

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Talk Handout

I. Introduction to Evangelization

A. What is Evangelization?

- 1) **Definition** - Evangelize: From the Greek - *evangelitso* = ‘to bring the Good News’
- 2) **Goal** - “For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: *‘Now I am making the whole creation new’* (Rev 21:5).”
(Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi - On Evangelization in the Modern World*, 17)
- 3) **Means** - “The Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely by the divine power of the message she proclaims...” (EN 18)

B. Cycle of Evangelization

(from Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21-24 – Full text on pp. 5-6)

1) **Witness** (EN 21)

“Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization... All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers.” (EN 21; cf. CCC 2044)

2) **Proclamation** (EN 22)

“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...” (EN 22)

“Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission... Evangelization will always contain – as the foundation, center and ... summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ ... salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy...” (Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio - On the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate*, 44)

3) **Discipleship** (EN 23)

Discipleship is a deep relationship with Jesus.
Discipleship is being formed by Jesus.
Discipleship is believing and following Jesus in day-to-day life.

4) **Community** (EN 23)

Initiation into the Church
Communion of love among the members
Adherence to the Church and the Sacraments

5) **Mission** (EN 24)

“Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is **unthinkable** that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming, a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.” (EN 24)

Among Catholics, which stages of the cycle are strong/weak? How can the cycle break down?

C. Words & Deeds: Not Either/Or → Both/And!

“The economy of revelation is realized by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other. The works show forth and bear out the doctrines and realities signified by the words, and the words for their part proclaim the works and bring to light the mystery they contain.” (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum - Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 2)

“There is a mystery hidden in our good works. The mystery is the love of Christ. People need not only see what we're doing, but they need to know why we're doing it. They need to know the truth behind the deeds. After all, the first act of charity is truth. That is, the greatest, most important act of charity the Church can do for anyone is to reveal to them the truth about Jesus Christ, and in that, provide the only antidote to the despair and sickness of spirit that is literally killing every human heart. It's not enough to relieve people's physical suffering. Only the Church can relieve the pain of eternal suffering.” (Peter Herbeck, *Words & Deeds*, Renewal Ministries Newsletter)

D. The Urgency of Proclamation and Mission

1) “The peoples who have not yet received an initial proclamation of Christ constitute the majority of humanity.” (Pope John Paul II, RM, 40)

- a) The majority of humanity hasn't even heard of Jesus.
- b) Catholics make up about 17% of the world's population.
- c) But what percentage of Catholics practice their faith?

US: ~40%, **Canada:** 75% (1950) → 32% (2000) **Quebec:** 88% (1950) → 20% (2000)

(US from The New York Times, “In God We Trust ... Canadians Aren't So Sure,” by Clifford Kraus, March 26, 2003. *Canada & Quebec* from The Catholic Church in Canada, CBC News, July 15, 2002.)

2) “Do not be afraid to go out on the streets and into public places like the first apostles, who preached Christ and the Good News of salvation in the squares of cities, towns and villages. This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16). It is time to preach it from the rooftops (Mt 10:27).” (John Paul II, WYD '93)

3) “Where Jesus is lifted up and proclaimed with confidence and joy in the power of the Holy Spirit many are attracted to him and the Church grows ... where the message is not clear, where there is doctrinal and moral confusion, where Jesus is not at the center, where the Holy Spirit is not free to move, hardly anyone comes and many who are already there leave for practical paganism or other Churches.”

(Ralph Martin, *The Catholic Church at the End of an Age*, p. 135)

II. The Church: Missionary by Her Nature

A. The Church Exists to Evangelize

1) “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.” “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists to evangelize...” The Church “is linked to evangelization in her inmost being.” (EN 15)

“... the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel.” (RM 5)

2) “At every phase of human history, the Church, constantly gripped by the desire to evangelize, has but one preoccupation: whom to send to proclaim the mystery of Jesus...” (EN 22)

B. The New Evangelization

1) **Shift from Maintenance to Mission**

2) **John Paul II has identified this shift as the *New Evangelization***

“God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense the moment has come to commit all the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ‘ad gentes’. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty to proclaim Christ to all peoples.” (RM 3)

3) **What is the *New Evangelization*?**

“Evangelization, however, can and should be new in its ardor, its methods and its expression. It must be heralded with new energy and in a style and language adapted to the people of our day.” (Cardinal Avery Dulles, *John Paul II and the New Evangelization*, “What Does it Mean?”, p. 28)

C. The New Evangelists - Who are they?

1) All Christians

“No longer reserved to clerics and religious with a special missionary vocation, evangelization is now seen as the responsibility of the whole Church. Vatican II had already taught that since the Church is missionary by her very nature, evangelization is the duty of every Christian.” (LG, nos. 16-17; AG, nos. 23, 35).” (Ibid. Dulles)

2) The Laity are called to proclaim the Gospel

“The lay faithful too, precisely as members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC 905)

III. The Progression of Evangelization: From the Trinity to Us

A. Evangelization begins in the Heart of God the Father

- 1) “*God desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Tim 3:15)
- 2) “God’s saving love, the origin of all true evangelization, is universal. There is not, nor ever will be, any person or place or culture that God does not desire to transform through the ‘hidden energy of the Good News’.” (EN 4).
- 3) But, because of the Fall, we are under the power of sin & death: (1) *Alienation from God*, (2) *Wounded nature* (concupiscence, darkening of intellect, disordered passions), (3) *World comes under the dominion of the Enemy*.
- 4) “Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the power of death, but helped all men to seek and find you. Again and again you offered a covenant to man and through the prophets taught him to hope for salvation. Father, you so loved the world, that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Saviour.” (Eucharistic Prayer IV)

B. The Father Sends the Son

- 1) “*For God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son, so that whoever might believe in Him shall not die but have eternal life.*” (Jn 3:16)
- 2) “If we go back to the beginnings of the Church, we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one Saviour of all (Jn 14:6, Acts 4:12), the only one able to reveal God and lead to God.” (RM 5)
- 3) Christ comes to tell us who the *Father* is, the truth about who *you* are, and how you are to live.
- 4) “*No one has ever seen the Father; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known.*” “*He who has seen me, has seen the Father.*” (John 1:18, 14:9)
- 5) “*If then, we have died with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him...*” (Rom 6:8-11)
- 6) “*So whoever is in Christ is a new creation...*” (2 Cor 5:17-20)

C. The Father and Son send the Spirit

- 1) *A Joint Mission* - “When the Father sends his Word, he always sends his Breath. In their joint mission, the Son and Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable. To be sure, it is Christ who is seen, the visible image of the invisible God, but it is the Spirit who reveals him.” (CCC 689)
- 2) “When Christ is finally glorified, he can in turn send the Spirit from His place with the Father to those who believe in Him: He communicates to them His glory, that is, the Holy Spirit who glorifies Him.” (CCC 690)

D. The Holy Spirit sends the Church

1) "From this hour onward, the mission of Christ and the Spirit becomes the mission of the Church..." (CCC 730)

2) "*Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.'* And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, '*Receive the Holy Spirit...*'" (John 20:21-22)

E. The Church sends Us

"... the Church herself sends out evangelizers. She puts on their lips the saving Word, she explains to them the message of which she herself is the depository, she gives them the mandate which she herself has received and she sends them out to preach. To preach not their own selves or their personal ideas, but a Gospel of which neither she nor they are the absolute masters and owners, to dispose of it as they wish, but a Gospel of which they are the ministers, in order to pass it on with complete fidelity." (EN 15)

Summary: Evangelization is our participation in the Trinitarian Mission: To bring all creation back into communion with God. It begins in the heart of God the Father, who sent His Son to save all people. Jesus in turn sends the Holy Spirit upon the whole Church to continue His saving work. The Church sends us forth to bring the Good News to all.

IV. The Great Commission

A. Jesus Commissions Us

"Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Mt 28:18, cf. Mk 16:15-17, Lk 24:45)

B. The Holy Spirit Anoints Us

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

C. The Church Exhorts Us

"We cannot be content when we consider the millions of our brothers and sisters, who like us, have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but who live in ignorance of the love of God. For each believer, as for the entire Church, the missionary task must remain foremost, for it concerns the eternal destiny of humanity and corresponds to God's mysterious and merciful plan." (RM 86)

The Church is moving from Maintenance to Mission!

*"To be Christians means to be missionaries, to be apostles.
It is not enough to discover Christ --you must bring Him to others!"*

*You must have the courage to speak about Christ,
to bear witness to your faith through a lifestyle inspired by the Gospel.*

*The harvest is great indeed for evangelization and so many workers are needed.
Christ trusts you and counts on your collaboration."*

(Pope John Paul II, World Youth Day, 1989)

ON EVANGELIZATION IN THE MODERN WORLD

Pope Paul VI, 1975

The Cycle of Evangelization (par. 21-24)

21. Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. The above questions will ask, whether they are people to whom Christ has never been proclaimed, or baptized people who do not practice, or people who live as nominal Christians but according to principles that are in no way Christian, or people who are seeking, and not without suffering, something or someone whom they sense but cannot name. Other questions will arise, deeper and more demanding ones, questions evoked by this witness which involves presence, sharing, solidarity, and which is an essential element, and generally the first one, in evangelization."^[51]

All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers. We are thinking especially of the responsibility incumbent on immigrants in the country that receives them.

22. Nevertheless this always remains insufficient, because even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified--what Peter called always having "your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have"^[52] --and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. 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. The history of the Church, from the discourse of Peter on the morning of Pentecost onwards, has been intermingled and identified with the history of this proclamation. At every new phase of human history, the Church, constantly gripped by the desire to evangelize, has but one preoccupation: whom to send to proclaim the mystery of Jesus? In what way is this mystery to be proclaimed? How can one ensure that it will resound and reach all those who should hear it? This proclamation--kerygma, preaching or catechesis--occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it; and yet it is only one aspect of evangelization.

23. In fact the proclamation only reaches full development when it is listened to, accepted and assimilated, and when it arouses a genuine adherence in the one who has thus received it. An adherence to the truths which the Lord in His mercy has revealed; still more, an adherence to a program of life--a life henceforth transformed--which He proposes. In a word, adherence to the kingdom, that is to say, to the "new world," to the new state of things, to the new manner of being, of living, of living in community, which the Gospel inaugurates. Such an adherence, which cannot remain abstract and unincarnated, reveals itself concretely by a visible entry into a community of believers. Thus those whose life has been transformed enter a community which is itself a sign of transformation, a sign of

newness of life: it is the Church, the visible sacrament of salvation.[53] Our entry into the ecclesial community will in its turn be expressed through many other signs which prolong and unfold the sign of the Church. In the dynamism of evangelization, a person who accepts the Church as the Word which saves[54] normally translates it into the following sacramental acts: adherence to the Church, and acceptance of the sacraments, which manifest and support this adherence through the grace which they confer.

24. Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.

To complete these considerations on the meaning of evangelization, a final observation must be made, one which we consider will help to clarify the reflections that follow.

Evangelization, as we have said, is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact they are complementary and mutually enriching. Each one must always be seen in relationship with the others. The value of the last Synod was to have constantly invited us to relate these elements rather than to place them in opposition one to the other, in order to reach a full understanding of the Church's evangelizing activity.