

Pastor's Pen: #evangelization2018 Part 3

The family is the first place where faith is formed. It is even the primary place where the faith is formed. Family members are bolstered in this role in the sacramental life of the Church. However, faith has a definitive look and set of beliefs within the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church, while it does value the emotional response, wants that emotional response to be grounded in truth. In the Catholic Church, faith and reason go hand in hand.

It's not a children's book

The Catholic faith is a wide ranging set of truths that all are intertwined with each other. The Catholic faith is not a faith of compartments where faith applies to some compartments and not others. The Catholic faith is an integrated whole. Understanding it is not easy. Like most systems of advanced thought or sciences, Catholic theology circles around a few foundational premises that inform all the teachings. The application of these teachings must be understood to teach them effectively.

This is why learning the faith is important. What we do in any and all education programs is to help in both the understanding of the tenets of the faith and the principles under which they are applied. This is why the Church demands that her clergy have at least a master's level education. It is why bishops are to be fastidious in overseeing the content of catechetical materials to be used. It is why pastors are to have that same knowledge of what is being taught to their parishioners and are to be seen with the same role within the parish as a parent is in the family: the primary teacher.

The Church does want us to grasp these concepts. The Catholic Church has it written in the words of Scripture and in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Both of these are complicated documents. The Church wants all her members to have broad knowledge of both. The Church is also aware that simply giving either of these documents without any training can lead to error. The Catechism and the Sacred Scriptures are not children's books that are easily understood or implemented.

Help Me Help You

As a pastor of souls, one of my major tasks is to help each parishioner to understand our Catholic faith. I have several venues to do this. The first venue is the pulpit. I know in the 10 minutes or so I have on Sundays and elsewhere, I have a group in front of me to whom I am responsible for teaching the truth. The homily is to use the words of Scripture to point to the truth and suggest practical application of the truth to our everyday lives. To waste that time with fluff and pablum or to use that time to poison the minds and souls of my parishioners by promoting error are both offenses before which I would have to answer to God.

The second venue I am given is in my writing. As you can tell, I use the Pastor's Pen as a venue to explain the faith. I also use social media and my blog to expound on the truth of the Catholic faith. The third major venue I am given is the classroom. I spend some time most days in some classroom setting.

I try to get in see the classes in our school and other educational venues. I teach adult education, bring in speakers for our Tapping into Theology, and use what venues I have to teach.

To do this means I have to appropriate my time wisely. To be able to be coherent in these tasks necessitates me continuing to educate myself and be sure my spiritual life is continuing to develop. Consequently, I read most every day. I make sure prayer is a daily part of my regimen. I make choices at what gets air time in my brain and what doesn't. What gets priority in my life is based on what helps me to execute the duties I have as a teacher and pastor of souls. I can't give what I don't have.

You Can't Give What You Don't Have

No more than I as a pastor can give my parishioners anything solid in the passing on of the faith, nor can anyone. I am aware of this. This is why I teach and try to use the pulpit as I should. It is to give you the tools. It is why I had our parishes subscribe to Formed. This way each parishioner with internet access has a way to get to excellent content and better teachers than myself and have that access 24/7.

It is also why I am absolutely insistent that Catholic parents are regularly practicing the faith and being formed in the faith. Without God's grace, all the correct data in the world will go nowhere quickly. It is not just a matter that I want to see my parish parents succeed. I do. The point is that I NEED my parish parents to succeed. Their kids need their parents to succeed at this most important task.

It is not just parents though. Each member of our parish, regardless of age, gender, education level, or socioeconomic level, is necessary to the engagement of this parish with the fallen away of our neighborhoods and the unchurched of the same neighborhoods. There are so many people out there who are searching for truth. There are many voices saying they have the truth. We have to be more convincing about the actual truth. Because the Catholic faith is a lived truth, practice of the faith is absolutely essential to the ability to evangelize.

Our Reason for Being

The role of evangelization is not something extraneous to the lived expression of the Catholic life; it is the core of it. Jesus didn't tell His disciples after the Resurrection to go home and keep to themselves what they had seen and heard. He told them, rather, to go baptize the nations. He told them to teach the nations all that He had taught them as disciples. He told them to trust that He would be with them. Since that time, men and women have transversed the entirety of the known world, bringing with them the message of the Gospel. The apostles, the early missionaries, the missionaries who went into barbarian territory, the missionaries who crossed oceans to new worlds, and the current day missionaries who use electronic and conventional media, all continue that mission.

That mission to evangelize is not limited to these select few. It is meant for all who have passed through the waters of baptism. Consider the Parable of the Talents in which great wealth was given to three persons with the command to use it wisely. We are given the sacraments, the Scriptures, the catechism, and the devotional life. We are given access to a great fount of knowledge. WE have been given the five talents; let us use them wisely to help build up the Kingdom of God.