



Evangelization 101: Being “Good at” Relationship

The mission to spread the Gospel belongs to every Catholic by Baptism. None of us are exempt from the mandate of the Lord to “go, make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). But how do we *do* it? For our answer, we look to Jesus Christ Himself and the way in which He led and nurtured His own disciples. This happened primarily by way of *relationship*. Jesus entered into and built over time a relationship of trust, intimacy and friendship with his disciples. And *through* this relationship He communicated His own life and salvation to them.

When we think of evangelization, many people picture a man standing on a street corner with a bullhorn proclaiming a message to passers-by. But this isn’t the heart of evangelization. Evangelization is fundamentally a work that proceeds in and through relationship. God Himself demonstrates this as He constantly seeks personal intimacy with each one of us, walking with us, communicating Himself to us, speaking to us, directing our lives. So, too, the disciples of Jesus Christ who are called to make other disciples do this primarily by entering into relationship with others, building trust, friendship, intimacy, and waiting for those opportunities when a person is ready to hear about Jesus and His great love for them.

This basic truth about evangelization - that it proceeds by way of relationship - illumines a fundamental obligation for all of the baptized. We must become *good at relationship*. Being “good at” relationship means that we are growing ever more deeply in the virtues that make relationship and friendship possible.

First, we must have room in our hearts for other people. That is, we must become more and more liberated from our own ego and self-interest, from our tendency to use other people to get our own needs met. In its place, we must have enough freedom of heart to focus on and genuinely desire the good of the other person *for his or her own sake*. This is the very definition of love. Without it, our attempts to evangelize are simply a “noisy going, a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1).

Second, disciple-makers must know how to listen. It is far more important to have a genuine desire in our hearts to know the other person, understand where they are “at” and what they are seeking, than it is to have all the right answers about our Faith. The best way to become a good listener is to practice regular periods of prolonged *silence* – first in prayer and then when we are around others. Silence is our way of creating space for the other – first for God and then for the other person. Silence makes us capable of listening. The experience of being listened to and understood opens people’s hearts to the possibility of God.

Third, those who wish to evangelize must be capable of intimacy. The ability to be vulnerable and to share one’s heart humbly as an offering is a necessary part of all true relationship. Humble self-disclosure is the only way by which the Gospel can reach another person’s heart. This means that those who wish to make disciples must embark on a journey of working through their own intimacy issues – fear, mistrust, withdrawal, arrogance, neediness, self-righteousness, the need to control, and so on. The best way to make this journey – and thus prepare for the mission of evangelization – is to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who will lead us on a journey of intimacy with Himself. Relationship with Him becomes a kind of *school* in which we learn how to be in relationship with others.

So where do we begin? Perhaps with a simple prayer like this one prayed from the heart:

Lord Jesus, I want to help the people in my life come to know You. I recognize that I can only help others come to know You through my own relationship with You. Jesus, I invite you anew: come into my life. Grant me the grace of friendship and intimacy with You. Give me courage to surrender myself to You, especially those parts of my heart that don’t yet belong to You. Show me, Jesus, the people in my life that You want me to befriend and build relationship with. Teach me, Jesus, how to be good at relationship: how to love, how to listen, and how to humbly share my Faith. Thank you for the privilege of participating in Your great mission to save the world. Through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I make this prayer. Amen.

~Meghan Cokeley, Office for the New Evangelization, Archdiocese of Philadelphia