Evangelization – New? Old? Or Perennial?

Evangelization – how do you know if you're doing it right? Let's start with an example of getting it wrong.

There's a story of a group of Anglican missionaries who went to China in the early 1900's. They went to remote corners of that vast land, to people who had never laid eyes on a Westerner before. The missionaries would go to the center of a town or village, read John 3:16 out loud and then ask, "Does anyone want to be baptized?" They were heartbroken, when, in place after place, not one person came forward for baptism. "Why were the people's hearts so hardened?", they asked themselves. What they did not ask themselves, was whether the people they were speaking to, understood the English words that were spoken and read to them by the English missionaries.

Generations of Jesuit missionaries knew better, and learned the languages and cultures of the people they evangelized. Around the world, Jesuits compiled dictionaries and grammars of hitherto undiscovered tongues. The moral of the story: It's hard to evangelize if you're unintelligible.

Renowned magician Penn Gillette, an outspoken atheist, once told a remarkable story during an interview. He said after a show, that an Evangelical Christian spoke to him and bore witness to his faith in Christ. Gillette politely listened and thanked the man for his time. "I didn't believe a word he said – but – I respected very much that he believed it, and he believed it so thoroughly that he couldn't keep it to himself. He saw that he had to share with me what he believed to be a saving truth. I can't imagine how much hate you must have in your heart for your fellow man if you have what you believe is the saving truth and you don't share it!"

Would not Saint Francis Xavier agree? That's why he left behind the world he knew and went to the ends of the earth, suffering countless hardships, and baptized hundreds of thousands. What he did was a work of justice for the sake of God (working to help reclaim fallen creation) and an act of charity to neighbor (bringing him the saving truth of Christ). It would have been unbearable for Xavier, whose love for God fired his zeal for souls, to stay home and remain silent or coy or reticent about Christ.

And what about the "New Evangelization"? I fear that the phrase "the New Evangelization" is one of those infinitely plastic phrases that can be stretched and shaped to mean what any given speaker wishes it to mean – just like old classics such as, "the spirit of Vatican II", "social justice", "diversity", "inclusiveness", and, more recently, "mercy." We may have surmised that no one else knows precisely what those phrases mean either, even as we have

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gleaned that it would be impolitic not to speak of them approvingly.

It seems that the phrase, "the New Evangelization" can be used to justify just about anything. "Why does the parish need new hymnals? The New Evangelization. Why does the parish sponsor bingo? The New Evangelization. Why should we make this year's Easter Egg Hunt bigger and better than ever? The New Evangelization." On and on it goes.

Pope John Paul II held that the "New Evangelization" was a necessary effort to re-evangelize Catholics who have fallen away from the faith. It is obvious that there are many millions of such folk in this country alone. Even while we gear up to confront the powers and principalities of the civil, social and spiritual orders arrayed against us, we must have a zealous charity for those who have drifted away from the Church, outside of which there is no salvation, especially those who have drifted away and don't know that they have done so. To angry Catholics who have voted with their feet, to lapsed Catholics who have voted with their indifference, and to delusional Catholics who have voted with their misplaced ballots – to all these we must simply recall the Person of Jesus Christ, and all of the gifts of truth, beauty and goodness that He entrusted to the one Church He founded, teaching them that which the Church has always taught: no modernist, trendy methods necessary. And any honest missionary will tell you that it's hard to offer make much progress in evangelization if your own commitment to fidelity and sanctity is in doubt.

In other words, we can't give what we don't have. Before we undertake any apostolate of evangelization on behalf of others, we must be sure that we ourselves have been truly evangelized, catechized and sanctified: believing, understanding and doing what the Church has always and everywhere believed, understood and done. I maintain that we will be more likely to undertake the task of our own ongoing conversion in the spiritual life, if we are convinced that we have something to give, that we have to offer even more – for the greater glory of God; and that we have a lot to lose – the salvation of our own, and countless other souls.

If new efforts to evangelize appear necessary, this is not because the "Old Evangelization" failed, but because, for the most part, many in the Church failed the Divine Mission entrusted to her: we stopped evangelizing; forgetting or ignoring the necessity of the one, true Church for salvation. We foolishly, senselessly accommodated the culture without engaging it, much less challenging it, rejecting it, or offering a viable alternative. A lot of sheep have wandered off in recent decades, and it is everyone's responsibility to share in the search-and-rescue mission.

Our Blessed Lord commanded us to make disciples of all nations. Saint Paul exhorted us to preach the gospel in season and out of season. It is incumbent upon all Catholics,

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regardless of their state in life, and echo Saint Paul: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!"

We owe it to God and neighbor to do our best to bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ. But we will labor in vain – if at all – if we do not first know and love Christ. We live in a world that would have us compromise Him, forget Him, deny Him or denounce Him. And that is why we need this Novena of Grace in honor of Saint Francis Xavier, so that through his intercession and inspiration, we can undertake our solemn and privileged task, which is the work of perennial evangelization. We are to live and tell the timeless truth always and everywhere, in all times and places, for the good of our neighbor, for the salvation of our soul, and for the greater glory of God.

Prayers for the Novena

Novena Prayer to St. Francis Xavier
(By Father Marcello Mastrilli, S.J.)

O most lovable and loving St. Francis Xavier, in union with thee, I adore the Divine Majesty with all reverence. Filled with deep joy on account of the extraordinary graces which God bestowed upon thee during thy sojourn here on earth, and on account of the extraordinary glory conferred upon thee after death, I thank Him from the depths of my soul. I implore thee at the same time from my innermost heart, to secure for me through thy powerful intercession the special grace to live a holy life and die a holy death. I also beseech thee to obtain for me the following graces. (Make some petition). But should my supplication not be in keeping with the greater honor of God or the good of my soul, obtain for me then what is more conducive to both. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be. (300 Days Indulgence)

To the Passion and Precious Blood of Jesus

Antiphon: His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground. One of the soldiers opened His side with a spear, and immediately there poured forth blood and water.

V. O Lord, come to the aid of Thy servants.
R. Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood.

Let us pray: O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou didst come down from Heaven and shed Thy Most Precious Blood on the Cross for our salvation; by Thy Sacred Wounds and the bitterness with which Thy holy Soul departed from Thy Body, we humbly beseech Thee, through the

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merits and intercession of Thy servant, St. Francis Xavier, who always bore in his heart Thy bitter Passion, mercifully grant us the favors we ask of Thy infinite mercy, Who livest and reignest, world without end. Amen.

To the Immaculate Conception

Antiphon: Thy Immaculate Conception, O Virgin Mother of God, has brought joy to the whole world, for from Thee has arisen the Sun of Justice, Christ our Lord.

V. In Thy Conception, Thou wert immaculate.
R. Holy Mother of God, pray for us.

Let us pray: O God, Who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary didst prepare a worthy habitation for Thy Divine Son, preserving Her by the foreseen merits of the Passion and Death of Thy Son from every stain of sin: we beseech Thee through Her intercession and the prayers of St. Francis, who always devoutly venerated Her Immaculate Conception, to cleanse us from all sin, in order that we may be partakers in the Divine Grace, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

To the Holy Angels

Antiphon: Holy Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim: praise the Lord and be our intercessors with God.

V. He hath given His Angels charge over thee.
R. To keep thee in all thy ways.

Let us pray: O Lord Who doth dispense the services of angels and men in a wonderful order, mercifully grant that our life may be defended by them on earth, as they always protected St. Francis, and that what we ask of Thee we may obtain by their intercession, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

To St. Francis Xavier

Antiphon: The Lord led the just man by right paths and showed him the Kingdom of God.

V. Pray for us, St. Francis Xavier.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: O God, Thou wast pleased by the preaching and miracles of St. Francis Xavier, to unite unto Thy Church the nations of the Indies. Grant, we beseech Thee, that we who

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reverence his glorious merits may also imitate his example, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of St. Francis Xavier for the Conversion of Infidels

Eternal God, Creator of all things, remember that Thou alone didst create the souls of infidels, framing them to Thy Own image and likeness; behold, O Lord! how, to Thy dishonor, hell is daily replenished with them. Remember, O Lord! Thy Only Son, Jesus Christ, Who suffered for them, most bountifully shedding His Precious Blood: suffer not, O Lord Thy Son and our Lord to be any longer despised by infidels; but rather, being appeased by the entreaties and prayers of the elect, the Saints, and of the Church, the most blessed spouse of Thy Son, vouchsafe to be mindful of Thy mercy, and forgetting their idolatry and infidelity, cause them also to know Him Whom Thou didst send, Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, Who is our health, life, and resurrection, through Whom we are freed and saved, to Whom be all glory forever. Amen.

Saint Francis Xavier's Hymn of Love

O God, I love Thee for Thyself,
And not that I may Heaven gain,
Nor because those who love Thee not,
Must suffer hell's eternal pain.

Thou O my Jesus! Thou didst me
Upon the Cross embrace;
For me didst bear the nails and spear
And manifold disgrace;

And griefs and torments numberless,
And sweat of agony;
E'en death itself – and all for one Who was Thine enemy.

Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ,
Should I not love Thee well:
Not for the sake of winning Heaven,
Or of escaping hell;
Not with the hope of gaining aught, not seeking a reward;
But, as Thyself hast loved
me, O ever-loving Lord?

E'en so I love Thee, and will

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love, and in Thy praise will sing;
Solely because Thou art my
God and my eternal King.

[N.B. Article edited for length].

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