

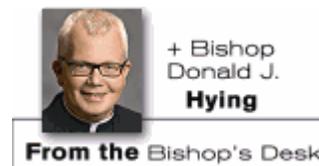
The love of God compels us to evangelize



Bishop Hying's Column

Thursday, Jun. 25, 2020 -- 12:00 AM

Note: Bishop Donald J. Hying is serializing his Pastoral Letter on the new Evangelization Initiative being launched in the Diocese of Madison. This is the third part of that letter. For the complete letter, go to the [Diocese of Madison](#) and [Catholic Herald](#) websites.



As I have considered this effort of evangelization, I return often to the story of Pentecost. It is a portion of our story that is perfect for this effort, and also the starting point for my entire ministry as a bishop.

I'd like to consider it again as we renew our efforts to give new life to our own local Church and call on our sisters and brothers to reclaim their birthright as baptized Christians.

Jesus and the Apostles

To set the stage, recall that Peter, Andrew, and the other Apostles and disciples have now followed Jesus around Judea, Samaria, and Galilee for three years. They have seen His mighty deeds and heard His teaching. Peter has professed that Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God.

They were given insight into what was to come -- His torture and death -- and told that He would rise again.⁷ And yet, when Jesus was actually taken, unjustly sentenced, tortured, and crucified, all but a few of them ran. And, aside from perhaps the Virgin Mary, all of them were left perplexed and even scared.⁸

Peter, the one to whom Jesus entrusted such responsibility and who was the first to profess Him as Messiah, denied Jesus and hid from being associated with Him.

Holy Spirit transforms them

The Apostles continue to be afraid and confused right up to the moment of Pentecost when the Church is born, the moment wherein the Holy Spirit of God descended upon the Apostles, the first followers of Christ, and through His anointing, transformed them from a band of scared followers, to be the very Body of Christ here on earth.

Their confusion gives way to clarity, their fear to inspiration. The Spirit of God came upon the Church and transformed these individuals in such a profound way that the entire world would literally never be the same.

When you think about it, many of the Apostles and disciples had already experienced the Risen Christ, but weren't sure what to do with that. Peter went back to fishing (what he knew). They were largely silent and afraid to share what they had experienced.

How I would love to have been a fly on the wall in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit arrived! What happened up there? Did the Apostles' hair catch on fire? Were those first followers of Jesus thrown against the wall from the force of the wind? We do not fully know.

What is clear is that this spiritual anointing fundamentally changed them. If they were afraid, confused, and silent about their experience of the risen Christ before, now they rush into the streets of Jerusalem, bold, clear, and eloquent in their witness to Jesus Christ crucified and risen as the new meaning of human history. They proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. This bold assertion is the definition of the word "kerygma", the centerpiece of our faith.

We are much like the disciples

How much is this like us and so many of our family members and friends? We have experienced the Risen Christ on some level, but are not sure what to do with that. We go about our business, doing that which we know and that with which we are most comfortable. And we remain largely silent and afraid to share what we've experienced. It strikes me that we are so much like those first disciples of Christ. And what happens to them?

By remaining faithful to Christ, even in their fear, for nine days they pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus has instructed them. How could they possibly have known what to expect? When the Holy Spirit descended upon them in wind and flame, this experience changed everything.

The Apostles immediately spread throughout the world and take on the pagan culture with the absolute confidence that if they share their faith and speak the Good News, that it will have its effect. They do not remain huddled together, but immediately go out.

The Acts of the Apostles details Peter's preaching to the crowds on Pentecost. And Scripture tells us that, when the crowds heard his strong message, "they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do?'" Peter says to them, "Repent and be baptized."⁹ He promises that if they do, they will receive the Holy Spirit as well. And indeed, that promise is fulfilled through the Church's sacraments of initiation until today. The Church is born and sustained in the explosive power of the Holy Spirit!

Right there is the whole inspiration, definition, and expansion of the Church's mission -- which is precisely what evangelization is. I've said before that people are often scared by the word "evangelization," but it is very simply rooted in the Greek and Latin for "the Gospel" --

evangelion or *evangelium*, or "the good news." Evangelization is, "good-news-ization," telling the good news to others about the richness of our relationship with Christ and the saving and merciful nature of His coming.

If you think about it, if those first disciples had not followed God's plan and gone out, if they had simply rejoiced in knowing they were loved and saved, and left it there, neither you nor I would know Christ. We would not have received this good news ourselves.

Sharing the gift we received

If we are truly to be disciples then, we have no option but to do the same. Being a mediator, a missionary to others, is fundamental to our being disciples.

We have been given a treasure. It has taken over 2,000 years and has literally cost people their lives to deliver it, but we now have it. The thing about this gift, however, is that we can sit with it, and we can and should spend time considering how grateful we are for it -- offering our thanks to the Giver.

But if we only place it on a shelf or, worse, bury it, it will be taken from us. A fundamental tenet of Alcoholics Anonymous is that one can only maintain personal sobriety if one is busy helping someone else find theirs. So it is with faith. Faith shared is faith strengthened.

Why is this? What compels us to evangelize? Love. Love of Him who first loved us. Love of our neighbor. Love of ourselves as He loves us. When you think about it, if we truly valued the gift God has given us in loving us, redeeming us, and drawing us to Himself, the only appropriate response is to love, to thank, and to glorify Him (and this should always flow from and lead to the Eucharist).

The best and most perfect way to love God is to keep His Commandments¹⁰ and the last mission He gave His disciples was precisely to evangelize -- to make disciples.¹¹ To love our neighbors and to love ourselves perfectly, we should desire to work for the salvation of souls -- to bring others and ultimately ourselves into perfect union with God. The love of God compels us to evangelize.

We are disciples, we are evangelizers, and we are called to be missionaries to those around us out of love. We want every human being to know and love God, to experience salvation

Reflection question: Name two or three immediate people to whom God is calling us to be mediators and messengers of God's love, to serve as missionary disciples.

⁷Jn 14

⁸Jn 20:19

⁹Acts 2:36-38

¹⁰Jn 14-15

¹¹Mt 28:18-20
