

An Examination of Conscience for Evangelizers

This reflection can be used individually, as part of a retreat, or in parish leadership discernment sessions. Choose a section or two that resonate most & prayerfully reflect as a group, with a journal or with a trusted spiritual companion.

IN AND WITH YOUR PARISH

What parish realities might be standing in the way of a vibrant evangelizing mission?

- The occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of our parishes [where] an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach (EG, 63)
- A concentration on administering the sacraments apart from other forms of evangelization (EG, 63)
- Lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. Room has not been made for them to speak and act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making (EG, 102)
- Thinking that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort ... a malicious excuse for remaining caught up in comfort, laziness, vague dissatisfaction and empty selfishness (EG, 275)
- Subscribing to a relativism which proves even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism... acting as if God did not exist, making decisions as if the poor did not exist, setting goals as if others did not exist, working as if people who have not received the Gospel did not exist (EG, 80)
- Activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. Far from a content and happy tiredness this [leads to] a tense, burdensome, dissatisfying and, in the end, unbearable fatigue (EG, 82)

***Which of these have I experienced in my parish? How have I responded to them? How have I contributed to them?
What obstacles has my parish overcome? What fruit did it bear?***

IN YOUR OWN HEART

How might you be resisting the Holy Spirit's work in your efforts to evangelize?

- Seeking to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of privacy or in a small circle of close friends (EG, 88)
- Interpersonal relationships provided by screens and systems which can be turned on and off on command [instead of flesh and blood encounters] (EG, 88)
- Thinking that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort ... a malicious excuse for remaining caught up in comfort, laziness, vague dissatisfaction and empty selfishness (EG, 275)
- An inordinate concern for personal freedom and relaxation... a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervor (particularly among many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women) (EG, 78)
- Fear that you may be asked to undertake some apostolic work (EG, 81)
- Seeking to avoid responsibility that may take away from your free time (EG, 81)
- Throwing yourself into unrealistic projects. Or because you lack the patience to allow processes to mature, having a tendency to want everything to fall from heaven (EG, 82)

Which of these tendencies feels most familiar?

How might you begin surrendering it to the Spirit's work?

What desire for mission is the Holy Spirit stirring in you?

How have you softened, held back, or hid your faith out of fear or discomfort?

- The gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, in which all appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small-mindedness (EG, 83)
- A purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which keep one imprisoned in [one's] thoughts and feelings (EG, 94)
- A sort of inferiority complex which leads [us] to relativize or conceal [our] Christian identity and convictions. [We] end up being unhappy with who [we] are and what [we] do; [we] do not identify with [the] mission of evangelization (EG, 79)

When have you held back your faith to fit in or avoid judgment?

Stayed faithful, even when it was hard?

What truth about your identity in Christ do you need to reclaim today?

WHEN ZEAL MISFIRES

How has concern for correctness or defending overshadowed the joy of evangelizing?

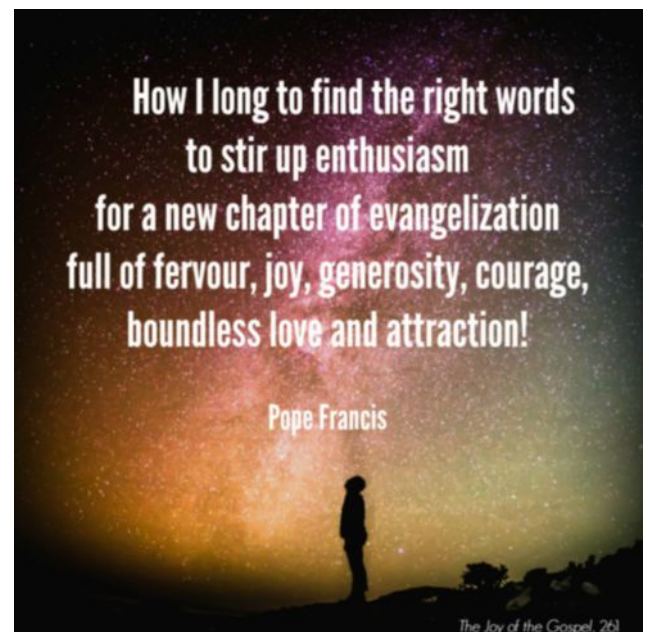
- Instead of seeing to impose new obligations, [we should] appear as people who wish to share their joy (EG, 14)
- A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline [that] leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism whereby instead of evangelization...inspecting and verifying [others] (EG, 94)
- An ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church's prestige, but without concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time (EG, 95)
- Some who have solid doctrinal and spiritual convictions frequently fall into a lifestyle which leads to an attachment to financial security (EG, 80)
- [Those who] have lost real contact with people and so depersonalize their work that they are more concerned with the road map than with the journey itself (EG, 82)

Where might spiritual pride or status-seeking be showing up in your life or ministry? How might fear, comfort, or control be limiting your joy in evangelizing? What would it look like to live and share the Gospel more fully with real people and real needs?

Our own intransigence, our unwillingness to evangelize, is by far the harshest theme in Evangelii Gaudium, the most difficult for me personally to hear. I hope that this reflection will lead both you and me to action: that we will know and share the joy of the Gospel, as a personal and living reality.

I hope that you will be inspired by Pope Francis, as I am, to bring about the changes that the Holy Spirit is calling for in our lives, our parishes, and our world. "We are always 'missionary disciples'. So what are we waiting for?" (EG, 120)

Deacon Charles Fernandes • Diocese of Hamilton



A PATH OF REPENTANCE FOR EVANGELIZERS

When we recognize the gap between the missionary call of the Gospel and our lived reality, we are invited into a holy and hopeful response: repentance that leads to renewal. Use the steps below to examine your heart, ask for mercy, and rekindle the fire of mission.

ACKNOWLEDGE

Ask: Where have I drifted from a missionary heart? Where am I content to manage rather than to evangelize?

Pray: *Lord Jesus, I confess that I have grown complacent. I have settled into comfort, routine, or administration without mission. I have been more focused on maintaining structures than on proclaiming You.*

REPENT

Ask: What attitudes or fears have kept me from evangelizing? What comforts or distractions have dulled my desire to share the Gospel?

Pray: *Forgive me, Lord, for the ways I have placed obstacles in the path of Your Gospel. Especially when I have clung to spiritual worldliness - seeking status, control, or approval more than Your will.*

RECEIVE

Ask: When was the last time I truly rejoiced in being loved by Christ? How can I receive that joy again?

Pray: *Jesus, let me rediscover the joy of knowing Your saving love. Remind me of the mercy that changed my life. Let that joy burn again in my heart.*

SHARE

Ask: Who needs to hear the Gospel through me? What small, concrete act of witness can I offer today?

Pray: *Flow through me, Lord. You have transformed me into a stream of living water, let that water bring life to others.*

ACCOMPANY

Ask: Who in my life needs presence more than preaching? Who is the Holy Spirit calling me to walk with?

Pray: *Teach me to accompany people with tenderness and truth. Help me to enter their joys and sorrows, not with answers but with presence and with the hope of the Gospel.*

PROCLAIM

Ask: To whom is God inviting me to speak the name and Good News of Jesus? How am I being called to reveal His love through my actions? To be good news for the poor?

Pray: *Jesus, you are the Good News and I believe in Your Kingdom. Give me boldness to proclaim your Kingdom of justice and mercy, and let my life reflect Your love to all - especially those who most need it.*

SURRENDER

Ask: What part of my evangelization needs to be less about me and more about the Spirit? Am I relying on my own skills or the Spirit's power?

Pray: *Holy Spirit, You are the true evangelizer. I surrender my efforts to You. Animate my words, my work, and my witness so that others may encounter Jesus through me.*
