

DISCIPLES IN MISSION SERVE OTHERS IN LOVE



LENT ASKS US TO LOOK INTO OUR HEARTS. IT ISN'T ONLY CANDIDATES WHO WISH TO ENTER THE CHURCH WHO SHOULD LOOK INTO THEIR HEARTS. WE ALL SHOULD. OUR HEARTS, AFTER ALL, EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST JOY WHEN OUR IDEALS ARE HIGH AND OUR MOTIVATIONS PURE. WHAT KIND OF "SCRUTINY" IS GOD ASKING OF ME THIS LENT?

Expectations

Sometimes we are pleasantly surprised.

Although we expected the runaround, we didn't get it. Although we expected to stand in line for a long time, it didn't happen. Although we rushed someplace during our lunch hour, worried that the official we needed to see would be out, the official wasn't. When we were sure the salespeople would be least helpful, we were surprised: we were advised so well that we left the store knowing we got exactly what we wanted and needed.

Our needs have so often been slighted by people who put themselves first that we are surprised when this doesn't happen. We are pleasantly surprised when people actually take our needs into consideration—when they see our satisfaction as their mission.

Motivations

When it's so easy to be cynical about the motivations of other people, we believers, especially, need to understand our own. Either we are out to serve ourselves or we are out to serve another person in his or her true needs. Often it is easy for us, particularly in the name of evangelization, to stereotype someone who's right in front of us, rather than truly engaging that person and discovering what the Spirit of God may be doing in his or her heart.

The Church asks us to be very clear about our motivations, particularly in the light of our sometimes-checked history.

We evangelize not to increase our membership, not to prove we are right and others wrong, not to make ourselves look good, not to conquer and not to shame. These, and

other, similar, objectives, do not have the Gospel or the other person as the objective. They are all self-serving.

We evangelize in order to serve the other in love with God's Good News.

The U.S. bishops, when they drew up *Go and Make Disciples*, placed special emphasis on our motivation. In the light of how easily the motives for evangelization can be questioned, the bishops wanted to make sure that Catholics would operate out of unquestioned motivation. (See pp. 4-5.)

- The first motivation comes not from ourselves, but from Jesus Christ who, because of God's desire to bring everyone into his fullness, came to reach out to all people. We follow Christ's command.
- We evangelize so people can come to realize in a full and explicit way the tug of grace, which is part of every life. When even believers often find themselves resisting God, what about those who do not have the help of revelation, the sacraments, and God's teaching?
- We evangelize because God's word is wisdom and truth. Through it God would bring enlightenment to all, that we may know the purpose of our existence, the destiny to which we are called, and the path God gives us to follow.
- We evangelize because God calls all humans to union with his divine life.

● We evangelize because we know that Jesus is God's unique revelation. He is the One sent by God, who embodies grace and life.

● Most of all, we evangelize because of our love for other people and our desire to help them receive the priceless gift that God has given us: faith. Our experience of the love of Christ makes us want to share it.

Love is the Way

These motivations that the bishops explore can only be pure if we act out of true love for the other person. Love respects, listens, sympathizes and puts the other person first. It does not operate from power, nor does it manipulate or dismiss the experience of another.

Love, rather, places the other in the center and trusts God's grace so much that when we invite, when we share, when we explain, the other sees God rather than our own egos. Since people in our society sometimes feel used by religion, keeping our egos and interests out of faith is all the more important.

With all the games going on in the name of religion, we can surprise others by not playing any of them ourselves.

Reflection

Recall the best religious discussion you ever had. Try to identify the reasons why the sharing was so effective.

Action

Look over the motivations for evangelization listed by the bishops. Which ones resonate most deeply with your own experience?

Prayer

FOR GOD IS MY WITNESS, HOW I LONG FOR ALL OF YOU WITH THE AFFECTION OF CHRIST JESUS. AND THIS IS MY PRAYER: THAT YOUR LOVE MAY INCREASE EVER MORE AND MORE IN KNOWLEDGE AND EVERY KIND OF PERCEPTION, TO DISCERN WHAT IS OF VALUE, SO THAT YOU MAY BE PURE AND BLAMELESS FOR THE DAY OF CHRIST.

(PHILIPPIANS 1:8-10)