

Pastor's Pen: #evangelization2018 Part 2

In this year, I am asking our parishes to focus on the primary mission of the Church to follow of the command of Christ that we go and make disciples of the nations. This task, known as evangelization, is not extraneous to the life of those baptized into the Body of Christ, but is essential to our very definition as members of the Body of Christ. Evangelization is who we are.

Last week, I pointed out how this mission finds its life blood in the sacramental life of the Church and how living faithfully that sacramental life is absolutely essential. Without the sacraments, we are spiritually spinning our wheels and going nowhere of worth. The importance of both the sacraments and the living of the mission are first introduced not by a cleric or teacher, but by the parents. The home is the incubator of faith.

The Domestic Church

The Catholic Church sees as its most basic building block an entity called the *domestic church*, that is, the church of the family. The family is where the lessons of faith are most powerfully taught by word and deed. The example of the parents in the way they do or do not live their faith will be the primary influence on the faith of their children. This is especially true for the dad of the family. The faith or faithlessness of the dad is the single largest determining factor of whether the children grow to embrace the catholic faith themselves.

The family is the first place of evangelization. Children are the first targets of evangelization on the part of their parents. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, sections 2221-2231, make clear that the role of the parents in the reception and nurturing of faith in their children is paramount. For example: *"Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the 'first heralds' for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church."* (CCC 2225)

I invite moms and dads to read the entirety of these sections from the Catechism. These are the duties that you told God you would undertake when you had your children baptized. The role I play within the larger parish as a pastor, you moms and dads (again, particularly the dads) play within your family. Inasmuch as it would be scandalous for me to use my position to drive a wedge between my flock and the Church or my flock and God, so it is scandalous for parents to do the same with their children. To this end, Jesus warns us, *"Scandals will inevitably arise, but woe to him through whom they come. He would be better off thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck than to give scandal to one of these little ones."* (Luke 17:1-1)

Helping You Help Them

Each parish has a responsibility to help those who are the primary teachers in the ways of the faith. Many times, though, the primary teachers had the necessary knowledge and formation withheld from them when they were young. It is hard to hand on what one does not have. I realize that for many decades Catholic catechesis has been lacking. In some cases, it has been seriously lacking. This must be fixed.

To this end, our parishes have given access to an excellent online program called 'Formed' to give parents a forum to deepen their own understanding of the faith and give them an opportunity to be the primary teachers of the faith they are called to be. I know many parents feel inadequate to the task to be primary teachers. We want to help you rise to the standard and be for your child who they need you to be and who God wants you to be.

Starting in January, we will be starting the 'Choice Wine' series for our married couples in order to help them be what they are called to be. It will be started at SS Peter and Paul. If there are people from St. Joseph who would like to be facilitators for this, I will most happily point you in the right direction. Again, given the catholic nature of our faith, it is not merely desirable that parishes act in tandem and cooperation, it is absolutely necessary. I also have the "Beloved" series if some would like to try that. The Beloved Series is available on the Formed website.

Partners, not Replacements

Whether your child is in a parochial school, a PSR program, or a confirmation class, parents are called to be partners in the process. As already said, parents are the first teachers. We offer various educational opportunities to supplement what should be going on in the home. No catholic teacher, however brilliant they may be, will be able to counteract fully the lack of teaching that may be given by the parent.

In the coming months we will be developing ways in which parents are given more a role in the spiritual and sacramental development of their children. It is not the job of a teacher to be the primary teacher and witness to the faith. They must be witnesses to the faith to be sure, but, it is the parents' responsibility to be the primary teacher. Just as in the classroom there is a necessity to make sure what is being taught is not a personal interpretation of the truth, so in the home. Parents are every bit as responsible for upholding the truth of Christ and His Church as I am as a pastor.

I am a big believer that pastors and parishes cannot gripe about behavior that they enable. More often than not we enable behavior because changing behavior is much more difficult. However, the task of the parish is to make sure that each of her members is living up to their evangelical call. I know this might represent a massive shift in how we do business. However, if my goal as a pastor is to guide the parish in its totality to Christ, then my call necessitates reaching out and correcting the ship even if it is the only ship in the harbor to be corrected. What happens in other parishes is not my responsibility; what happens in my parishes is my responsibility. This is why I want myself and my staff to be your partners in the development of our youth into Catholic disciples ready to live their baptismal call.