

XXIV Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Praise be Jesus Christ. Now and Forever! As I begin my homily today, let me ask you a question: Why does the Catholic Church exist? Why does Holy Trinity, this our parish, exist? Well, I am sure that some of the ideas and/or thoughts that come to mind are: to take care of the poor, to administer the sacraments, to build up community, to worship God, to promote social justice, to educate in Christians values, and so on. All these ideas and thoughts are correct. But what if I tell you that the Church, that Holy Trinity Parish exists essentially to evangelize.

What? Really? What is that? Isn't that knocking doors with a bible in hand? Is that even a Catholic thing?

The answer is yes. The Church exists – Holy Trinity Parish exists – to evangelize, and yes, it is a very Catholic thing. In fact, this teaching is not something new, but the core missionary mandate of Jesus Christ to his disciples before his glorious ascension into heaven: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

In 1975 Blessed Pope Paul VI, issued a magisterial document called, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” (“*Evangelization in the Modern World*”). This document says that “the church exists to evangelize, that is, to proclaim Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit so that people in our times will open their hearts to him and find in the Lord and in his church salvation from their sins and the path to authentic holiness. This mission is directed toward those who have not yet heard the Good News of the Gospel, but [...specially...] directed toward those who no longer practice their faith.”

Evangelization was also central to the papacy of St. John Paul II. He called, actually, for a “new evangelization,” which is not new in content, but new “in its ardor, methods and expression.” He reaffirmed the church’s mission to proclaim the Gospel to those who have never heard it but also stressed the obligation of the church to evangelize those whose faith had grown cold and to re-evangelize nations, where formerly the faith was strong but now is fading.

In the same way, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized that New Evangelization is not just a program but rather an opening of the heart. This, therefore, involves us being agents of the Holy Spirit in helping people have a profound experience of Jesus and his love, a love that opens them to the Word of God, the sacraments, to virtuous living and ultimately to their vocation to holiness.

And of course, New Evangelization is clearly central to the pontificate of Pope Francis. In “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), he speaks of the urgency of this mission and calls each of us and our parishes and church institutions to “a missionary-discipleship conversion.”

But, why New Evangelization? Because it is the heart of what Jesus came to do, so that we could know God. As the first disciples, empowered by our baptism, we are invited to be the hands, the feet, and the heart of Christ; we are invited to continue sharing the Good News of the Gospel down through the ages. We need to recapture catechesis from structure, organization, and dogmatic formulations to connectedness with Jesus, because he is the only one who can bring us to the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit. I think we have done a good job in bringing the Gospel to all parts of the world. However, we must also recognize that we are living in a new age, one characterized by the rapid rise in numbers of those who profess no religious identity, those

who are formal members of faith communities but do not practice their faith, and those who have some connection to their faith, but one that has stopped growing. So, even though a good number of people may identify themselves as Catholic, primarily because they've received the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, and have taken their first Communion; and also, perhaps because they go to Mass regularly, but they do not have an interior, lived relationship with Christ. This is the reason of the New Evangelization.

As you may remember, in the spring, this initiative was presented to you, even before I got here. And now, after months of preparation work, we are ready to implement it here in our parish.

In today's Gospel Jesus asks a question. Who do people say I am? Who do you say I am? Brothers and sisters, the only possible way that we can answer that question is knowing Jesus – who is not just an idea or thought, a philosophy of life – but a living person. And for that reason, Holy Trinity exists. We exist to help you to know Jesus personally. But how do we do that?

As with our stewardship way of parish life that we have implemented, and will continue using, the new evangelization, which once again, is not new in content (same Gospel), but new in its ardor, methods and expression, this new addition to our parish life, will help us to revive and fortify our faith in God; it will help us to fulfill our parish purpose, that is, to proclaim the Gospel so that all will be one in Christ for the glory of God. The new evangelization together with stewardship will be our ways of forming missionary disciples committed to hospitality, prayer, formation, and service.

So as part of this new way of parish life, these are some concrete steps that we are taking here in our parish:

1. Trainings for our catechists, parish and school staff, and ministry leaders about new evangelization.
2. We have started a pilot opportunity called “Alpha,” which is a series of sessions, which focus is exploring life, faith, and meaning. In the coming winter, we will open this opportunity for all the community. But it is important to let you know that this is just one of the programs and activities that we have in mind for the future.
3. We have also the small Christian communities, which are opportunities to connect with other members of our parish as we grow together knowing Jesus.
4. We have also hired two new full-time staff members: Cynthia Mulcaire, who is already working as our Director of Missionary Discipleship and New Evangelization (PreK to 6th grade and adults) and Hannah Terbrack, who is already working as our director of Missionary Discipleship and New Evangelization (7th to 12th grades and young adult).
5. I know we cannot present everything at once. So, on the evening of October 11, we will have a session to which everybody is invited, in which we will present in more detail this project.

So, as we continue working and praying for the purification of the Church, we must also continue our mission as a parish family with this new way of parish life. Let us ask to God in this Holy Mass that all that we do may be means and opportunities to fulfill our mission: to know his Son Jesus personally. Remember what the same Jesus asks us today: “who do you say I am?” Are you ready to answer this question? If not, come and join us in this new way of parish life called new evangelization. You won’t regret it. Praise be Jesus Christ. Now and Forever!