



Franciscan Living

The New Evangelization: Franciscan Style

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Today, many of us live in families with varying degrees of faith commitment. We might have multiple faiths, no faith or lukewarm faith – all in the same family. Sharing our faith is no longer simple. The “New Evangelization” is the Catholic Church’s attempt to recapture the lukewarm, the unchurched, the rarely churched and the uninvolved. So how do we reignite the flame of passion among those who already profess the faith? How do we reach out to them? I am convinced that evangelization for a Franciscan is one of Witness and Presence.

Since I am a Catholic Christian in a multi-faith family, who I am and how I approach God, matters. I am constantly aware that for many in the family, I represent not only my church, but also the love of God to them. I am accepted because I do not proselytize nor do I talk about God much. Instead I prefer to use my actions to speak for God’s love for each of them. The family already knows that I live my faith intensely, and all that I am and all that I do, is a reflection of this faith. Hopefully, I do not mess up reflecting God’s love for them and they can find God through me.

St. Francis’ early followers were not clerics but rather they were people who earned their keep through manual labor. Francis did not seek the church’s permission to preach. Instead, Francis asked for the church to bless his style of living the gospel life. What a crucial difference this made in the development of the Franciscan order! Francis believed in living the gospel life as an overflowing demonstration of the love that God had given him. Francis was first IN LOVE with Christ, and then his evangelization followed.

Like Francis, in order to become effective evangelizers, we must be totally infatuated with God! Christ must be so real and so personal, that He is all that matters! We have to spend time with Him to constantly recenter our relationship with Him. We have to be so open to Him in our lives, that all our whole life depends on Him and His will for us! Humbly, we make room for God who takes over our lives more and more. This is the continuing oblation that we offer when we make our profession into the Order.

Because we rely on God more, we become more confident in His love and we become free to ex-

press it to others. Our confidence does not stem from judgmental attitudes towards others; rather it is a humble quiet confidence steeped in the knowledge that we are not in control, God is! For we are nothing without God and his gift of faith is just that – a wonderful gift!

I guess there is a place for apologetics for some in this new evangelization, but traditionally for Franciscans, we are lovers not arguers. I know I do not have the quickness of intellect for appropriate responses that apologetics demand. We can leave the arguments to others! However, how nice it is to be more drawn to be a lover not a lawyer!

We need not feel second best if we do not have all of the answers (after all, our faith is a mystery and a gift). We just need to love with the love of God... simple but difficult! We may spend the rest of our lives trying to do just that!

However, others *do* notice how we live since many in our society do not live intentional lives. They become aware that we *are different* and start asking questions. There is something about us and how we love, that is attractive to others (just like Francis was attractive to many during his era). This attraction can start many meaningful discussions about the place of God in our lives and His love for us. We evangelize people by love and not by arguments!

My appreciation for our particular Franciscan style of evangelization has increased living in a multi-faith family. I am drawn to be a witness for our faith and to be present to others with the quiet compassionate love of God (compassion, in the Franciscan tradition, means to share in the passion of others).

It has been said that Francis found great joy sharing in the lives of the lepers and those considered the least in society. To do so, Francis found, is to be truly alive in Christ. It is our sharing in Christ’s passion and His sharing in ours that is the meaning for the suffering in our lives and the way to Him! It is how we grow in the love of God. It is a privileged place. It is the paradox of the gospel – in order to live our life, we must lose it! In order to evangelize others, we must be “in love” with God! It’s just that simple.