

**MAY 10**

Not long ago someone shared with me that the word “evangelization” is awkward, a bit threatening, and more associated with how our Protestant brothers and sisters spread Christianity. The person was a bit taken back when I responded with, “and that’s exactly why I like the word – ‘evangelization.” If the word itself shakes us a bit and challenges us beyond the comfort levels of our method, that’s what we need if the Church is to grow. Perhaps, for too long we’ve chosen words, methods, approaches, and programs that have kept us safe and secure. Perhaps, for too long we’ve chosen methods that are comfortable and within the parameters of what we have deemed OK. Whether we like it or not the creativity of which we spoke last time should, like the word “evangelization,” cause us some discomfort in what may be ahead. Whether we like it or not the creativity of which we spoke last time, and the word, “evangelization,” should cause us to take a good look at how our Protestant brothers and sisters are spreading Christianity. (Be reminded that the vast majority of non-Catholic mega churches are made up of formed Catholics, drawing large numbers of youth, and have an enthusiasm about faith in Jesus that many of our places lack.) This is why we need a word and concept that will, in fact, make us nervous. This is no time for a watered-down method, approach or word that keeps us comfortable, and in the end non-effective. While evangelization may be easier for some than others, the solution is not to water it down! The solution is in the awareness that each of us will be called to say or do something. The level or degree to which each of us goes will be different and make take time to evolve, but lowering the bar, changing the words, softening the expectation can not be part of the plan. The word “evangelization” may serve to remind us that non-Catholics have much to learn from us, and we as Catholics have much to learn from them. How to evangelize may just be one of those lessons. A serious dialogue between us and them may produce a fruit that will benefit everyone.

**APRIL 26**

To be evangelistic is to be creative. Creativity as I said before will be a fun challenge to so many, and a source of consternation for others. What is this creativity of which we speak? One might describe it as the ability to “go outside,” namely, to “go outside” of the structures that make us so comfortable or safe. But why “go outside?” Namely, because that is where we will find that many of our brothers and sisters searching for God, seeking healing and reconciliation, hopefully, discovering a reason or way to renew their Catholic faith. Are we willing to “go outside” the walls of our churches and sanctuaries to find them? Are we willing to “go outside” the programs we’ve run for the past years to create new avenues of return? Are we willing to “go outside” the same way of doing things so that fresh and vibrant methods may be discovered? Are we willing to “go outside” and create that which at this time doesn’t even exist? Are we willing to “go outside” of our own personal desires, wants, stubbornness or resistance, so that I open myself to my own personal evangelization experience? Are we willing to “go outside” just our own Catholic way of doing things, and learn from our non-Catholic or non-Christian brothers and sisters, so that we might better reach out to others as, perhaps, they do? Are we willing to “go outside” of our own fear and trust those anointed by God’s Spirit as they lead us into a new a creative model of Church? Evangelization asks for a “yes” to each of the above. And creativity is defined in that way. Saying “yes” and being creative will be demanding, but essential to effective evangelization. Let creativity help us risk, surrender, dream, and dare so that our Church may grow and that we, as Catholics, regain the respect, dignity, and power to help others for which we’ve historically been known to own. In a way, we can say that creativity is our faith, is critical to the Church, let us be proud to profess it through Christ our Lord.

I hope your Holy Week and Easter celebration was full of hope, promise, and peace. In his homily for this year's Chrism Mass, Bishop Murry referred to the official opening of the Office of Evangelization on Pentecost, May 19. While this new office will bring to close the Office of Parish Planning, details of parish planning will be administered by the new Office of Evangelization. Two key points that Bishop Murry and others have shared with respect to evangelization are: (1) every person in the parish, every Catholic shares in the responsibility and opportunity to evangelize in some way - even if it's just smiling and being nice! When Pope Francis was elected so many asked the question, "what must this new pope do to help the image of the Church?" The question frustrates me! A better question would be "what must EACH of us do to help the image of the Church?" This responsibility does not solely rest on the shoulders of your pastor, your DRE, your school principal, but it rests on the shoulders of each and every one of us. (2) Critical to new evangelization will be our understanding that being Catholic, following Jesus, *is not an event!* A growing number of Catholics, especially younger, "more busy" Catholics, show up occasionally and/or when there's a baptism, marriage or confirmation need. Just ask any pastor. They seem to think that weekly, daily prayer and participation in the faith community is not that important. *Au contraire, mes amis!* Being Catholic, following Jesus is discipleship. It's a life-style. Being more serious about daily, weekly, more active participation will be a big jump for many. Much will be happening after May 19, but in preparation for that day and the days to follow, we all need to take to heart these two critical aspects of evangelization if we are to be successful. Next time we'll wander down the road of how important creativity will be to further the cause of evangelization. This aspect will be a fun challenge to so many, and a source of consternation for others. Our history as a Church and the biblical direction of the Lord always seem to point to the future. Many choose to travel onward while some prefer to return to Egypt. Being creative and unafraid of change has been so important to our history and will be to evangelization.