

6

REFLECTIONS

MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

Rev. Robert J. Hater, Ph.D.

Embracing the New Evangelization

Pope Francis says, “in all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 119). In these words, he reminds us that we are all called to be missionary disciples.

Impelled by Vatican II, successive popes have emphasized this role for all Christians. In 1975, Pope Paul VI initiated a call to evangelize in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. He stressed that to evangelize means to follow Jesus, the greatest evangelizer. The heart of this evangelization is found in Jesus himself.

Then in 1979, Saint John Paul II, while in Mogila Poland, called for a “New Evangelization.” Later, he described this as new in “ardor, methods, and expression” (The Conference of Latin American Bishops, CELAM Conference, 1983). Pope Benedict XVI expanded on these words, comparing the new evangelization to the slow and steady growth of a seed into a mature plant.

Finally, Pope Francis stresses the new evangelization and missionary discipleship. He urges us to reach out to people living at the borders or fringes of society. This includes sensitivity to the poor, alienated, sick, dying, persecuted, and the those in need.

These popes put the challenge to proclaim the Good News of Jesus squarely on the shoulders of all the baptized. We are to evangelize with pride, enthusiasm, and zeal. Alluding to the new evangelization,



Pope Francis states, "... an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!" ... The Word of God is to flow "from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #10).

The new evangelization has three audiences. The **first** is directed to proclaiming the Gospel anew to regions of the world where the Gospel was never preached or, once preached, is no longer practiced. The **second** focuses on individuals, once instructed in the Catholic faith, who no longer practice it. The **third** includes pastoral activity directed to the faithful who are active in their faith and seek to grow into a deeper union with Christ.

We are encouraged to take to heart Pope Francis' call for joy and enthusiasm, as we search for new ways to share God's Word. This may require searching for new methods and expressions of the faith. Excellent books, pamphlets, and digital products exist today to help us in this effort. They present the faith in vibrant, interesting, and relevant ways. Our zeal and commitment to our Christian task helps others realize the richness of our faith.

QUESTION

**In our homes and as we go
about our work, how can we
be missionary disciples who
respond to the Church's call for
a "new evangelization?"**