

DISCIPLES IN MISSION RESPECT OTHERS' FAITH



IN THESE FINAL WEEKS OF LENT, WE PREPARE FOR THE RE-PRESENTATION OF THE GREAT STORY OF OUR REDEMPTION, THE DYING AND RISING OF JESUS. WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT THE WHOLE DRAMA OF GOD'S LOVE FOR US IN JESUS IS ABOUT MERCY.

The Catholic Call

If God's mercy extends to every person, and if the Good News makes a claim on every human being—this is the very essence of what the word *catholic* means—how do we reconcile that with our modern-day sense of pluralism? After all, the last thing we want to do is impose our faith on others or violate the courtesy of acknowledging someone else's experience of faith. So what does it mean to evangelize in a pluralistic world where many faiths are held and shared?

Careful reflection on our faith, and respect for God's work in the lives of other people, can help us escape many misunderstandings in this area.

The first insight is that evangelization does not mean proselytism, which is the manipulative, disrespectful, and dismissive approach to someone else's faith. Our bishops teach us in *Go and Make Disciples*: "Catholics cannot proselytize—that is, manipulate or pressure anyone to join our Church. Such tactics contradict the Good News we announce and undermine the spirit of invitation that should

characterize all true evangelization" (p. 8). Evangelization never gives us permission to dismantle the faith of others.

This leads to the second insight: as believers, we can always share our faith appropriately with others when we speak from our personal experience. Sharing faith recognizes the integrity of the other person and is based on respect. We need only remember how we felt the times people approached us without respect for our faith.

The third insight is that sharing leads to inviting when that inviting arises from a dialogue of faith and friendship.

A Time to Share

We share our faith with different people, and the meaning of our sharing is affected by the situation of those with whom we share. The kind of invitation we offer is similarly affected.

We can think, for example, of *those who are unchurched*, with whom we might share our faith. These are people who, for all practical purposes, do not belong to any religious

community. When we share with the unchurched, we are inviting them to faith and conversion.

We know others who are *inactive Catholics* or inactive members of another church. When we share with these people, we are inviting them to a rediscovery of their faith.

We also know many people who are *active, committed Christians* belonging to other churches or denominations. Sharing with these people means recognizing the Gospel that they already accept. Some of these people will be drawn to enter the Catholic Church, something of great joy. Most, however, will remain in their own denominations, where they will continue to grow in God's grace. The Holy Spirit, through the ecumenical movement, is drawing all Christians together. As evangelizers, we support this as a sign of the Gospel. Still, we can always invite these people to know our faith more clearly.

This is what the bishops say, in *Go and Make Disciples*, about sharing our faith: "Catholics earnestly share their faith in Jesus Christ, which gives meaning to their lives, praying for that good day, known to God alone, when all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and serve God with one accord" (p. 7).

We may also know people *who do not know Christ*, but here too, we acknowledge differences. Our Christian faith has grown out of the Jewish experience: we worship the God of Jesus, who is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Our

sharing with Jewish people must never deny the covenant God formed with them as God's chosen people. Muslim believers are also descendants of Abraham. We approach members of these religions mindful of their relationship to our God.

People of the other world faiths also deserve great respect; we recognize that through these religions, God mysteriously touches the hearts of people. Our sharing with non-Christian believers gives us the opportunity to reveal how the experience of Jesus touches and challenges all human beings.

Everyone has the right to hear the Gospel of Christ; our respect for others' faith never takes that away. But everyone also has the right to hear that Gospel with dignity and love.

The Golden Rule

In our sharing and inviting, we need to return to the gospel injunction itself, the Golden Rule. It will keep us from detracting from the faith experience of others or from our own experience. Jesus, in his first instruction to his disciples, taught them: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

A lesson like that should never be forgotten.

Reflection

Think about the last time you shared your faith with someone. What did it lead to? Have you ever invited someone to a parish activity, to worship or pray with you?

Action

Make a list of the people whom you could, in an appropriate way, invite to join you in a worship service or a parish event.

Prayer

SLOWLY RECITE THE LORD'S PRAYER. PAY ATTENTION TO ITS UNIVERSAL SCOPE. HOW IT CAN BE PRAYED *BY* ANYONE AND *FOR* ANYONE.