

Evangelisation for Glasgow Priests, 10 Nov 2023

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THE MORNING: SOME EXAMPLES AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF EVANGELISATION

- St Alban + St Amphibalus - personal conversion
- St Gregory + St Augustine of Canterbury - public mission

These examples show evangelisation has many forms: (Alban) private faith, accident, unplanned, grew out of disaster, no resources or strategies, unknown people vs (Aug) years of prep and planning, fully resourced, mighty task force, across continents, VIPs, Popes, Kings

Other examples. I asked my evangelisation class (Yrs 1+2) at VEC give examples from history: Nils Steenson (Dane) converted to Catholic when saw Blessed Sacrament procession in Italy; Koreans converted by bible, no missionaries; Francis of Assisi go see Sultan, no visible result, courage; St Faustina private diaries; St Teresa founding monasteries; Fulton Sheen on TV.

Examples show that evangelisation needs faith: the faith of Amphibalus, Alban, Gregory, Augustine - the external activity is not a substitute for faith. The danger of activism, cf. the books [The Soul of the Apostolate](#) by Chautard, and [the Ruthless Elimination of Hurry](#) by John Mark Comer.

Often the lack of evangelisation in our parishes is because our faith is weak; faith has to come before evangelisation.

- Mary Magdalene meets the Lord (faith) and then announces to the disciples I have seen the Lord.
- The Woman at the Well, she went back to the town to give her testimony, “he told me everything I ever did” - he knew me!
- Jesus to Peter: Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Jesus needs to know that he is ready. Am I ready? Is my faith strong for evangelisation?

Evangelisation also needs desire, conviction about the importance of evangelisation. You can't evangelise to fix your problems (falling numbers, low vocations); you can't do it to please the bishop. It needs a genuine desire to share faith, a love for souls, to believe that it matters. This is true for all Christians, but NB in Vatican II (Presbyterorum Ordinis) the purpose of priesthood is twofold: the glory of God and the salvation/sanctification of souls. We need charity/love for souls to evangelise.

Many Catholics have a love for the faith but not a heart for reaching out to share it in charity. Pastorally, as parishes, we often don't believe it is important and therefore don't act. Why are we stuck? Different reasons:

- Ignorance - we simply don't know it is important
- False humility
- A subtle relativism (it's important for me but not for others; true for me but not true for others)
- A misguided notion of salvation (God loves everyone, which he does, and therefore there is no need to invite people into anything bigger - the Gospel)
- An overemphasis on witness at the expense of proclamation, testimony
- Trivialising of sin: sin and therefore the forgiveness of sins (baptism) is not important
- We are overwhelmed by the scale of the task
- Simple lack of energy, time - we leave for the next generation

Evangelisation starts when the penny drops that this really matters, a personal conversion, longing to share this gift with others too, a compassion for others, not triumphalistic/arrogant.

Mt 13: the overwhelming joy of discovering the treasure, the pearl.

Rose of Lime in the Office of Readings for her feast: “if only you knew how great it is to possess divine grace, how noble, beautiful, precious - the riches, joys, delighted”. Eph 3:8, St Paul, “though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”.

Do we feel this? We need an examination of conscience, to bring this to prayer, to spiritual direction, to confession. Praying for our own conversion: Lord, give me this vision, zeal, grace, and let it take me wherever you wish.

Many priests are tired, especially after Covid, feeling pressured and overburdened, not on top of everything, and to speak about evangelisation and new projects seems like an additional burden, another imposition, adding to the to-do list.

I want to turn this upside down: to discover this deep spiritual yearning for evangelisation, this zeal, is to be given new energy, new meaning; it can bring a renewal of priesthood and helps us reconnect with the reasons we became priests in the first place. It's not a new burden but a new reason, purpose to live the priesthood, from black and white to colour.

Remember St Boniface: he was a successful missionary then retired to his monastery in Fulda, Germany. Then in his 80s he felt inspired to go on mission again to Frisia, and there he was martyred. Don't feel that your priesthood is in the past, when you were younger - maybe like St Boniface it is in the future, and you need to discover it anew.

THE AFTERNOON: SOME CONCRETE EXAMPLES AND SOME PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

Very random, 12 examples of evangelisation that I have been involved in or come across:

1. [Night Fever](#): inviting people into the beauty of a city centre church on a Friday or Saturday evening, prayer, music, confessions, conversation, no pressure
2. [The Alpha Course](#): warm welcome, a talk/film, group discussion, presentation of the kerygma, ecumenical but done in a Catholic context. Cf. [Sycamore](#) which has a wider scope and involves evangelisation, ongoing formation and catechesis.
3. [Genesis Mission](#) (Plymouth Diocese); training missionary disciples, how to live and share the faith in your personal life, from discipleship to mission
4. World Youth Days, and pilgrimages in general: travel, friendship, fun, faith, witness, conversions, examples, especially Lourdes.
5. Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, Waterford and Lismore: sitting in the market square outside his Cathedral once a week with a sign and two chairs saying he is happy to chat or pray with anyone, cf. Lucy in the Snoopy cartoons with her psychiatrist's stall
6. The Legion of Mary: mission, formation, door knocking, prayer, conversation. The largest missionary movement in the world?
7. Theology on Tap: advertise a talk that is open to everyone, but do it not in the church hall but in the local pub or café, going out to where people are, so they feel less threatened by unfamiliar surroundings
8. Plymouth Street Evangelisation: an ecumenical initiative, using a religious survey to ask people questions and get them into discussion about faith, cf. [St Paul's Evangelisation](#) movement in the States.
9. Spirit in the City: a week-long mission in the centre of London, with two public processions in the evenings, one Eucharistic and the other Marian: the public witness to faith, joy, prayer cards, invitations, conversations
10. Local media: using local opportunities, local radio, local newspapers, offering to write articles or get involved - they are open to stories, cf. social media
11. Free Book Distribution: a UK philanthropist paid for 100,000 copies of [Rediscover Jesus](#) by Matthew Kelly to be distributed around parishes in the UK for Christmas a few years ago, a great introductory book for parishioners to give to their friends

12. [Sion Parish Missions](#): old-style mission, invitations, week-long events, homilies, confessions, door-knocking, cf. the Redemptorist missions, cf. the disbanded Catholic Missionary Society; cf. John Pridmore on mission.

Other random ideas: the Mercy Bus that went around northern Dioceses; NET Ministries for parishes and young people; Focus Missionaries for universities; etc

What lessons can we learn from these projects? What threads run through them all?

- You need faith, zeal
- They are not centred on the priest but on the laity. And yes they usually need a priest who will be supportive, encouraging, but not doing all the work.
- The need for a core committed group, even very small - 2 or 3 people, friendship, commitment, praying together, trusting, enjoying being together
- The need for formation: some formation for the team, in faith, in prayer, in evangelisation. Cf. Jesus goes up the mountain with the 12 before he sends them out; cf. St Peter's house in Capernaum, the first mission centre; cf. the Legion of Mary and the Young Christian Workers, always forming the group before sending them out, and then bringing them back to the group
- Discernment: not just acting or reacting but discerning, listening. What is really needed in this situation, what is God saying, what is his will, what gifts do we have, what are the local needs in the concrete? Don't assume it is just to fill the pews. The image of Pentecost: waiting, discerning, listening. Cf. the audit that an SVP does before it starts working, to make sure it understands the needs of local people; cf. the YCW reviewing the local situation, the needs of their peers/
- The feedback effect: if evangelisation is started in some way, then this involves inviting people back to the parish, to the community. But what are you inviting them back to? It makes us examine our wider community life and ask if this is a community, a church, that people will want to visit, known, join. It calls us to renewal, to be more faithfully the church we are called to be. Remember Francis of Assisi re-built the physical church of San Damiano before he went to evangelise the world. Going out involves a feedback effect, a circular reflection on who we are.
- Another feedback effect: even if just a few people are involved in your project, it will touch the whole community if you talk about it, ask everyone to pray for it, share what is happening, help everyone to take ownership and feel excited and interested. It makes everyone more aware of evangelisation even if they are not involved directly
- Building relationships: all these projects involve relationships, trust, openness, discussion, welcome, invitation - not just lecturing, delivering information, learning. We need to meet people where they are and use their language, as well as hoping them to offer a way forward into something deeper, richer.
- Start small: you can't do everything. It's OK just to do one thing, to focus our energies - you can't do everything.
- Have a plan, and do it as well as you can: it may not be perfect, but do it well, well-planned, well-resourced, professional, not half-baked or shoddy.
- Courage is always needed, bravery, to start a new project: the fear of failure, the fear of our own inadequacies; but risk and courage are essential, "the perfect is the enemy of the good" (don't be so paralysed by the ideals that you never do the basic simple things you can do)
- Failure is common (apparent failure). If you have discerned carefully, then God will bless this work somehow. Don't be discouraged. Leave the fruits with God. On the one hand, persevere and trust in the Lord; on the other hand, we need to be realistic and adjust based on experience, and "measure what matters" - see where the fruits are and try to build on that. Or try something new!