

# Pastoral Letter

from Bishop Sam G. Jacobs  
to the People of the Diocese



## The Year of New Evangelization

Bayou Catholic Photos by Lawrence Chatagnier

February 2012

The call to evangelize is not a new call for Christians, even though John Paul II has coined the term “new evangelization.” “There exists today the clear need for a new evangelization. There is the need for a proclamation of the Gospel capable of accompanying man on his pilgrim way, capable of walking alongside the younger generation” (Crossing the Threshold, p. 117). What he insists is that it must be “new in method, new in expression and new in zeal” (1983). “The new evangelization needs new witnesses ... people who have experienced an area of change in their life because of their contact with Jesus Christ, and who are capable of passing on that experience to others” (1991).

What is evangelization? John Paul II said: “Unchanging in its content which is Christ ... it is not a theory but a life, a meeting of love which radically changes our life, today as at the beginning of the church ... . To evangelize is to bring about life in Christ, the unique Redeemer of mankind” (1994).

Some Catholics shy away both from the word and from the work because they consider it too “protestant.” This is unfortunate as well as untrue. Evangelization is rooted in the commission of Jesus to his Apostles and disciples. “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 lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Prior to that, he had sent them out two by two into the villages ahead of him to proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God. In a sense, this was the pre-evangelization that opened the hearts of the hearers to their encounter with Jesus. However, it was this encounter which made the difference.

Once Jesus had fulfilled his mission as Messiah through his death and resurrection and prior to his returning to the Father, he reminded the Apostles that they were to do the work of evangelization in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for ‘the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak: for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit ... . But you will 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 1:4-5, 8).

Then 10 days later, on the Feast of Pentecost, the promise of Jesus was fulfilled as the Holy Spirit descended upon them in the form of tongues of fire and they, anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, went forth to witness and evangelize, as Jesus commanded. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit that the work of evangelization receives its effectiveness.

Even though the call to evangelize is rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus and the biblical mandate given by Jesus to his disciples and thus to the church of all ages, what Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI have done is to give new emphasis to the call for evangelization by raising it to the level of a new and present conscious awareness.

Paul VI said that the church exists to evangelize. ➡

Bayou Catholic • Houma, LA



LAWRENCE CHATAGNIER/BAYOU CATHOLIC

Pope John Paul II said “The new evangelization needs new witnesses ... people who have experienced an area of change in their life because of their contact with Jesus Christ, and who are capable of passing on that experience to others” (1991). Christine Streams proclaims the word at St. Luke Church in Thibodaux.

John Paul II called for a new zeal for evangelization by every baptized and confirmed Catholic. Benedict XVI has stated: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Likewise, at the root of all evangelization lies not a human plan of expansion, but rather the desire to share the inestimable gift that God has wished to give us, making us sharers in his own life.”

I am often struck by the words of St. John Chrysostom, an early church Father, who many centuries past spoke these words, very apropos for today. “There is nothing colder than a Christian who does not seek to save others ... . How can such a person be a Christian? Tell me, if yeast did not make the whole mass like itself, is it really yeast? Again, if perfume failed to pervade all around it with its fragrance, would we call it perfume? Do not say: It is impossible for me to influence others. If you are a Christian, it is impossible for this not to happen. Things found in nature cannot be denied; so here, for it is a question of the nature of the Christian ... . If you say that a Christian cannot help others, you have insulted God and called him a liar. It is easier for the sun not to give warmth or shine than a Christian not to shed his light. It is easier for light to be darkness than for this to happen.”

The call is not to just evangelize, but to evangelize in the power of the Holy Spirit with new boldness in conjunction with his gifts. That is why the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was essential to the fulfillment of the Father’s plan, namely, to send Jesus to redeem

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us through his death and resurrection and to send the Holy Spirit to sanctify and empower us for the building up of the Body of Christ through the various gifts Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12.

In baptism and confirmation we have received the gifts of the Spirit for sanctification and for evangelization. These gifts must be enflamed once more so that the work of evangelization may be based on the work of the Spirit and not on our human gifts and abilities.

First of all, each of us needs either to come into that personal encounter with Jesus Christ which brings us under his Lordship, making him the center of our life or to deepen our relationship with him so as to better respond to his grace.

This is to lead us to the next step. Paul VI said very emphatically: The one who has been evangelized must in turn become an evangelist.

Paul VI later went on to state: “As a result of the frequent situations of de-Christianization in our day, (evangelization) also proves equally necessary for innumerable people who have been baptized but who live quite outside Christian life, for simple people who have a certain faith but an imperfect knowledge of the foundations of that faith, for intellectuals who feel the need to know Jesus Christ in a light different from the instruction they received as children, and for many others” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 52).

So who needs to be evangelized today?

■ There are those who have been baptized and received the various sacraments but have never had a personal conversion to Jesus Christ. There ➡



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Bishop Sam G. Jacobs says to be evangelizers it may mean that we receive some training on the process of evangelization and how to give our personal witness or testimony, short and sweet. Peter Herbeck, of Renewal Ministries in Ann Arbor, MI, speaks to participants at the School of Evangelization held at the Lumen Christi Retreat Center.



is something missing at the core of their being. Jesus is not the Lord of their life. Though they may go to church somewhat regularly, they could be more influenced by the culture around them than by the teachings of the church.

- There are those who are called the inactive Catholics. They come to church when convenient or on traditionally special moments, like Christmas, Easter, baptism, marriage and funerals. It is said that there are approximately 45 million active Catholics in the U.S. and another 17 million who are not practicing their faith on a regular basis.

- The unchurched or unaffiliated with any religion are one of the fastest growing groups in our country today. One statistic says that the unchurched in the U.S. are nearly at 100 million

- Our culture needs to be evangelized. It is sad to realize that our culture in the U.S. is no longer based on Judaic-Christian principles, upon which this country was founded. Instead, secularism, materialism, relativism and consumerism seek to undermine and determine our culture with some success. Even some of the latest government's directions and enactments have invaded the religious tenets held for so long as part of our moral system as a nation. The media has promoted these "isms" with the determination to change the culture.

This is how Benedict XVI summed up this situation and challenge. "The crisis we are living through carries with it signs of the exclusion of God from people's lives, a general indifference to the Christian faith, and even the intention of marginalizing it from public life" (2011).

What are we doing to evangelize the culture rather

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***Pope Benedict XVI 2011***

than allowing the culture to evangelize us?

John Paul II gave us a direction and a starting point. "Proclaiming Christ means above all giving witness to him with one's own life. It is the simplest form of preaching the Gospel and the most effective way available to you ... . The world today has special need of believable witnesses" (1991).

Secondly, it means to recognize that it is ⇨



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God's plan for us to be evangelized and to evangelize others.

Thirdly, it calls for us to become prayer warriors, interceding for the grace to step out of our comfort zone and personally embrace the central mission of the church.

Fourthly, it may mean that we receive some training on the process of evangelization and how to give our personal witness or testimony, short and sweet.

Fifthly, we need to act and not just talk; we need to embrace our identity as a disciple of Jesus Christ and do the work of the Gospel.

Let me share a story from S.D. Gordon. He pictures Gabriel as asking Christ when he reached heaven after his resurrection what recognition the world had given to his divine suffering for its sake. Christ replies that only a few in Palestine knew of it. Gabriel feels that more ought to know—the whole world ought to know—and he asks, "What is your plan, Master, for telling them of it." Jesus replies, "I have asked my disciples to make it the business of their lives to tell others, and those others to tell others, until the last person in the furthest circle has heard the story and has felt the power of it."

"But suppose they do not tell others—what then?" Gabriel asks.

Jesus answers quietly "Gabriel, I have not made any other plans. I am counting on them."

What I believe God is looking for as we respond to the call for "new evangelization" is submission to his plan as evidenced in the Scriptures. We do not have to reinvent the wheel or develop a new process. We need

***If not you, who? If not now, when? If not the truth of the Gospel, what? If not in the power of the Spirit, how? If not to your environment and local world, where?***

to be rooted in our relationship with God, to be formed in our faith, accept the empowerment of the Spirit already given to us, trust in God, be attuned to the lead of the Spirit with obedience, speak out fearlessly but faithfully the Word of God and our faith Tradition, share the Gospel message of salvation in simple terms, and exercise the appropriate gift of the Spirit as we are led to do.

Let me close with a quotation from the Letter of the Romans and some challenging questions. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to share. And how can men share, unless they are sent" (Romans 10:13-15).

If not you, who? If not now, when? If not the truth of the Gospel, what? If not in the power of the Spirit, how? If not to your environment and local world, where?

"The Gospel is not something only to go to church to hear, but to go from the church to tell."

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