

## Becoming an Evangelizing Disciple

(Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 2017)

A few weeks ago, we announced changes to our Sunday morning schedule, which will take effect next weekend, when we return upstairs to our newly restored church. In addition to Fr. Tom's letter, which we hope you've had a chance to read, we have decided to offer a series of brief reflections over four consecutive Sundays, in which we go a little deeper into what we hope to achieve by the upcoming changes.

The past three weeks, we talked about the way we observe Sunday as the Lord's Day, about how we participate in worship, especially the Sunday Mass, and the call to live as intentional disciples. We conclude the series with a look at one of the results of fruitful discipleship: evangelistic outreach.

The summons to evangelize comes to us directly from the mouth of the Lord Jesus, who promised to make His Apostles "fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). He taught and formed them, and they experienced the transforming power of His love. Only after having become His disciples themselves, and witnesses of His death and Resurrection, were they ready to "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). So it is for us: first, we need to be evangelized. We need to be transformed by the encounter with our Savior, to grow in relationship with Him, and to deepen our commitment to following Him as His disciples. Then, we can participate in the mission to proclaim the Gospel, a mission that is ours by virtue of our Baptism into Christ.

This Gospel proclamation is made first and foremost through the example of our lives. When we live as intentional disciples committed to ongoing conversion and growth in holiness; when we allow ourselves to experience the joy of being redeemed and transformed by Christ – our freedom and joy become attractive to others. They will want to know what it is that makes us different, how we have found what they, too, are looking for. Then we have the opportunity to share what the Lord has done in our life, and to invite them to experience it as well. It is important for us to be able to recognize and take advantage of those opportunities when they arise.

Our evangelizing activity needs to be natural and authentic, flowing from our experience and motivated by real love for our neighbors. Effective evangelization most often happens in the context of a true friendship where there can be deep sharing in an atmosphere of trust. For an intentional disciple, who prioritizes their

relationship with God and sees the connection between faith and life, this kind of sharing comes naturally. When it comes to the people we care about (and Jesus reminds us that everyone is our neighbor! (cf. Luke 10:25-37)), if we desire their ultimate good – the eternal life of heaven – and we believe that the way to attain it is through faith in Jesus the Savior, then why would we withhold the “words of everlasting life” (Jn 6:68) from them? We need to pray for the confidence and the courage to overcome our fears of being rejected or ridiculed, so that we can embrace our role in the evangelistic mission of Jesus and His Church.

Our hope is that the changes we are making to our Sunday schedule will help us to become evangelizing disciples. By prioritizing our observance of the Lord’s Day, entering into communal worship in the Sunday Mass, and taking steps to strengthen our discipleship, we will become more confident and effective at proclaiming the Gospel to the world.

Next week, we return upstairs to our beautifully restored church, and we begin our new Sunday morning schedule. May this truly be a blessed time of new beginnings for our parish family.