

Homily Title: Habits of an Effective Evangelizer

Use: First Sunday of Lent B

Introductory note: The Gospel today presents Christ as an evangelizer. He is summoning people the kingdom of God. It is instructive to see in this Gospel a four-fold process of evangelization: Preparation, Partnership, Promptness, and Prescription. These are developed in the outline below. The outline follows the text of the gospel line by line.

I. PREPARATION

- A. ***The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.***
- B. It is a remarkable thing to consider that Jesus spent 30 years getting ready for his public ministry! Perhaps as God he could have chosen to bypass all of this and simply appear on the earth as a full-grown man to begin his ministry. Nevertheless, he chose to experience our life quite substantially before he preached. Clearly, he thought it important to draw from life experiences in his preaching and ministry. We who would evangelize was also draw from our life experiences. When we summon people to Christ and to the kingdom we should draw on our own personal experience. Testimony must be personal. We are to be firsthand witnesses of the kingdom of God. We ought to be able to tell our story of personal conversion, of trials and victories, of triumph over sin, of our experience of God's mercy and grace. It's not enough to quote someone else, we have to tell our own story! Our own life history is an essential ingredient of our testimony to others. What is your life story? Can you tell others of how God is worked in your life in a convincing and joyful manner? And we shouldn't sugarcoat it, we should tell the whole story. Surely there may be some personal matters that are best left between us and God, but, as a general rule, be honest to others about how God has worked in your life and the difficulties and sins you have overcome by his grace. Testimony should be joyful as well as humble. There is an old gospel song which says it well: "I'm not what I want to be, but I'm not what I used to be, a wonderful change has come over me!"
- C. In this text from today's gospel Jesus goes out into the desert, led there by the Spirit. There he is tempted but overcomes! His life was not easy, but Angels ministered to him! Perhaps too, we have a similar story. We've been through some desert. In our own life, we've been tempted, sometimes we fell, but many times we've triumphed and all along the way God has blessed us and Angels and ministered to us. What is your story, what is your testimony? All of these experiences are important preparations were evangelizing. We have a story to tell our loved ones and fallen away family members, our coworkers and neighbors. Please see your own life as an important foundation in preparation for the task of evangelization.
- D. Note also, some of the other a gospel accounts indicate that Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert. If you are trying to bring back a family members or others to the church have you ever thought of doing a little fasting? It might help them and it might help you too.

II. PARTNERSHIP

- A. ***After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God***
- B. Notice that Jesus built upon the work of John the Baptist. It was God's will that John should go before Christ in the spirit and power of Elijah, preparing the people for the coming Messiah. You and I who evangelize now do not start from scratch. We build on the work of those who gone before us. We have a marvelous Tradition of Faith. It is possible for us to learn well also from the work of others. There are wonderful resources available today such as books and recordings and also E.W T. N., Catholic.com, and many other websites. While it is true that Jesus did not need intellectual or personal formation, we do! Build on the work of others,. Though Jesus did not have to build on John the Baptist work, he chose to and in so doing has given us an example.
- C. Note too, we never approach anyone cold. God the Holy Spirit has already gone before us to prepare the way! Thus, when we preach teach or evangelize God has already gone before us to prepare. We have partnered with the Holy Spirit who alone can cause true and lasting conversion. It is not our eloquence or personal charm that ultimately brings conversion it is God.

III. PROMPTNESS

A. ***This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.***

B. Notice the urgency and Jesus proclamation! *This* is the time...God's kingdom is at hand. There's nothing vague or merely suggestive about Jesus' call. He is not saying merely, "You ought to think about choosing God one of these days." Rather, he is saying, "the kingdom of God is now before you, it's time to make a decision!" We too should not lack a sense of urgency in what we announce. When someone is invited to God's kingdom by us or anyone else it is a decisive moment. Tomorrow is not promised. We need not be strident or harsh or nagging but our loved ones who've fallen away from the practice of the faith, other family and friends should hear some urgency in our voice. It is not an insignificant matter if they are away from the sacraments, away from prayer, failing to keep holy the Sabbath or just lukewarm. Our invitation should be specific and time-based, "Come with me to confession and Mass this weekend." or "Call Father Smith today, here's his number." we should be zealous and earnest for the conversion of our loved ones and friends if they are not practicing the faith. Though it is surely not wise to appear panicky, an urgency and zeal should be perceivable in us. No one follows an uncertain trumpet. Our call should be clear: "this is the time... God is at hand.

IV. PRESCRIPTION

A. ***Repent, and believe in the gospel***

B. Notice the balance in this called it Jesus makes. First he calls us to face the fact of our sin. Then, he balances this with encouragement to believe the gospel, the good news that God loves us and can set us free from our sins. So, here's the prescription: "Repent and believe in the good news!" Simply put, we have to stop minimizing and soft-pedaling the reality of sin in our lives. We have to call it what it is: sin! There are things that we are doing that we have no business doing. There are attitudes that we have which are sinful and wrong. Sin causes great harm in our lives and the lives of others. The Greek word which is translated here as "repent" is *Metanoia*. Literally, this word means "to come to a new mind." Therefore, the Lord is inviting us to receive a new mind from him. This new mind will allow us to see things differently and to understand more as God does. With this new mind, we will stop calling good what God calls a bad, stop being rebellious in our thinking and behavior. So, the Lord is directing us to come to a new mind. With this new mind we can begin to accept the good news that God can totally transform our lives and enable us to keep the Commandments, to love even our enemies and to see our lives radically changed. This is very good news!

C. For us who would evangelize, there is here a prescription. Merely inviting people with pleasant slogans is not enough. The Church is more than a pleasant community where everyone smiles, it is also a hospital where we confront the sober reality that we are sinners very much in need of God's mercy. We should not be afraid to speak to people honestly and forthrightly about the reality of sin. Sin is very serious and ultimately deadly. We, and those to whom we speak are desperately in need of a Savior. It is not wrong to speak to our family and loved ones about concerns that they are living apart from God and or the life of the Church. It is a mortal sin to miss mass on Sunday, and we may have concerns about other important moral issues in their lives. Jesus loves us enough to tell us that we have to repent. If we speak to our loved ones with love it is possible for us to speak about the reality of sin and that it is a very serious matter not to be lightly regarded. But as we share our concern about sin, we also have good news that there is a solution to our struggle with sin. The Lord Jesus Christ can completely transform us! This is where we have to have a personal witness. We have to be able to say that through our own reception of the sacraments, reading of Scripture, and daily prayer we have experienced personally the good news of the Lord hand and will set us free. If you have been faithful to God, you have a story to tell of increasing freedom over sin, greater love for others and real transformation. Tell your story! Sin is awful, but God is good, very good!