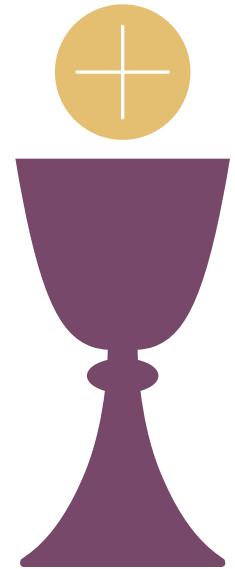


The Chance of a Lifetime

When someone has good news for us, what might we expect? A bonus? Some unexpected benefit? The chance of a lifetime? The Good News of Jesus Christ is all three of those things rolled into one: a wonderful gift; something good beyond our dreams, freely given; the chance of a lifetime for eternal happiness. Why, then, are we so shy about proclaiming it?



STUCK IN THE SALT SHAKER

We are sent out to evangelize: to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Gospel says we are the “salt of the earth.” Our calling makes us a lively, flavorful ingredient that will bring out the best in the world around us. The Good News is ours to share. But often enough we hesitate. We are salt... but we get stuck in the salt shaker.

There are various reasons for this. Here are a few common ones, along with some reasons why they shouldn't hold us back.

It's not how I was raised. True enough, some of us were brought to church as babes in arms, by stern silent parents and grandparents who believed that if we died before the water was poured we'd go to limbo. Earlier generations expected stability, tradition. You inherited your religion like you inherit being Irish, or Italian, or Polish, or Mexican. Everybody was something. You were Catholic.

Think about it, though. A lot has changed since that time. Religion is no longer a given, harnessed by generations reaching back to time immemorial. The number of unchurched and those not subscribing to any religion is fast-growing. Many are searching for faith. We need more than ever to reach out, witness, and invite.

I don't want to look like a holy roller. One of the effects of the privatization of religion is that some people consider

it bad taste to talk about faith at all. Anyone who wants to share what they believe, in this sort of mindset, is suspected of being a fanatic, abnormal.

But is this really the case? Religion is interesting. Faith is a plus in life. In general, people who have a faith community live longer, are more healthy, and are happier than those who don't. Why wouldn't you want to talk about it? Perhaps at one point in your life you were buttonholed by someone who tried to convert you, and you've sworn never to do this to someone else. Fine. But be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will give you the right words to share your faith, in a genuine, convincing way. You might be surprised how long the conversation goes on, and how much interest there is in what you have to say.

It feels risky. Almost all of us carry around some anxiety about sharing something as personal as our faith. Suppose I share this precious part of my life with my non-believing friend or co-worker, or with a family member who no longer practices, and they reject it. Aren't they rejecting me also? Suppose they make fun of me, or ask me a question I can't answer. Will I look like a fool?

Truth to tell, there's always the possibility that sharing the Good News will not result in the outcomes we want—at least not immediately. We have no control over how people will respond. But we have to trust that God will be there to help us.

Sharing the Good News requires us to step out in faith and take a risk. But the risk is small compared to the potential gains. It's unlikely that you will make a fool of yourself. But suppose you do. Better a fool for Christ than tasteless salt in a salt shaker!

WITNESS AND INVITATION

To share the Good News is an act of faith. Yet proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ does not have to be overwhelming. It can happen quite naturally, through life witness and invitation.

Those who live their faith with sincerity and joy already give the most important witness: life witness. By their simple and unaffected commitment to whatever is good and true in the world around them, by their joy and fellowship with other believers, by their confidence in the promises of Christ and in a truth that transcends their present struggles, they offer an example of faith for all to see. Life witness is the cornerstone of proclaiming the Good News, because it gives flesh to the message of Christianity. An example is worth a thousand words.

Example alone, however, is not enough. Witness of life must be complemented by the invitation to "come and see" what Jesus Christ and his Kingdom are all about.

How do we invite others to discover faith in Jesus Christ for themselves? It may be easier than you think. Here are some suggestions:

- Invite someone to come with you to a church event and talk with them about it
- Share something in your faith that brings you joy; if it is good news to you, it may be good news to someone else
- Listen actively; respect the other person's freedom and journey

- Speak about Jesus and the Church from within your own experience
- Pray for the person whom you wish to reach

Any believer can witness and invite. It doesn't take advanced training or special skills. Neither does it require a life of perfect sanctity. Ordinary, fallible, imperfect people can do this. The witness we bring is not to ourselves, but to Jesus Christ, who loves us. And that is very good news.

REFLECT

Who are the people in my life who have no church home or who have drifted away from active participation in the Church? Do I understand and identify with their questions and longings? How can I be a bridge for them?

ACT

Decide on one concrete step you can take this week to reach out to someone with the Good News. Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help you.

PRAY

Holy Spirit, fill me with so much joy in my faith that I will want to share it with others. Give me the words to speak, the listening heart, and the courage I need to reflect your love. Let me be your witness today!

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