

EVANGELIZATION from Pope Francis

Every Christian is called to evangelize. We who are privileged to be baptized as Roman Catholic have a profound responsibility to proclaim our faith. Many were raised that one's faith was private –just between you and God! The message that was never promulgated correctly until Vatican II i.e. that our faith was personal and by the radical identity of a personal God we are to proclaim it to the housetops! So to speak. We have never developed the proper skills to know how to proclaim our faith by sharing it gently and in a timely manner. Our faith is truly Christian and by its nature of it is nourished in the community.

Communities build from the movement of grace experienced by us in our personal prayer, liturgy of the Mass and the reception of the sacraments. The grace that deepens and flows from our spirit opens the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Our Baptism is the grounding point of grace that grows from the love we receive from God and the human love that radiates His Presence at every moment of our lives. Later when we receive Confirmation the grace of Pentecost brings a renewal of the Spirit – it is a Baptism of the Spirit that opens the heart more fully to receive the love God initiated in our original Baptism. This opens an enthusiasm and abundant joy as we openly and dynamically receive the continual outpouring of the Holy Spirit who is alive in our consciousness as a person so deep and personal in His love that we think we might explode. If that hasn't happened then pray intently and continuously for His outpouring of grace.

This is what Pope Francis is referring to as authentic - that grace of the Holy Spirit breaks open the desire and personal fulfillment to proclaim ones' faith and evangelization is now in progress. Recall how the Father saw this young woman of thirteen or fourteen with a spirit of prayer and with the love experienced through her father she was totally open to the Fatherhood of God. There is a direct projection of relationship from our human father to the Fatherhood of God. All the human traits of trust, desire, hope, peace – the fruits of the Holy Spirit come to fruition from the human love that opens the heart to trust the Father above. When that relationship is broken or minimized so the affections of the heart are stunted – love experienced is the only source of the healing.

Because of the Father's love, he reveals to the world through the Annunciation that He has a Son. This is the first time humanity is aware of the Father's Son. The Father looking at suffering humanity decides he needs to do something more profound than what was revealed to the prophets – he sent an angel –Gabriel-to reveal to this lovely young woman who is betrothed to a fine holy young man named Joseph that she is chosen to be the mother of His beloved Son. How did she reveal this to her parents Joachim and Anne, what was there reaction? We know what Joseph experienced and how the Angel assisted him in his resolution. Be apprised that all this is happening to prepare us down the centuries to open this mystery to the world only when we've carried the mystery deeply in our hearts over considerable time and let it transform us, especially in gratitude to the Father who created us and was so deeply in love. The Father was so in love with each creature and so concerned for each one's salvation that he overlooked the failure and sins of humanity. Originally he sent the prophets but something more dynamic had to come so He sent His only beloved Son.

It is through the relationship with Jesus where daily we open our hearts to His love and receive the love of the Holy Spirit so that our faith challenges us to embrace the beauty and gift of our life daily resulting in a quality of witness. When a soul is on fire with the Holy Spirit their lives are transformed and they live a quality of holiness that witnesses a depth of faith that by their very lives they are evangelizing. Maybe not a word was spoken and need not be because they radiate such a presence that lives are aware there is something different and it becomes an attraction. So often when the difference is recognized and people ask “why are you different?” The answer needs to be direct and honest, such as “the presence of Jesus lives in me and that brings peace, joy and hope.

One who is alive in his/her faith exudes an energy of presence and profound joy. Life is taken in stride and no matter what the difficulties or blessings they are able to sustain an even type of balance in their daily response. They are less likely to react. There is a readiness to respond to any challenge because in their heart of hearts all glory is given to God. Those convicted to evangelize are open to all people and desire various types of encounters regardless of who individuals are or what values they hold. Skills of appropriate encounter must be learned and even tempered to be able to proclaim initially a proclamation of Jesus. The verbal skill needs to be carefully honed so as to draw the seeking heart to the true Person of Jesus. Learning the skills tempered with patience and love means moving out of our comfort zone. It is taking the experience of deep love with an attitude of inviting one into the “more” versus convincing them to move in a particular direction.