

Evangelization

The simple, yet complex, definition of evangelization

BY MARCEL LEJEUNE
COLUMNIST

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of souls." (Romans 1:16)

In its simplest form evangelization is sharing your faith with another person. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says evangelization is, "The proclamation of Christ and his Gospel by word and the testimony of life, in fulfillment of Christ's command." (CCC, 905) While simple to understand on the surface, once we begin to unpack the definition we will find that there is more to it than what appears on the surface.

However, before we explore evangelization more deeply, it is important to remember that in many ways we can make evangelization too complex. With this complexity often comes inaction. Jesus kept it very simple. He called his followers to heed his words and to follow his example. This example included calling others to radical conversion

which, in turn, led to following Jesus by word and deed.

This formula of evangelistic discipleship is evangelization in its simplest form — witness + proclamation = evangelization. If we look deeply enough we will find that the church understands evangelization to be both simple and complex. However, if we are to fully grasp, believe and implement the complexities of evangelization, we must be firmly grounded in the basics first.

Several years ago I had an exchange with a very well-educated Christian from the Reformed tradition. We had a long history of exchanging apologetic arguments back-and-forth without either of us giving much, if any, ground. During one of our discussions he asked me how I understood the Gospel and he challenged me to tell him what it was. After a deep breath and a shrug of my shoulders, I started to impart to him a theological treatise that would tire the most tedious of theologians. After I was done with my presentation full of pride — and wind — I waited for his gratitude

to come. That isn't quite what happened.

He simply asked why I thought the Gospel was so complex. He then asked how I would be able to proclaim the good news to "all the nations" with such a long-winded and confusing presentation on the need for Jesus. He also questioned how I would be able to bring a simple or uneducated person who may live a very modest life to faith in Jesus, if it took several college degrees to understand what I was saying.

At the time, his challenge didn't do much to change my mind, because I was too proud to see God working through my "adversary." Over time, though, I found that he was correct to challenge me. I was presenting the need for Jesus in a much too complex manner. There is a great need to present the Gospel message simply. While the depths of Christianity and the understanding of Christ and his Gospel can in fact be infinitely deep, we must not plumb those depths at the beginning of our evangelical efforts or we risk leaving many people behind.

There can be a failure to understand that the Gospel is first and foremost the message of God becoming man and he lived, died and rose from the dead in order to draw us to his Father. As St. Paul tells Timothy, "This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." (1 Timothy 1:15)

We must not fail to keep this simple message of faith at the front of our minds. The great commission is a call to all of us to heed the call to evangelize: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Marcel Lejeune is the assistant director of campus ministry at St. Mary Catholic Center at Texas A&M University in College Station. He is married with five children.