

Baptize All Nations

Episode 8: Evangelization and Fallen Humanity

Welcome back to Baptize All Nations. I'm Michael Miller.

Although the Lord commanded all of us to evangelize, He also said that some people wouldn't listen and that we'd be persecuted for preaching the Gospel.

There are as many spiritual problems out there as there are people. But as evangelists we're expected to interact with people just like the Lord did. Recall the Lord's parable of the sowers and the wheat. Some wheat fell on rocky ground and never took root, some in shallow ground where the roots died, and some in good ground where they flourished and yielded a hundred fold.

He didn't chide sinners when they came to him with faith even though at times He was upset by the hardness of their hearts, yet he was always gentle with them. So we too can't be hard on people because as St. Paul said "But by the grace of God, I am what I am".

Some people that we'll meet are those who consider themselves "spiritual but not religious". Actually, we all probably know people who think this way. For the most part, they're scandalized at the evil actions of people in the Church or they're scandalized at what they've heard about the Church. They believe in God but consider the mainline religions as corrupt and false. So what they try to do is to have a relationship with God where they define what God's laws are and how to worship Him. They often hold scripture to be true but they take only what they want from the bible and throw out what they don't agree with. They think that they can find their own way to God and that they don't need any help from the Church.

The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* says:

[Human beings] from birth, therefore, are immersed in traditions which give them not only a language and a cultural formation but also a range of truths in which they believe almost instinctively... Nonetheless, there are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification.
– *Gaudium et Spes*, 12

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith comments further:

Whoever trusts only in his own individual efforts and does not recognize the need for help from others, is deceiving himself. – CDF *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* 5

But their objections aren't too difficult to address. The Lord never appeared to "uncle George" and said: "And I say to you, that you are George, and upon you I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give you, George, the keys of the kingdom of heaven." [cf. Mt. 16.18]

Really, they just need to understand that people in the Church can fail but it doesn't mean that the whole thing is bad.

Some of the most difficult evangelization will be to ex-Catholics and family members. Ex-Catholics can have a great deal of hostility towards the Church, like the television host Bill Maher. They could have endured some scandal that would have soured their opinion of the Church or else they are using the pretense of a fallen Church to justify a sinful lifestyle that they don't want to give up.

Either way, no matter how hostile or offensive they are, as evangelists we must try to be patient with them because God desires their conversion too.

Family members might not be open to attempts at evangelization but our Lord himself was mostly unsuccessful in converting His own people from Galilee. They didn't believe his miracles because they

knew his family and the place where He grew up. Tradition says the Lord lived a quiet and unassuming life right up until the beginning of His public mission. Their hearts were so hardened that they wouldn't believe in Him even when they saw His Miracles. Scripture says that it was for that reason that He did not do many miracles for them.

Often times an evangelist gets a better reception from a stranger than a family member but we can't let that discourage us. The Lord said: "And the enemies of a man will be those of his own household." Yet we must not get discouraged. If you pray, do penance, and show a good example then hopefully they'll come around.

It's not just those close to us who may not listen to the Gospel. Our spiritual fathers: priests and bishops may even be hostile to our evangelizing efforts. If we are faithful to Church teaching then we will make enemies outside and inside the Church.

So when we are yelled at by a priest for kneeling for communion, or accused of being hateful for standing up for the Church's teaching on homosexuality and abortion, or ignored for demanding liturgical propriety, we must pray very much for our spiritual fathers.

If as a layperson, temptations from the devil might seem overwhelming, then think about how much greater is the spiritual battle for a religious or priest. Perhaps Father so-and-so doesn't seem to be fighting his spiritual battles anymore, maybe he's given in. But we can't give up on him because if God let us cross paths then we are the ones who have to pray for him. A holy priest or religious can do a lot of good and satan knows that so he attacks them the most.

The first thing that will make our evangelization effective among difficult people is to first lead by example. St. Charles Borromeo said:

Be sure that you first preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you say one thing, but live otherwise, and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a derisive shake of the head. – *St. Charles Borromeo*

Preaching by example goes hand-in-hand with preaching with words. It can't be stressed enough how important it is.

The second thing to do is what St. John Vianney did for his penitents: do penance for them. None of us have gotten the grace to be where we are without the prayers and suffering of somebody else, so it is for those we evangelize to. If we aren't willing to help provide the grace for people's conversion then we aren't evangelizing.

Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, constantly spoke to him of the faith but he ignored her lessons and example. She prayed, suffered, and wept for the conversion of her son for seventeen years. Her persistence was repaid by God when Augustine finally converted and became one of the brightest lights of the Church.

Blessed Teresa of Kolkata said: "God doesn't require us to succeed; he only requires that you try." Very good and PRACTICAL advice from a great evangelist. The reason is that success is not up to us, because it's between the individual and God. But in the end some people just won't listen, no matter how much you fast, pray, or exhort. Yet it is our obligation as members of the Church to evangelize anyways.

God spoke through the prophet Ezechiel, reminding us of our solemn duty to evangelization to the peril of our immortal souls:

If, when I say to the wicked man, 'You shall certainly die,' you do not announce it to him, and you do not speak so that he may be converted from his wicked way and live, then the same wicked man will die in his iniquity. But I will attribute his blood to your hand.

But if you give warning to the wicked man, and he is not converted from his wickedness and from his evil way, then indeed he will die in his iniquity. But you will have delivered your own soul. – Ezechie: 3:18-19

We don't know in this life how we effect people and we can't expect to see results immediately. Sometimes God is just planting a seed and it will mature later. But eventually we'll know and we'll be happy that we did what we did.

I'm Michael Miller... we'll see you next time on Baptize All Nations.