

Evangelisation

ENCOUNTER • DISCIPLESHIP • MISSION

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION FOR ALL CATHOLICS

1. In this document, we will examine evangelisation in our Catholic Tradition. We will do so by reflecting on two key Gospel texts related to the Lord's evangelising work. From this, we draw some pastoral observations.

Let us consider John 4:5-30 – the Samaritan woman at the well. Let us also consider concurrently Luke 24:13-35 – the Emmaus disciples.

2. When we consider the Scriptures, let us also keep in mind the important articulation of Catholic evangelisation from Pope St Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) 6-16. In these important paragraphs from this kind of magna carta on evangelisation in the modern world, St Paul VI orients us “From Christ the Evangeliser to the Evangelising Church”.
3. Upon reflection on these texts and in the light of our growing Catholic teaching on evangelisation, at least three fundamentals of Catholic evangelisation on becoming “fishers of people” (Mark 1:17) could be made.



Encounter

The first fundamental is about encountering Jesus.

4. What is evangelisation? From a biblical point of view, Jesus commissions us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Regarding a more popular definition, the great saints of evangelisation could say something like “Making Jesus known and loved”. Certainly, St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) – the great French Carmelite saint who died at an early age of tuberculosis and never left her convent yet remains a great evangelist – would say this.
5. We can see this in the Samaritan woman. She encountered Jesus in a most extraordinarily mysterious way. Without being able to articulate it completely, she simply returned to the village and told everyone, “He told me everything I have ever done” (John 4:29). The Emmaus disciples, when they encountered Jesus, said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us as he opened the Scriptures to us” (Luke 24:32).
6. Clearly, the first fundamental of evangelisation is an extraordinarily deep and profound personal experience of God through, with and in Jesus Christ. We see in both those texts that Jesus takes the initiative and invites them to this personal encounter. He is the first evangeliser, in particular in sharing the *kerygma*. The *kerygma*, according to Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* (2019) 112-133 and in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) 163, is “the first and fundamental proclamation of the Good News”. The content of the *kerygma* is summarised by Pope Francis as: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 164).
7. The *kerygma* is this initial moment of grace in encountering the life and death of Jesus within us. Through the power and action of the Holy Spirit, this Good News proclaimed is very strongly linked to the catechesis, teaching and reception of sacraments that follow it. The *kerygma* and catechesis are not separated from each other; they go together to form evangelisation. The *kerygma* leads to catechesis, but the catechesis must also move towards the *kerygma*. We cannot have one without the other. They are distinct, but they are never separate.
8. It is the Church, herself, that evangelises as the presence of Christ in the world today. Evangelisation is inseparable from Christ. It is interesting to note that the Samaritan woman and her encounter with Jesus happens at Jacob’s Well, which becomes a kind of church. It is here that she comes to experience Christ and draws others to this experience at this place. The Emmaus disciples, alternatively, experience this when they share a special meal with Jesus. The key words used here are take, bless, break and give. They are, of course, words inseparably linked with the Eucharist. Therefore, evangelisation and the Church are inseparable.
9. Perhaps it is Pope Benedict XVI that best expressed, in this golden age of magisterial teaching on evangelisation, the heart of what encountering Jesus means. In a type of summary on Christian life, Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) 1 explains “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives a new horizon and decisive direction”.

Those who have opened their hearts to God’s love, heard his voice and received his light cannot keep this gift to themselves

Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (2013) 37



Discipleship

The second fundamental is about becoming disciples. How does Jesus evangelise? How does Jesus make disciples?

10. With the Samaritan woman, Jesus engages patiently with her in a very gradual, merciful dialogue that evangelises. On a very hot day at a drinking well, he simply asks the woman to “give me a drink”. It opens up the conversation. Jesus himself takes the initiative here. He invites her to consider the possibility of “living water” (John 4:10). This takes time; she does not quite understand what this means. She has a very physical understanding of the water. Jesus gives it a spiritual understanding of a spring welling up deep within her.
11. With the Emmaus disciples, again, we find Jesus gradually initiating a dialogue with them to draw them into the deeper mysteries of faith. After scolding them for being “so slow” (Luke 24:25), he then patiently “explained and opened the Scripture to us...and we recognised Him in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:32-35). It is gradual. It is patient. He walks with them. In walking with them, he explains the mysteries of the faith. It is a synodal experience.
12. With both the Samaritan woman and the Emmaus disciples, there is a common call to conversion. They are to repent and believe in the Good News. They are to do a 180-degree turn towards a life looked at from the point of view of God’s merciful love and not their own. There is a movement from little or partial faith to a complete faith. In a sense, we could say even today that there is a movement from a type of cultural faith to a full appropriation of the Catholic mysteries of faith.
13. All of this, of course, as we examine Jesus, as the Master evangelist, is something that is **proposed**, but never **imposed** on anyone. This is stressed by St Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 80 and by every Pope ever since as a hallmark characteristic of Catholic evangelisation.
14. There is a subtlety in Jesus the evangelist. It is invitational. Jesus never proselytises or forces people to believe in him. He evokes very deep questions in them. What he says leaves a deep impression on them. What we say, too, of our faith can be used mightily by the Holy Spirit to bring people to faith. Also, it is not only what we say but our lifestyle that should evoke questions in others. These stirrings of wonder can also be evoked by beauty in its many forms: creation, music, poetry, art, even architecture. For example, look at the spires of a cathedral; they are fingers pointing to heaven. The stirrings of our heart, wonder of beauty or the impression of those we encounter can all lead us to Jesus.
15. If we want to imitate Jesus as evangelists, we must realise that the world today wants witnesses more than teachers. Reverting to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, St Paul VI in 41 says: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”
16. Hence the fascination with the saints. They are our great witnesses of faith. Particularly, for instance, Mary and St Joseph. Very little is said by them in the Gospels. In St Joseph’s case, nothing is spoken by him directly. From what we learn of them, we witness the presence of Christ in their lives by their actions. They become great evangelisers and intercessors for us.

Evangelisation in our time will only take place as the result of contagious joy

Pope Francis, Message for World Youth Day (2014)

Mission

The third fundamental calls us all to the work of evangelisation that is missionary, Marian and has a synodal style.

17. In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, once she has encountered Christ and becomes a disciple, she immediately goes out in a missionary style. She cannot stay still. She runs back to where she comes from to tell people about Christ. She says to them “come and see” (John 4:29). In her haste, she leaves behind her water jar, the very reason she went to the well in the first place (John 4:28). Later on, the villagers come to Jesus and the disciples and say it is not just the woman’s testimony that draws them to an encounter with Jesus, but their own investigations. They say, “We know that he is truly the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). They testify to Jesus as Lord and Saviour.
18. All this happens as a synodal movement from Jacob’s Well to the city and back again. They are walking together. The Samaritan woman becomes a real “Mary figure”. We recall how Mary herself hastened to affirm in faith her cousin Elizabeth at the Visitation. This is exactly what the Samaritan woman does. She is full of tenderness, full of the spirit, full of missionary zeal, full of joy.
19. The Emmaus disciples similarly find themselves in a vigorous missionary mode. As soon as Jesus “vanished from their sight” (Luke 24:31), “that same hour...they returned to Jerusalem” (v. 33). They go back to the very place they were running from. Beforehand, they became hopeless and were dragging each other down. After this saving encounter with Jesus the evangeliser, they make a complete 180-degree turn and go back to Calvary refreshed and renewed, and become some of the first witnesses to the Resurrection. When they go back to the Apostles, they say “The Lord has truly Risen indeed” (v. 34).



20. Here we find an ancient definition of what Christians are – missionary disciples of the Resurrection. Christians are animated by the Holy Spirit – “The Lord and giver of life” – in all their missionary activities. Pope Francis states “there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 280).
21. Pope Benedict XVI, in *Deus Caritas Est* 25, helpfully articulates the Church’s long understanding of itself when he says, “This missionary impulse has a threefold responsibility”.
22. Firstly, it is to proclaim the Word of God to the whole world. This is where the words *kerygma* and martyrdom originate.
23. Secondly, we are to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as the source and summit of all missionary life. This impulse is often called “liturgy”. Evangelisation and liturgy are profoundly linked.
24. Thirdly, and very importantly, our missionary endeavour propels us on to be missionaries of charity to others, especially those who are lost, lonely or least. Our movement out into the peripheries to find those needing the caress and tenderness of Christ – both physically and spiritually – is part of what we call the *diakonia*. This is expressed normally in our dioceses, local parishes, schools and ecclesial communities.
25. These threefold responsibilities are demonstrated in a mode which is best described as a Marian style of evangelisation. This is particularly stressed by Pope Francis. A Marian style proposes with tender mercy Christ among us and holding the world close, especially to those on the peripheries. It avoids all politicisations and polarisations, as these impose themselves on the Church and in the world.
26. Finally, it is a synodal and Petrine style of evangelisation. Walking with Jesus, we are led by the Holy Spirit. Here, in this style of evangelisation, listening becomes more important than merely hearing. The Spirit is the “principal agent” of evangelisation – sending us out to proclaim the Gospel, and working in the hearts of men and women, prompting a response of faith and conversion in them. We are to pray without ceasing and let ourselves be guided by the Spirit as the “decisive inspirer” of all our attempts to evangelise others (see *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75). We participate in the mission of Jesus to transform all into the life of the Kingdom of God until Jesus comes again. This is done in the “boat” of Peter. It is led by the successor of Peter, our Pope. Evangelisation is profoundly Petrine. We are never lone rangers. We always go together as Church led by Jesus, particularly expressed as the successor of St Peter, our Pope. Evangelisation is also profoundly Marian – we see Mary as the mother and star of all our missionary activity.

It is not therefore a matter of inventing a "new programme". The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment... This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium

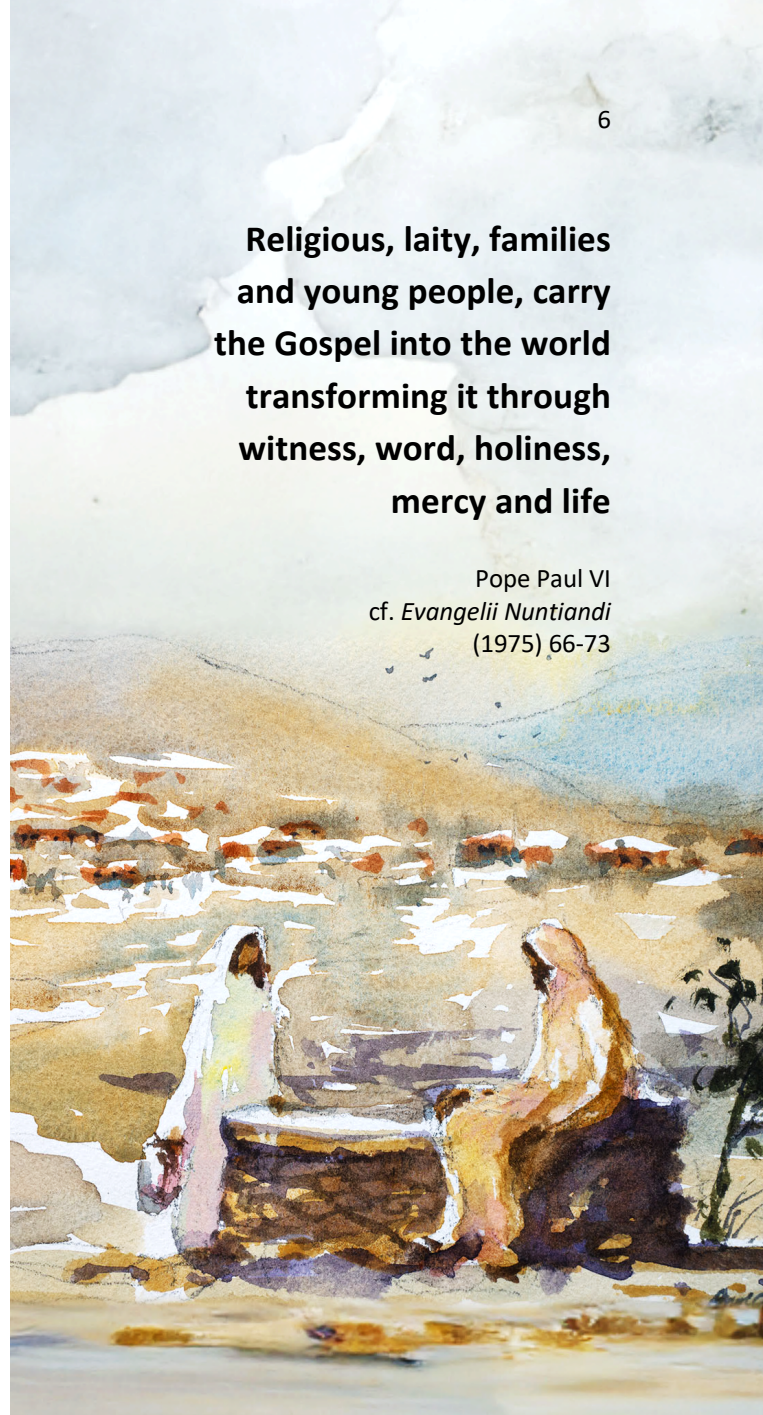
*All the Church
All the Gospel
All the World
All the Time*

27. In a summary comment of evangelisation, the Catholic Church could well focus on the great contribution of Pope St John Paul II.
28. Certainly, his enormous body of teaching helps us to understand evangelisation. Perhaps even more so, his extraordinary evangelising apostolic journeys around the world, unmatched by any other Pope, should indicate to us how he saw himself as the chief evangelist of the Catholic Church in a very global-pilgrim way.
29. St John Paul II spoke much of the new evangelisation, of the uncommitted, the converted and diverted (those who have lost their faith). The evangelisation of entire cultures and all expression of human endeavour was also to be included. This moves towards what Pope Francis calls today “integral ecology”.
30. There is an expression that could summarise the contribution of St John Paul II concerning evangelisation in general. It pertains to the fact that all the Church, and all the baptised, are to preach all the Gospel, including all Scripture and Tradition, to all the world. We are a missionary people entering into the cultural worlds of our society and we do this all the time until Jesus comes again.

In summary, all the Church, to preach all the Gospel, to all the world, all the time.

**Religious, laity, families
and young people, carry
the Gospel into the world
transforming it through
witness, word, holiness,
mercy and life**

Pope Paul VI
cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*
(1975) 66-73



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