

Growing in Grace #3—Evangelism: Sharing the Faith

Tell me—what do you do when you find something new? You tell others, right? It's common practice—telling others is common in our society. Nothing wrong with that. A beautiful girl has found the boy of her dreams. So, she tells her friends, and family, and anyone who wants to listen. A young man has been promoted to a new level in his company—so he shares the good news with others. A man has just bought a new car—and he tells others how much fun it is. Nothing wrong with any of that. It is the same with the Faith.

When you discover a new meaning in your life; when you find an exciting relationship with Jesus Christ; what do you do? You share with others, right? For you it is like a light has been turned on in your life, and you would like others to know. So, you tell others. That, in church language, is called Evangelism. It is simply sharing with others something wonderful that you have found, something that is changing your life. You are happy, and you want to share that happiness with others, hoping that when they find it too, they will be happy also.

As you Grow in the Faith, as you discover the Love of Jesus for you, it is normal and right to want to share that good news. Of course, others, who have not learned what you have learned, may not be interested. That is their problem. Someday, if their minds and hearts are open, they will learn it too, and thank you for sharing your happiness.

Of course, there are some Christians who try to push others to learn what they have learned, and it doesn't work. We are naturally prone to object when others try to push something at us. Real evangelism isn't pushy. Evangelism is simply sharing the Good News that you have learned. Like the girl with the new boyfriend, it is sharing your good news. In Evangelism, if your friend asks you to tell them more, then do so. Let them know that the Love of God is for everyone. Tell them what you are learning. Tell them, if they ask, how Jesus is changing your life. True Evangelism is sharing what Jesus can and is doing for you; not pushing others to do the same.

Years ago, Billy Graham held large Evangelism rallies, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with everyone present. Only when he had said all he wanted to share, did he invite people to come to the front, and learn more about Jesus. He never pushed people to come forward. It was always an Invitation. People would come forward when they were ready, when they wanted to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, when they wanted to learn more. Thousands came forward, thousands didn't. Billy Graham declared the Truth of the Faith, and then let people make up their own mind. And that's the way all Anglicans work. We declare what we know is True, and let others freely make their own decision.

This means that as you grow in the Faith, you will want to share what you know about Jesus, and His Good News. Don't be shy. Don't let others tell you to keep quiet. Don't let others shame you into silence. When the time is right, be prepared to share what you have found is True, and how it is changing your life. Like a homemaker sharing her new cake recipe, share your new relationship with Jesus as Good News. Don't be pushy, but

don't be shy either. True Evangelism is great for everyone because it helps others find the God who loves them wonderfully.

I have found that inviting others to church works. You can help them do so by picking them up or meeting them at church and sitting with them. When a newcomer sees the Eucharist in all its quiet power, hears the joy of others, watches the humble priest as he/she celebrates the mass at the Altar, they are moved in their hearts to get what they see others have. And when they share in the fun and happiness at the Coffee hour, most newcomers want to come again. They are open to hearing how the Lord is changing you; how you are growing in Christ; how you are happy to answer their questions and come often to church with you.

One of the great examples of Evangelism is St Francis of Assisi. In the 13th century, St Francis discovered Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and heard Jesus quietly say to him: "Francis Rebuild my Church". At first Francis thought that meant to repair a church building, and he set out to do so. When he had finished, the bishop came and blessed the building. And then Francis heard Jesus again: "Francis Rebuild my Church." And with that Francis understood that Jesus meant the people of the Church, not the building. Francis rejected all the riches of his family, even took on the clothing of the poor, and began to tell anyone who would listen the Love of God as shown in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Many men gave up everything they had and joined Francis. Together they journeyed all over Europe, sharing the Gospel of Christ, and calling people into a new and loving Faith. One of his great statements is: "Preach the Gospel always; if necessary, use words." Thousands of people came to Christ during his life of only 40 years and began to Grow in Grace. Millions have done so ever since. Franciscans everywhere spent their lives sharing the Love of Jesus, and bring people to Christ, and helping new Christians everywhere to live new and happy lives. St Francis and his followers today are great leaders of Evangelism. The Society of St Francis is one of the great monastic movements today.

Evangelism is sharing what you have discovered about the Love of Jesus with those ready to hear. I wish everyone in every parish could learn to do the same. The more people discover how Jesus can change their lives, the more this world will begin to look like the Kingdom of God that Jesus told us about. "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be done, on earth" – right here, right now.