



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Easter

April 10, 2016

Never Too Far Gone

By Janel Esker

We've all experienced awkward moments: You run into someone at the grocery store whom you've been avoiding out of anger. A friend overhears a criticism that wasn't intended for her ears. Your wife greets you dressed up for dinner, and you realize you've forgotten your anniversary...again. It can be difficult to smoothly navigate these moments—to minimize hurt feelings and reestablish intimacy.

So reflect on the more-than-awkward moment between Peter and Jesus in today's Gospel reading. Peter did more than just forget a birthday or spread gossip; he denied ever knowing Jesus, and he did it when Jesus was at his most vulnerable. That kind of betrayal would permanently end most relationships. But Jesus comes back to Peter and asks three times whether Peter loves him—a threefold reversal of the three denials. Peter must be embarrassed, afraid and, at the end, even frustrated at being asked so many times. But Jesus persists and reestablishes their intimate friendship. In fact, he calls Peter to even greater leadership—such was the trust Jesus placed in his formerly cowardly friend.

In this episode Peter shows us that no one is too far gone to be redeemed by the Lord. Peter's sin was great, but Jesus' love was greater. Jesus doesn't let awkwardness or discomfort get in the way of forgiveness and healing. Jesus calls even well-practiced sinners to greatness.

In the Easter season, we celebrate Jesus' new risen life; at the same time, we're challenged to rise to new life from our sin, betrayals, and failings. Jesus hasn't given up on us, and he never will. †

A Word From Pope Francis

We say we must seek God, go to him and ask forgiveness, but when we go, he is waiting for us, he is there first ...To find someone waiting for you is truly a great grace. You go to him as a sinner, but he is waiting to forgive you. ...Moreover, when we seek him, we discover that he is waiting to welcome us, to offer us his love. And this fills your heart with such wonder that you can hardly believe it, and this is how your faith grows—through encounter with a Person, through encounter with the Lord.



—Address, May 18, 2013 (Pentecost Vigil)

Sunday Readings

Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41

"We must obey God rather than men....We are witnesses of these things."

Revelation 5:11-14

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing."

John 21:1-19

"Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What emotions and assumptions hold me back from new life?
- Where can I grow in trust, love, and mercy?

What Is Evangelization?

When we think of evangelization, images that may spring to mind are pastors in pulpits, revival events, televangelists addressing packed stadiums, or going door to door passing out leaflets and seeking to gain converts by persuasive words. Yet it is a common error to restrict the meaning of evangelization to preaching or proselytizing.

Actually, many people are already evangelizing without knowing it: parents who teach their children Gospel values by embodying them in their daily lives; citizens who write their senators and representatives to urge better housing for the poor; coaches, mentors, and therapists who counsel troubled youth; nurses who treat and comfort fearful patients; volunteers who work with charitable agencies and organizations. All these people are engaged in evangelization.

To share our faith more effectively with today's world, we first have to get a clearer and richer understanding of evangelization. The word comes from the Latin word *evangelium* (Greek, *euangelion*) meaning "good news" or "gospel." To evangelize, therefore, means to do the Gospel—to live it, to carry it out, and to proclaim it. Challenging others by one's example and lifestyle, upholding true values, opening people's hearts to God's saving power, building community, struggling against injustice, and working to transform society are all vital elements of evangelization.



Because God is the chief architect of evangelization, in order to promote and implement the Gospel, we must be open to God's power through prayer and sacramental life. For a parish, this means implementing programs that help to deepen the spirituality of the community. It means the whole Christian community must renew its inner life, and its members must energize each other by sharing their faith. It means submitting ourselves as willing instruments of God's saving action in the world. Indeed, the advance of God's kingdom is first of all God's gift.

Many may find evangelization a bit scary, but effective evangelization is not difficult or risky. There is no need for academic degrees, religious training, or public-speaking experience. It involves no coercion, charm, or casting fear. True evangelization relies on God's love and the truth and power of his word. It is both gentle and friendly. When we share our faith, Jesus is our model. He had

compassion on the unbeliever. He met people on their own level, and he spoke their language—in parables and stories they could understand. The way we can evangelize is solidly rooted in the way we live and relate to other people.

If our relationship with Jesus Christ is genuine, it will show. People will see us celebrating something wonderful with them, mourning with them in their grief, and comforting them in times of hardship. Being a friend, one who empathizes and supports, is the first step in helping people discover the secret to your happiness—an intimate union with Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior.

Reflection Questions

1. How has God revealed himself and empowered you as a disciple?
2. Why should a layperson, evangelize?
3. How can you begin to share the Good News with those around you? †

Adapted from *Catholic Update Guide to the New Evangelization*, © 2012 Liguori Publications

PRAYER

Risen Lord, you gave your life to save the world. Help me to be a selfless servant of love and peace in the world.

—From *Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 11–16

Mon. St. Stanislaus:
Acts 6:8–15 / John 6:22–29

Tue. Easter Weekday:
Acts 7:51–8:1a / John 6:30–35

Wed. Easter Weekday:
Acts 8:1b–8 / John 6:35–40

Thu. Easter Weekday:
Acts 8:26–40 / John 6:44–51

Fri. Easter Weekday:
Acts 9:1–20 / John 6:52–59

Sat. Easter Weekday:
Acts 9:31–42 / John 6:60–69