

How can the Laity be of Service to the Church's Mission to Spread the Gospel in the Secular World?

My father has engraved on his tombstone these words of Cicero: *Esse quam videri*, "To be, rather than to seem." My dad's point? If you are Christian, be so in reality and not merely in appearance. Faith in Jesus Christ and His Gospel exists to burn deep in the marrow of my bones, in the depths of my heart, in every nook and cranny of my life. Jesus lives to be Lord of my thoughts and choices, my relationships and possessions, my aspirations and failures. He is not my domesticated companion, but a Lion who wants out of the many cages I have built around Him.

But for this to happen, we have to know our faith, be nourished in faith, live the faith, and live among a people of faith who will encourage, inspire, and challenge us to be true to what we profess to believe. The old saying, "You can't give what you don't have," stands true of faith. Faithful who do not have, know, or live their faith cannot transform the world around them with faith's vision.

St. Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). *That's the key!* Only a laity who have been transformed by the truth of faith in Jesus can transform the world. Only by having the mind of Christ can we speak God's Kingdom into existence—a world built on truth and justice, tempered with mercy, and crowned with love. And only when we are close to Christ crucified can we risk bringing such radical change with courage and perseverance in the face of hostility, cynicism, apathy, and rejection.

The laity can serve the Church's mission to make the Gospel—Good News!—of Jesus known to every human being by *being* that Good News in real-time, beginning with the smallest details of life each day. At home or work, on social media or the ballfield, on vacation or while volunteering, in a protest or at a party, in the midst of battle or suffering, in the way we act or speak, argue or make peace, spend money or give of our time—in each and every moment, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to unleash Christ on the world around us. To show His character. To speak of His love for us and of our love for Him. To invite others to know that love.

Years ago, I was in charge of an RCIA program for people interested in becoming Catholic. One woman, who was a professor at the university where I worked, gave a public lecture a few weeks after her baptism, explaining to listeners what led her to faith in Jesus in the Catholic Church. At the heart of her story was the witness of a colleague of hers who was Catholic. I'll never forget her words, which I wrote down in my journal. Among many things, she said:

So, as you see, there were many reasons that faith made sense to me, but the glue that held all of these reasons together was not an idea but a man. Bill. Even before I knew he was a serious Catholic, I knew Bill was a man of the highest personal and professional integrity. He worked harder than anyone I knew, yet never lost his joy or his sense of hope. He was witty, authentic, and normal. And he was the best listener I'd ever known. So when I one day asked him how he managed to stay the way he was in a world full of

compromise and cynicism, he very naturally, confidently and humbly said: “My faith in God is everything.” And with that line, he had me hooked.

Esse quam videri



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