

Evangelization

A short summary by Bruce Murphy

What will be covered tonight?

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How To Evangelize

Summary

What is Evangelization?

In the simplest terms, it is the spreading of the Good News. Jesus started his ministry by proclaiming “*The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*” Mark 1:15. He then called the Church to go and do the same.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) stated it this way.

First the Church tells us that Evangelization is the essential mission of the church and then tells us how it is to be done; through our words (sharing) and actions (witness). The Bishops declare the following.

“The simplest way to say what evangelization means is to follow Pope Paul VI, whose message *Evangelii Nuntiandi (On Evangelization in the Modern World)* has inspired so much recent thought and activity in the Church. We can rephrase his words to say that evangelizing means bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself. At its essence are the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ and the response of a person in faith, which are both works of the Spirit of God.

Goals of Evangelization

Jesus stated the following in Matthew 28:18-20.

“All power 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 until the end of the age.”

The bishops stated three goals.

1. To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others
2. To invite all people in the United States, whatever their social or cultural background, to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith.
3. To foster gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society, so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ

In *Ecclesia in America* (“The Church in America”), Pope John Paul II stated the following.

“If it is genuine, the personal encounter with the Lord will also bring a renewal of the Church: as sisters and neighbors to each other, the particular Churches of the continent will strengthen the bonds of cooperation and solidarity in order that the saving work of Christ may continue in the history of America with ever greater effect. Open to the unity which comes from true communion with the Risen Lord, the particular Churches, and all who belong to them, will discover through their own spiritual experience that “the encounter with the living

Jesus Christ" is "the path to conversion, communion and solidarity". To the extent that these goals are reached, there will emerge an ever increasing dedication to the new evangelization of America."

What Catholic Christians are called to

Pope John Paul II wrote, "*The era of missions is not over. Christ still needs generous men and women who will become messengers of the Good News to the ends of the earth. Have no fear of following Him. Share freely with others the faith that you have received!*"

"No believer in Christ, can be separate from the supreme beauty; of proclaiming Christ to all the people'." --
Pope John Paul II, Vatican City, Sept. 19, 2003.

The word "evangelist" or "evangelizer" comes from a Greek word that is usually designated to mean one who came to the king with news of victory over the enemy. For Christians, it means one who brings the good news of Christ's victory over sin and death. This is our good news. In bearing it, we become evangelists.

The USCCB in "Go and Make Disciples", broke down what evangelization means using the following two statements.

Sharing

"Sharing the good news of Jesus in an explicit way"

Evangelization must always be directly connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed."

Witness

"Simple living of the faith"

It means we must first be converted ourselves and come into a deep relationship with God. Grounded in this life in Christ, we must grow in our understanding in the sacred scriptures and teachings of the Church. Jesus told the disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit who would give them power. As the Spirit descended upon them, God's power filled them and they went forth in boldness and proclaimed the Good News of what God was doing in their midst.

Our witness must be authentic. If we are living lives that differ from what we profess when at Mass, then something is wrong and we are out of touch with reality in what we profess. We must continually come to God through his Son Christ Jesus and be constantly renewed in the Holy Spirit.

How To Evangelize

Bishop Sam Jacobs in "Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization" has this to say,

Primary Responsibility

"I believe we can best respond to the pope's call for a 'new evangelization' by understanding and submitting to God's plan as evidenced in the Scriptures. We do not have to reinvent the wheel or develop a new process. Our primary responsibilities are to be rooted in our relationship with God, to be formed in our faith, to accept the empowerment of the Spirit already given to us, and to trust in God.

As we try to be attuned to the lead of the Spirit and respond with obedience, we need to speak our fearlessly but faithfully the word of God and our own faith-tradition, share the gospel message of salvation in simple terms, and exercise the appropriate gifts of the Spirit as he inspires us.”

Gird all things in Prayer

God calls us to pray and ask for his help, to seek him and ask him to go before us and to empower us. Pray first to the Holy Spirit asking God to go before us and prepare hearts of men, women and children to become fertile soil where seed may be sown and take root. Bishop Jacobs goes on to say,

“Like Jesus and the apostles, we need to continue to seek the face of the Lord and to enter into greater intimacy with the living God. Like Jesus, we need to be obedient children of the Father of all. Like the apostles, we need to come under the Lordship of Jesus, to live consciously in the presence of the One who is the beginning and the end.

Like Jesus, we need to be a people of prayer so that our witness and evangelization may flow from union with the Father in the power of the Spirit. An example of this is found in the healing of the paralytic. Prior to this miracle, Jesus has gone to the desert to pray; it is out of this context that the miracle occurs. Our witness and evangelization need to be brought back to the Lord in thanksgiving and praise, as we see after the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law as well as many sick and possessed brought to him that evening.

Like the apostles, we need to pray for the continued infilling of the Holy Spirit, so that we may boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus. They beseeched the Lord in the upper room, ‘Grant to your servants, even as they speak your words, complete assurance by stretching forth your hand in cures and signs and wonders to be worked in the name of Jesus, your Servant’. God responded in a dramatic way: ‘The place where they were gathered shook as they prayed. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak God’s word with confidence’ (Acts 4:29-30)

Our need for conversion

Ask the Lord to change you and give you only what needs to be said asking for direction for occasions to pray with people and open to see those opportunities when the Lord presents them.

Bishop Jacob said, “Like Jesus and the apostles, we need to be open to the lead and power of the Spirit if our work of evangelization is to be authentic and fruitful. How many divine appointments have we already missed because of fear, laziness, a sense of inadequacy, an unwillingness to be a disciple of Jesus at the moment, or any number of other excuses? As a result, how many people have not been given a change to respond to God’s invitation to a new life? How many have missed the grace of repentance, conversion, and sanctification because we did not respond to the grace of evangelization?”

Study and Growth

Study each day to grow in your understanding of the sacred scriptures and of church teachings.

Again Bishop Jacobs says, “Like the apostles, in the words of Paul VI, we must share ‘the name, the teaching, the promises, the kingdom, and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.’ In all of this, ours is a small part of the process, though by God’s choice, a necessary one. However, what the Spirit does through us and in the person being evangelized remains the heart of the matter, the essential part of the process of conversion.”

God’s Love and Desire for You and the Person Being Evangelized

God desires all to come to know him in a personal relationship and calls us to live in that relationship.

Bishop Jacobs finishes by saying, “We must always remember that the response of the person being evangelized is not the measuring stick God will use in judging our efforts. Whether someone comes to a saving relationship with Jesus and becomes a member of the community of faith is not our responsibility but that of the person evangelized. Our responsibility is to do the work of evangelization in the power of the Spirit.

To paraphrase a comment by Mother Teresa, God is not asking us to be successful but faithful to his command. We are not held accountable before the Lord for the number of people we actually evangelize but for how many times we obediently act on his lead and in his power to proclaim the good news to others.”

Summary

1. We as Catholic Christians must first be converted and be re-evangelized in an ongoing life in Christ.
2. As we are renewed through the Holy Spirit and transformed, we must submit to the leading of the Spirit to go forth to both share and witness the good news of Jesus Christ and invite others to this same conversion.
3. Finally, we must ultimately realize that the goals of evangelization are to bring all peoples to salvation in Christ and ongoing conversion.

In Mark 12:29-31 Jesus taught us the following.

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

May God bring all of us to the full realization of this great love he has for us.

Resources to start with

Evangelii Nuntiandi – (ON EVANGELIZATION IN THE MODERN WORLD) - <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6evan.htm>

Redemptoris Missio (On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate) - http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html

Ecclesia in America - http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_22011999_ecclesia-in-america_en.html

Christifideles Laici (The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People) - http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

USCCB “Go and Make Disciples” - <http://www.usccb.org/evangelization/goandmake/index.shtml>