

A Fresh Encounter with Jesus Christ: Directions in Evangelization

*His Eminence
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I. Why these Directions in Evangelization?

The first task of the Church is to preach the Gospel to all nations. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope Paul VI described evangelization as the “deepest identity” of the Church, which “exists in order to evangelize” (EN, 14). While proposing a broad and inclusive concept, Paul VI made it clear that there can be no evangelization without proclamation of Jesus as Lord (EN, 22).

Even with all our programs, the vitality of our ministries, vibrant worship and a strong outreach, no matter how hard we work, so often it seems that something is missing. What is that? It is my sense that many of our people feel that they lack that personal encounter with Christ which transforms one’s life, and the language in which to talk about it with others.

Any program of evangelization must begin from a “fresh encounter with Jesus Christ” (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 7). Consider the following:

- Barbara was 19 years old. She worked part time in the parish office. She had been active in the youth group. The pastor noticed that she had recently dropped out of the group and that she had not been coming to Mass. When he talked to her, he was surprised and saddened to hear that she now was going to an evangelical church with her aunt. Barbara told him, “Father, I came here for First Communion and for confirmation and the youth ministry. I learned a lot about the church in those years, but I did not meet Jesus till I went to the other church, and I have learned more about His word there in a few months than in all the years here.”
- Mike’s son went through 12 years of Catholic school. His family always participated actively in the church. When he went to college he dropped out of the church. Later he married and now has children. They have become active members of a Pentecostal church and are happy there. He says he has found a relationship with Jesus that somehow he never found in his parents’ church. His parents are happy he is in a church and a good man, yet sad that it is not their church.
- In a large parish with 500 First Communions the pastor invited all to return the following Sunday in their suits and dresses. Fourteen came.
- A Director of Religious Education decided to seat the First Communion children together rather than with their parents. This is because so many of the parents came up with their children and crossed their arms for a blessing instead of receiving Communion with their children.

As I listened to these stories and so many others, I thought of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were sad and disillusioned even though they knew all the key elements of the Christian story, “of Jesus, a prophet mighty in word and deed ... who was condemned to death and crucified,” and they had even heard that “He is alive” (Luke 24:19-20). It seems to me that many of our people find themselves in this same situation. They know all the elements of the Christian story but they

have not yet had that encounter with the risen Jesus which transformed the two disciples and can transform their lives also.

What are some of the common elements of a dynamic fresh encounter with Jesus Christ? First, there is attention to personal experience. Second, there is the sharing of experience with another or others in a community of faith. Third, the Word of God helps the person and community to interpret experience in view of the love of God proclaimed in the Scripture.

I began to sense also that our energies need to be directed not only at getting people to come to our events and activities, but to enable them to encounter Jesus again in all our events and activities. Our parishes need to focus not just on instruction but on spiritual formation, not just on responding to needs but on helping people share their faith in their everyday lives, not just on developing programs and ministries but on forming ministering and evangelizing communities. We are called not only to welcome those who come to our doors but to seek the lost and bring them to our doors. It is time for us to learn again that we are called as Church not primarily for ourselves but sent to a secular world with the good news.

September 2, 2003, marked a historic moment in the life of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. On that day, in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angeles, our Synod process was brought to a close as we signed Six Pastoral Initiatives, making them particular law for this Archdiocese. The first of these, the Pastoral Initiative which is to give direction to the other Initiatives and, indeed, to the life of our Local Church in the coming years, is entitled: “Evangelization and ‘The New Evangelization.’” Perhaps this emerged as the first Initiative because our people recognize that we need to put a renewed emphasis on how we pass on the Good News of Jesus Christ the Lord to our children and to the wider world in which we live. There was also a recognition that to do this, we all must allow the Gospel to touch the unconverted corners of our own hearts.

I began to meet with small groups of priests to discuss evangelization. These meetings were for me very deep encounters, opportunities to know my brother priests better. During these meetings, I was able to open up more than usual, telling some of my own story, sharing some of my struggles, my disappointments, my frustrations, and my hopes for the people entrusted to my care. I was challenged to talk about my own relationship with Jesus and how that relationship has deepened during these last few years of tremendous difficulty. I found that as I shared about who Jesus is for me over and over again, my relationship with Him deepened.

I would say that in these days I have experienced a fresh encounter with the love of Christ. What I also came to see in these meetings is that so many good things are taking place in our Archdiocese. There are so many positive directions taken in response to the Gospel imperative to spread the Good News.

These *Directions* emerge from our first Pastoral Initiative. They are offered in an effort to provide an understanding of evangelization and to give examples of some of the work of evangelization being done in our parishes. Also these *Directions* recommend some skills that are helpful in this work. They are intended for priests and pastoral leaders who are responding to the call to evangelize. Moreover, the *Directions* are offered for all who are aware that in many ways we have failed to help our people find the words for, and to speak the language of, their personal experience of God’s love for us.

II. What is Evangelization?

Many of our Catholic people, indeed some of the clergy, have some hesitation about the word “evangelization.” But in the parishes there has been a growing response to the Synod’s strong

affirmation of evangelization and “the New Evangelization” as the central concern of every parish in the Archdiocese.

Furthermore, in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) Pope John Paul II wrote: “I sense that the moment has come to commit all of 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). He added on another occasion that this new commitment must be “new in ardor, methods and expression” (*AAS*, 75 (1983) 778).

What exactly do we mean by evangelization and “the New Evangelization?” A clear answer is found in what was affirmed by Synod Delegates and Key Archdiocesan Leadership in endorsing ***Evangelization and “The New Evangelization”*** as our First Pastoral Initiative, our top priority over the coming years:

Every baptized Catholic is called to participate in the mission of Christ and the Spirit, proclaiming in word and deed the message at the heart of Jesus’ life and ministry: the Reign of God among us here and now, at this time and in this place. The whole life of the Church in all its dimensions is to serve this MISSION: announcing in what we say and do the Good News, the year of God’s favor, the transformation of the world and the coming of the Reign of God, the reign of truth, holiness, justice, love and peace.

Central to this mission is EVANGELIZATION. There are three levels of evangelization:

First, evangelization entails allowing one’s own heart to be seized and saturated by the Gospel, responding to the call to lifelong conversion to Christ by the gift of the Spirit.

Second, evangelization requires reaching out to others to proclaim in word and deed the Reign of God.

Third, evangelization demands that the values of the Reign of God — a reign of truth, holiness, justice, love and peace — permeate each and every culture, transforming every sphere of life.

Because we are called to holiness of life through the grace of our baptism, we have a responsibility to proclaim to others our experience of Christ to our families, in our places of work, in our neighborhoods, as well as in the public square. Every Catholic should be able to convey a personal knowledge of God’s love and salvation in the language of the Scriptures, by way of the experience of the Sacraments and through an appreciation of the tradition of the Church.

Further, today there must be a NEW EVANGELIZATION, focused on evangelizing or re-evangelizing under-catechized, inactive, and alienated Catholics, as well as on re-animating the faith of those who have grown up in the Church. The “New Evangelization” also means that each one of us who already has faith in Jesus Christ allows Christ to touch the unconverted corners of our lives (“Gathered and Sent,” 2003, Pastoral Initiative I).

Evangelization as it is commonly understood might be referred to as “primary” evangelization. “Primary” evangelization means coming to a personal experience of God’s love, forgiveness and healing through an encounter with Jesus Christ. The “New Evangelization” entails a revitalization, a reawakening of faith in Jesus Christ among those who are indifferent to the Gospel and in those whose faith may be dormant.

Evangelization and “the New Evangelization” have as their prime purpose to bring people of every race and tongue, of every land and nation — especially those who are poor and afflicted in

any way — to a deeper experiential knowledge of God’s love for them in the particular, concrete circumstances of their lives.

III. How do we Evangelize?

At those meetings with the priests, what also emerged was a clear sense that what is NOT needed is new programs for more effective evangelization. It is more that in our efforts to evangelize we need to do much of what we now do, but do it in a different way.

Before giving examples of how evangelization is taking place in our Archdiocese, recall that our late Holy Father John Paul II insisted that any program of evangelization must be rooted in a “fresh encounter with Jesus Christ.” This encounter with the living Christ leads to continuing conversion (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 6, 28, 66).

The “fresh encounter with Jesus Christ” as the basis for all our efforts at evangelization is echoed by Pope Benedict XVI: “The hoped-for renewal of parishes cannot only result from pastoral initiatives, albeit useful and timely, nor even less from programs worked out theoretically. Inspired by the apostolic model as shown in the Acts of the Apostles, parishes “rediscover” themselves in the encounter with Christ” (Address to the meeting of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, September 22, 2006).

What follows is a series of examples and stories that illustrate practices and skills which facilitate the encounter with Jesus Christ. As a result of this encounter, people’s lives and our parish communities are being transformed. I share them in order to guide our practice while recognizing that the Spirit is always the agent of evangelization.

- Martha was invited by her mother-in-law to come to a small community meeting at a neighbor’s home soon after Martha’s husband was killed in a car accident. There she began to talk about her loss and her worries for the future and to hear the Scripture. She continued to attend and her faith began to grow. When her job demanded that she work on the night of the meeting, she met another neighbor and together they formed a new group which meets on Friday evenings. She tells her employers that she is not available on Friday evenings since she has another “job” then.
- Tim, a 47-year-old man stopped attending Mass as a teenager. He completely left the Catholic Church, and rejected its teachings. He had not put a foot in any church for 25 years. His wife was a practicing Catholic. She was killed in an auto accident. He was devastated and completely lost after her death. He felt obligated to have her funeral in the Catholic Church. He was so moved by the bereavement committee and the funeral liturgy that he has returned to regular Mass attendance. He says his life is forever changed.
- Lourdes was required to come to a series of meetings as part of the preparation for her daughter’s First Communion. She resented this at first. In groups with other parents, Lourdes began to talk about her life, her child, her hopes and to connect that to passages from the Gospel. She began to learn how to pray more and in different ways and to have a strong relationship with Jesus. She changed from seeing the process as classes to get her child through First Communion, to helping her child come to know Jesus more. They pray together as a family more now. She is looking for ways to continue to nourish her faith now that she no longer has those Communion meetings.

IV. A Model of Evangelization?

At a recent social gathering a man approached one of our regional bishops to tell him that he was

soon to get married and his fiancée had just gone through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The man said “I went through it with her. Even though I had 12 years of Catholic schools, I am really glad I did. I wish every Catholic had the opportunity to have that experience.”

Many pastors hear that sentiment echoed frequently. Several priests expressed the view that what is needed is a sort of re-initiation of those Catholics whose faith is flat, or dormant, or inactive. The RCIA, both in its structure and methods, can be something of a model for such re-initiation, or the new evangelization. The model of the RCIA helps us to understand that there are stages in conversion, dynamics that are at the heart of a developing, growing, maturing faith.

The initial stage of the RCIA is focused on developing a living, personal relationship with Jesus Christ that is demonstrated by a change of life, prayer and the desire for service. The methods of this stage are the sharing of life experience in small groups, testimony or sharing of faith by believers, the proclamation of the essential good news of God’s love and forgiveness as revealed in the person of Jesus. Even for those who have already been catechized and have received the sacraments, the dynamics of this stage of RCIA can lead to a deeper response to the person of Christ as Son of the Father who calls us to live in the Spirit.

Briefly, the opportunity for people to gather in small groups to reflect on their own experience in the light of the Scripture and to share it with others can lead Catholics to come to know Jesus again as if for the first time.

In the RCIA, after the Rite of Entrance, during the period of catechumenate, the initial faith in Jesus Christ is deepened by catechesis leading the catechumen more fully into the teaching of the Gospel and the Church and, after the Rite of Election, the third stage is a process of spiritual enlightenment and transformation. The fresh encounter with Christ also will need catechesis and spiritual growth if it is not to wither away like the seed sown on rocky ground.

However, catechesis does not ordinarily facilitate that encounter but rather presupposes it. The encounter is not the result of instruction nor based on concept or doctrine. Rather it is the heart falling in love with Christ. Its methods are different. They are the methods of stage one which again include witness to the greatness of God’s love, learning to hear the story of the other and to tell our own story as a story of God’s love and presence; prayer; music, and above all a community in which faith is shared and conversation opens onto faith.

The RCIA also calls us to recognize the power of rites in initiation and transformation. Creative use of public rituals can also be very effective in the new evangelization. There is no true learning without participation. The dynamics of the RCIA work well, in part, because of adherence to that principle. In the past our approach to handing on the faith was narrowly focused on book knowledge. In the RCIA, the whole person — mind, body, senses, emotions, feelings — is engaged in the dynamics of conversion. The RCIA process is multifaceted, takes place within a group, is ongoing, Scripture-based, rooted in personal reflection and sharing, and expressed in witness. Each phase touches different dimensions of people. An approach to evangelization based on some of the dynamics of the RCIA can open up the imagination, memory, and the emotions as well as the intellect as doors to the sacred.

The RCIA provides many elements that are vital to the dynamics of evangelization. What is happening in our parishes is that opportunities integrating some of these elements are being provided which facilitate an encounter with Jesus Christ.

V. Creating Space for the Evangelizing Word

Recognizing the importance of such a fresh encounter as the basis of all activities in the parish and

the wider Church, pastoral leaders are exploring ways of providing opportunities for parishioners to encounter Christ afresh and to testify to the difference that this has made in their own lives and the lives of others.

Many use a Gospel reflection process in all meetings and groups during the week. The reflection is on one of the upcoming Sunday's readings, usually the Gospel. The purpose is to have people help one another connect their experience to the Gospel narrative. It helps them to see that the Jesus encountered by Peter and Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus, by Mary and Martha and the Samaritan woman is the Jesus who encounters them. One such process follows:

1. *Prayer to the Holy Spirit* to guide the reflection;
2. *Read the Gospel*;
3. *Echo*: each person chooses a word or phrase that has caught their attention and says the word or phrase out loud;
4. *Share experience or story* as to why they chose that echo;
5. *Prayer of Promise*: each person says a short prayer of promise expressing what they feel called to do differently in response to the reading and sharing.

Some parishes which incorporate this process into all events, groups and meetings (staff meetings, finance council, choirs, school parents, small communities in neighborhoods, etc.) say that the whole of parish life during the week is an extended Liturgy of the Word leading up to the Sunday Eucharist and drawing life from it.

One parish council president said: "We always have a busy agenda, and at first I thought this process would take too much time. We had always just begun with a quick prayer and an Our Father. But I noticed as we used the Gospel reflection process that the sharing changed the atmosphere of the meetings and helped us to connect to each other in a deeper way. We actually then got our work done more efficiently."

In another parish in response to the Gospel narrative about Bartimaeus (Mark 10: 46-52) read at a staff meeting, the school principal shared that he needed Jesus' help because he had been stressed, frustrated and angry. This opened the possibility for others on the staff to respond and reach out to help him.

At a gathering of parents whose children were to receive First Communion the following steps were followed:

1. The parents were seated at round tables with a Bible for each person as well as a pen and paper. They were asked to write all they could to describe Jesus and who he was for them. Most could write very little.
2. Each was asked to read Mt 15:29-37 privately, and then one proclaimed it to the whole group. The passage deals with several healing miracles and the feeding of the multitude. They were asked to consider who are those needing healing and who are the hungry today. After some discussion they were asked to add to their description of Jesus.
3. After a break for refreshments and the request to meet at least three new people, they were asked to write down what are the real pains and sufferings and worries in their life

right now that they would want Jesus to heal if He were to walk in the door and call them by name. They were encouraged to be very honest and real with the assurance that it was totally personal and not to be shared unless they wished to do so.

4. Each group was asked again to read privately and then one to proclaim to the group Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me all you who are burdened....” This was followed by more sharing.

5. The leader presented the question “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15), gave a brief description of the Gospel context, and said that it is the fundamental question of our lives. It holds the answer to life’s problems and challenges. Our search is to find out who Jesus is for us. This can only be discovered when we bring our life to the Gospels and search for the answer.

Some include an opportunity for reflection and sharing a life experience in all the regular activities and meetings of the parish.

- Maritza is a wedding coordinator. After rehearsal she gathers the group with the bride and groom and says something like: “We are going to take a little time for reflection now since tomorrow will be so busy. People have been getting gifts for Paulo and Ana. What gift would you want God to give them as they begin their marriage? They take a few moments of silent reflection and then people have a chance to share their wish or prayer if they want to.

- Deacon Leo does vigil services, mostly in mortuary chapels. He asks mourners to think for a minute on how they would finish the sentence: “What is something you thank God for in the life of the deceased?” or “What is something you want to remember from the life of the deceased?” After a brief silence he offers the opportunity for those who wish to share their responses.

- At the Baptism preparation, Lorenzo asks parents to share on what the birth of this child has meant to them, and how has it changed them.

- At the Baptism ceremony, Father Ramon gives out 3 x 5 cards and has people write their response to the question: “What is your prayer for Lilly on the day of her baptism?” He then offers an opportunity to anyone who wishes to read their prayer aloud. The family may keep these prayer cards as a memento of their child’s baptism.

- As the parish building committee is beginning to look at renovating the Church, the chair asked people to share in response to the question: “What happened within these walls that has made a difference in your life?”

- During Mass the principal celebrant will sometimes ask questions:

- ♦ At the Penitential Rite: “Before we hear the Good News let us tell God the bad news. Name what is sinful or painful in our neighborhood and world.”

- ♦ At the offertory: “What do you want to bring to the altar today along with the bread and wine even if it is a problem or worry?”

- ♦ At the Preface: “Can you recall something from this past week for which you

want to thank God this morning?”

- ♦At the sign of peace: “Before you offer a sign of peace, think of some aspect of your life or relationships to which you wish to bring peace?”

Special Masses such as for victims of violence, for graduating students, and for the divorced give an opportunity for people to ritualize their experience and to tell their story within the context of faith, hope, and love. Families can bring a picture of their loved one, or light a candle at the altar for deceased members. Graduating students from local High Schools or colleges can come in graduating robes to receive a special blessing.

Small Christian Communities are a powerful means of ongoing evangelization. These communities are groups of 10 to 15 people who meet regularly in homes to reflect together on the Scriptures, pray and share together and be a presence of the Church in their neighborhood.

Neighborhood Celebrations. Some parishes use traditional celebrations such as Novenarios, Posadas, Simbang Gabi, the Stations of the Cross, and the parish’s patronal feast day to gather people in neighborhoods. These are opportunities for neighbors to meet and to begin to talk to one another at a deeper level in the context of faith.

- Rudy’s wife signed them up to host an evening of welcome for a small group of parishioners. He had never been much involved with Church. He liked the experience and began to go with his wife to the other evenings of the Novenario. They began to get to know their neighbors more and after a time set up a small community on their street. They meet every week now to share the Scripture, support one another in their lives and to be a presence of the Church there. Rudy is the coordinator of that group now.

Parish retreats which stress the Kerygma themes of God’s love, the consequences of sin, salvation in Jesus Christ, forgiveness and healing and the gift of the Spirit can be a powerful means of bringing people to a fresh encounter with Christ.

- Kim Lee attended a men’s retreat. Afterwards, instead of going out with his buddies he started to spend more time at home with his family. The family started to pray together. He continues to attend a men’s group at his Church. Recently he told them, “I never realized how happy I could be at home with the family.”

Prayer groups with a strong outreach for evangelization have been powerful means of bringing people to Christ.

- Huy had been raised in the faith but drifted away in his youth. He had some struggles with addiction. A friend invited him to a prayer group, and when they prayed with him he experienced a new presence of the love and forgiveness of God.
- Antonio came from Central America as a young man. Freed from the constraints of home he lived a dissolute life for a few years. A friend invited him to a religious congress, and he was so desperate and lost that he accepted the invitation. The music and preaching touched his heart, and he began to return to Church and use his talents in leadership. He says it felt like coming home after a long journey.

Parish Visitation. Home visits have a long history as an effective means of reaching out to people in the parish. Many parishes are starting home visitation groups and report finding them powerful

for both the visited and the visitors.

- Gloria started to visit a family as part of the parish outreach. In response to her continued visits and conversations, the father of this family begins to make an effort to be a better husband and father. He begins to talk to his teenage son more. The son had been starting to hang out around gangs but now leaves that aside. The wife said “Because of all this I know that God lives.”
- Sal and Maria visit homes as part of a parish evangelization program. They offer to pray with people for anything they would like to pray for. One day they met Daniel whose wife had just left him because of his drinking. He was suicidal. They listened to him, prayed with him, helped him to get into a program for his drinking and become part of a group at Church where he finds friendship and support. Daniel often says that it was God who sent Sal and Maria that morning when he was at his lowest. Sal and Maria often say that their experience of God is strengthened by the visits they make.

Here again we are able to see the common elements of a dynamic fresh encounter with Jesus Christ in these practical examples. First there is **attention to personal experience**. Second, there is **the sharing of experience with another or others in a community of faith**. Third, **the Word of God helps the person and community to interpret experience** in view of the love of God proclaimed in the Scripture.

These three elements are essential to evangelization. Sometimes the process may begin with an experience that is then connected to a similar experience in the Scripture. At other times it may begin with a proclamation of the forgiving, healing, loving God or with the sharing of the action of the Spirit in the life of another. In all, people are evangelized as they help one another to understand their experience in the light of the Scripture. Paul says that faith comes by hearing (Romans 8). For many it involves hearing the echo of their own story in the story of another and above all in God’s own story in the Scripture.

VI. The Way of the Word in Scripture

The dynamics of evangelization are more a matter of the heart more than of the head. It is a matter of bringing to awareness the God who is present in life. The Scriptures give examples of **skills** and **attitudes** that help us in this work.

•As with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus there is often a **question that opens up the conversation**: “What are you talking about?” Jesus asks and they tell him of their loss and disillusion. When He explains the Scriptures to them, they feel their hearts burn as He enlightens and reinterprets their experience. Seeing their particular experience in the context of the larger story of Scripture they cannot help but share their new story with the others. Jesus frequently asks provocative questions “What are you looking for?” “What do you want me to do for you?” “Who do you say that I am?” Asking a good question is an important skill in evangelization and requires some preparation. A good question elicits the sharing of an experience, the telling of a story, rather than a factual answer. “Relate an experience” or “Tell of a time when...” are good beginnings. Like Jesus with the disciples heading for Emmaus the response to the question has to be listened to with attention and respect (even if sometimes it seems to be heading us away from where we want to get to). In the practice of listening, it is sometimes better to say nothing in the way of response. It is often in silence and receptivity that we are able to hear the Word beneath and beyond the words of what is honestly shared. Just as on the road to Emmaus the conversation leads to the encounter with the Lord in the breaking of the bread, so today our efforts at evangelization are to lead to a deeper recognition of the presence of God welcomed in welcoming the stranger, as well as celebrated in

Word and Sacrament. Preaching that is filled with the Good News of Jesus in the context of good liturgy is a powerful means of evangelization. Nourished by Word and Sacrament, the evangelized become the evangelizers.

- Jesus broke through barriers to start a conversation with the Samaritan woman. He begins by asking her for a drink of water (John 4:7). In evangelization we stand with empty hands, willing to receive the gift being offered in the other. There is a **profound respect** for those who are different from ourselves. Respect also means that we never force the Gospel on anyone or pressure them with unwanted testimony. Because of her encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman is transformed from isolation, confusion and guilt to openly testifying to her townspeople. Creating an environment for welcoming the Word also requires that we **be willing to speak our own truth; to share our own experience with confidence**. Catholics — whether parents with their children, coworkers, ministers in the church — have to learn how and what to share, to have a simple and personal language in which to express what God has done for them and what for them is good in the Good News. This process of sharing in a mutual exchange in faith, is not the same as confessing one's failings and sins in a confessional. It is not therapy, nor is it emotional nakedness. Rather it is the ability to notice the action of God in life and express it in personal terms, relating it to the Word of God in Scripture.

- In the story of the Canaanite women (Matthew 15: 21-28), Jesus is so moved by the faith of this woman, towards whom he had been dismissive, that he is changed by her. He heals her daughter of her unclean spirit. Jesus here teaches us the **humility** that is the *sine qua non* of evangelization. Humility does not take offense, nor does it offend. Rather, humility is expressed in healthy self-effacement, a willingness to listen even when others make claims that we would rather not hear. Humility is expressed in the avoidance of peremptory language, in tranquility, in patience under contradiction, in gentleness, in generosity of spirit. We need to be humble enough to **be willing to be evangelized** even by those we would normally be inclined to reject.

- Jesus notices Bartimaeus on the side of the way and Zaccheus in the tree despite the crowd's attempt to impede the encounter. He enters Zaccheus' house and Bartimaeus blindness and they are transformed. In the midst of very large and busy parishes we need to be ever more creative in finding ways to **pay attention to the individual**, especially those who are lost, hurting or rejected. God is present in every life, His spirit is active in every person and the Body of Christ needs the active presence of all of its members. Jesus, the Good Shepherd is willing to turn his attention from the ninety nine so as to seek out the one who has strayed.

- Jesus called the disciples, taught them the meaning of the parables, and sent them out two by two. They became the nucleus of the new people of God. Paul would follow this example and establish communities of faith on his missionary journeys. **Building community**, communities living in the Spirit, is the most effective means of leading people to God. Evangelized communities evangelize.

- Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. It is important that our parishes are places where people are taught how to pray. People need to be introduced to the rich traditions and methods of prayer as well as to the teachings and doctrines of our Church. Catholics need to develop their ability to pray aloud with others in their own words whether before meals, at meetings, or on special occasions. More than saying prayers learned in childhood, this deeper kind of prayer means being able to address God in simple language that names our experience and feelings. **Praying with and for others** in times of need or pain, gratitude or hope provides the opportunity of naming the experience, interpreting it in the language of the Scriptures and bringing it before the living and

loving God, thereby helping them to recognize the presence of Christ in their lives.

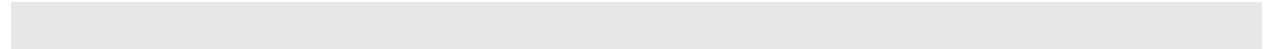
Luke's account of the Visitation (Luke 1: 39-55) brings together some key ingredients involved in evangelization:

- “Mary set out in haste ... into the hill country.” The experience of the Spirit of God pours over in an energy that is outbound, a movement out of ourselves to the neighbor, the enemy, the ends of the earth. Then, and now, those who hear the Word and keep it are likewise commissioned to go and teach all nations.
- Mary “entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.” Evangelization happens in just such ordinary encounters between ordinary people and in our time will only be truly effective when ordinary Catholics in their everyday encounters and relationships are willing and able to speak of the great things God has done for them.
- They both recognize that their experience involves not just them but God.
- Elizabeth praises Mary but Mary responds by pointing away from herself and glorifying God. The awareness of God's action in our lives leads to astonishment and praise.
- Elizabeth said “as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.” Mary said “My spirit rejoices in God my savior.” Joy and gratitude result from their encounter with one another and with the Word now in their midst.
- “The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” Testimony to God's presence takes the form of words and deeds. The example of love, service and a life well lived is always a powerful means of bringing people to Christ. But words are also necessary and evangelization is a ministry of the Word. God's love, healing, forgiveness and grace made present in Jesus must be proclaimed in season and out, before and above all other teaching. Preaching above all is a proclamation of the unconditional love of God and the fact that we are saved by God's grace. More than instructing, moralizing or exhorting to self-improvement, homilists would do well to help people discern the power and goodness of God in our lives.
- “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors.” Testimony about what God has done for her personally leads Mary into proclaiming what God has done for his people in history. Testimony leads to instruction and the personal opens up into the common tradition.

VII. Conclusion

In the Gospel of Mark, the woman who had been suffering for 18 years with a debilitating illness knows how to access the healing, life giving power of God. She knew that if she could only touch the hem of the garment of Christ she would be healed (Mark 5:25-34). To touch Jesus is to touch God Himself. We in the Church have not been good at helping people to know this liberating power of God in Christ. We are grateful to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, and to the evangelizing groups in our Church. Over the years these groups have helped many people to have experiences of Jesus' power which have changed them profoundly. It is my hope that we take every opportunity in our parishes and in our daily lives to help whomever we meet to have this encounter with Jesus.

In a “fresh encounter with Jesus Christ,” we come to a deeper participation in the very life of God. This occurs as we hear the Word, a Word echoed in the lives of others and in our own lives.



In evangelization it is not so much that we go looking for Christ. It is rather that Christ finds us. Evangelization is helping people recognize that Christ is present in their lives often in events, places, and people they might least likely suspect. Frequently, but not always, this encounter takes place in moments of darkness, loss, emptiness, suffering and sorrow.

The Christ who comes to us in our brokenness and loss, our tragedy and our triumphs is the one who emptied himself of all power and influence and achievement to be with us at our most vulnerable point, the most broken places, in our lives.

We know, however, that there are so many for whom experiences of brokenness and loss, or indeed any experience, remain just that, until someone provides them with an opportunity to share their story with others in a context of faith. Then there is the possibility of hearing the Word of God beneath their words and recognizing the presence of God in their experiences.

Pope John Paul II often reminded us that the great gift we have to share with the world is not a set of doctrines or rules but the living person of Jesus Christ. He is the source of all love, forgiveness and transformation. There is nothing else that we do that is more important than sharing this gift with the world. Miss no opportunity to proclaim Him.

I would like nothing more than to see every parish in the Archdiocese become an evangelizing community. I urge every parish to become a place where all activities — from finance council meeting to the small community meeting to the Sunday Liturgy — are done in such a way as to provide an occasion to encounter Christ over and over again. The question that we should constantly have before us, whether at the baptism class, at the youth group, at the whole community catechesis assembly, is: How will we help people meet Jesus and experience his love? It is by sharing Jesus' love that we will bring others to this fresh encounter with Him that changes lives forever.