dressed modestly? Have you acted appropriately? Have you committed adultery or another form of infidelity (such as pornography)? Do you trust your spouse to give themselves faithfully or have you expected them to fail (ex. a prenuptial agreement)?

FRUITFUL

Are you open to the gift of children? Are you open to discern God's plan for your family (possibly through Natural Family Planning)? Have you prevented children through contraception, abortion, or sterilization? Have you demanded rather than welcomed children through the use of in vitro fertilization (IVF)?

discussion questions

Do you know a married couple who is living out these vows? In what ways do they live out their marriage vows?

What part of these vows make you feel that marriage will be beautiful?

What part of these vows make you feel that marriage will be a struggle?

What do you imagine are similarities between the different vocations (Holy Orders, Matrimony, Consecrated Life)? What do you imagine are some differences?

YOUR PERSONAL DISCERNMENT

You might be wondering, "What does all of this mean for me?" Well, it is important to keep in mind that God calls you to the vocation that will be your surest path to holiness.

Although we sometimes feel like God is going to force us into a vocation we do not want, we need to begin discerning our vocation. The process of discernment may seem intimidating, but there are simple steps you can take to begin this process. First, ask the Lord to open your heart so you will be ready to say "yes" when He starts you on the path toward your vocation.

Second, learn about and experience as many different vocations as you can. The more you learn about them, the better you will hear the Lord when He begins directing you toward your vocation. You can start by researching the different types of religious orders and charisms. For example, some religious are active in education, serve the poor, or take care of the sick. Other religious are cloistered and commit their entire lives to prayer for the Church.

Once you find some vocations that you feel fit your gifts and personality, start getting to know people who are living them out. Spend time with a married couple living out the Lord's will in their family. Get to know our parish priest and see what his day-to-day life is like. Visit different religious orders. Get to know a

consecrated woman.

The idea of visiting a religious order may seem overwhelming and the people around you might make a big deal out of it, but visiting a convent or monastery does not mean you will become a sister or priest. It simply means you are opening yourself up to whatever path the Lord is calling you to. One day you will enter into your vocation. It will be an outward “yes” to the Lord in following His will for your life. For now, these smaller steps are just that: small steps to help you learn how to live out your call to holiness.

How open are you to where God is calling you in life? What hesitations do you have?

discussion questions

What questions do you have about some of the vocations? How can you learn more about each of them?

CLOSING PRAYER

your call for each of us

In today's section we learned about the universal vocation and your specific vocation. Many of us struggle to hear God's call because we are always so busy – we have music in our ears, activities we have to be at, and social media constantly drawing our attention. However, this is not a new problem. Even people in the Old and New Testaments had a hard time hearing God's call. This struggle is real but if we learn to listen, we will hear the Lord's voice.

READ 1 SAMUEL 3:1-11

During the time young Samuel was minister to the Lord under Eli, the word of the Lord was scarce and vision infrequent. One day Eli was asleep in his usual place. His eyes had lately grown so weak that he could not see. The lamp of God was not yet extinguished, [b] and Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was. The Lord called to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am." He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." "I did not call you," Eli answered. "Go back to sleep." So he went back to sleep. Again the Lord called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "You called me." But he answered, "I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep." Samuel did not yet recognize the Lord, since the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, "Here I am. You called me." Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the youth. So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the Lord came and stood there, calling out as before: Samuel, Samuel! Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening." The Lord said to Samuel: I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears it ring.

The Lord had to call out to Samuel four times before he finally said, "Speak, for thy servant hears." Often times, the Lord has to call our names many times before we turn to Him and say, "Speak, Lord."

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Take some time to listen to the Lord. Where is He calling you? Listen to Him and respond, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Pause to reflect.

We all have a vocation. What is God specifically calling you to do so you can live out your universal vocation, your call to holiness? What is God calling you to do so you can make a step toward your particular vocation?

Pause for a few minutes to reflect on and journal about your vocation.

What is God specifically calling you to do so you can live out your universal vocation, your call to holiness? What is God calling you to do so you can make a step toward your particular vocation?

Close with the following prayer: Lord, you have called each of us to live a life of holiness. Show us how to live out that call in this stage of our lives. You have a specific vocation for each of us. Help us to be open to your call and begin learning more about the different types of vocations in the Church. Give us the strength to always say "yes" to whatever it is you are calling us to. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.