



Go Make Disciples

Study Guide

Suggested Format for Use in Groups

This format can be used in various groups who may have set time aside for the discussion of the pastoral letter "Go Make Disciples." Since the time set aside by different groups (such as parish councils, or professional gatherings at the diocesan level) may vary from 15-90 minutes, they will be able to cover the material at different rates of speed. The chairperson of the meeting, or someone he or she chooses, can serve to facilitate the conversation. After the "reading" from the pastoral letter has been read, the facilitator launches the discussion by reading the question/questions out loud. The facilitator then "manages" the discussion by making sure that all who want to participate can do so, and that no one dominates the discussion.

- 1) Begin with the Prayer to the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the booklet.
- 2) Choose someone to read out loud the selection from the pastoral letter "Go Make Disciples" in the section you are studying.
- 3) Facilitator reads the first question (or set of questions), and opens the floor for discussion.
- 4) When everyone is satisfied that the material has been covered thoroughly, read the follow-up quote at the end of the section. Invite reaction, and then move on to the next question.
- 5) Since some sections are longer than others, it may sometimes be possible to cover more of the material in one meeting than in another. You can cover as much of the letter as is useful in any given meeting.
- 6) Close with the prayer at the end of the booklet.

Closing Prayer

Gracious and merciful God, we pray that through the Holy Spirit all Catholics may hear the call of the New Evangelization and seek a deeper relationship with your Son, Jesus.

We pray that the New Evangelization will renew the Church, inspiring all Catholics to “go forth and make disciples of all nations” and transform society through the power of the Gospel.

We pray for all members of the Church, that we heed the words of Christ—“do not be afraid”—and strengthened by the Holy Spirit’s gift of courage, give witness to the Gospel and share our faith with others.

We pray that we may become like the father of the prodigal son—filled with compassion for our missing brothers and sisters—and run to embrace them upon their return.

We pray that all people yearning to know Christ and the Church may encounter him through the faithful who witness to his love in their lives.

Loving God, our Father, strengthen us to become witnesses to the saving grace of your Son, Jesus, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

(USCCB Document “Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization”) ²³

²³ <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/disciples-called-to-witness/upload/Disciples-Called-to-Witness-5-30-12.pdf>

Go Make Disciples

Introduction: This study guide is meant to provoke the engagement of the reader with the pastoral letter published by Archbishop Paul Coakley in October of 2013. Please, take the time to read the pastoral letter in its entirety. While doing so, you might note those passages that seem to stand out to you, and ponder what it will mean for us in central and western Oklahoma.

The call for a New Evangelization initiated by John Paul II, and echoed by Popes Benedict and Francis is a response to a rapidly changing world, particularly in the countries of the west which were once rich in faith. Many of these places have been rapidly secularized, and as a result many baptized Catholics have lost a living sense of faith in the person and message of Jesus Christ.

The New Evangelization introduces the person of Jesus Christ to the baptized Catholic who has not yet experienced personal conversion. The New Evangelization invites a person into a conscious dialogue with God’s self-revealing Word, and initiates them into a personal relationship with Jesus that leads to salvation—or in other words, to become a disciple. The New Evangelization supports them in the ongoing entrustment of their whole life to Jesus.

Such a living relationship gives rise to a desire to know Jesus better through the Scripture and the teaching of the Church. A relationship with Christ releases the energy needed to undertake the Christian moral life. Strengthened by the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the Christian finds the source of power for the Christian way of life. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the source of grace and strength for ongoing conversion. From this living relationship with Jesus Christ, the Christian experiences a powerful desire to connect with others who know him. Personal love for Jesus engenders profound love for the Church and a deep desire for others to know him, too. The one who has come to know Jesus experiences a desire to serve the mission of Jesus with the gifts God gives them. In this way, the New Evangelization builds up the

life of the Church.

Notes

This study guide will excerpt 17 of the most salient sections of the text of the pastoral letter, and provide additional commentary, discussion questions, and suggestions for further reading. It can be used by individuals and groups. If you wish to take up this study guide in a group setting, there is a format for group use in the back of the booklet.

All are encouraged to invite the Holy Spirit, who is the principal agent of evangelization, to assist them in their prayerful study of this document.

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit, come fill the hearts of your faithful people and enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit, and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

(Let us pray.)

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit does instruct the hearts and minds of the faithful, grant that by that same spirit we may be truly wise and ever to rejoice in your most holy consolations, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Suggestions for further reading: Catechism of the Catholic Church 425, 618, and 1816.

From Pope Francis: "...[A]ll the usual activities of the particular Churches have a missionary character and this in the certainty that the missionary endeavor more than an activity among others is paradigm, that is, it is the paradigm of all pastoral action. The Church's intimacy with Jesus is an itinerant intimacy, it implies going out of oneself, walking and sowing always again, always further on. Let's go elsewhere to preach to the neighboring villages because I have come for that, the Lord said. [...] One must go out of one's own community and dare to reach the existential fringes that need to feel God's closeness. He does not abandon anyone and always shows His inexhaustible tenderness and mercy, so this is what must be taken to all people."²⁶

²⁶ Pope Francis, Message to Conference on Evangelizing the Americas, November 2013. <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/francis-video-message-to-conference-on-evangelizing-the-americas>

Section 1 The New Evangelization: Rooted in Vatican II

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 3: *The Year of Faith commemorates two of the most significant events of the twentieth century in the life of the Catholic Church. It marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It also coincided with the convening of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops whose theme in 2012 was "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith."*

Commentary: The Holy Father's recent encyclical letter *Lumen Fidei* says that "Vatican II was a Council on faith, inasmuch as it asked us to restore the primacy of God in Christ to the center of our lives, both as a Church and as individuals. The Church never takes faith for granted, but knows that this gift of God needs to be nourished and reinforced so that it can continue to guide her pilgrim way. The Second Vatican Council enabled the light of faith to illumine our human experience from within, accompanying the men and women of our time on their journey. It clearly showed how faith enriches life in all its dimensions".¹

A) If you are old enough to remember when the Second Vatican Council happened, what do you recall about that time? If you had to identify what was most important about what happened at the Council what would you say?

B) If you are not old enough to remember the Second Vatican Council, what impression do you have about its purpose? If "restoring the primacy of God in Christ to the center of our lives, both as a Church and as individuals" was a goal of the council, in what ways do you think God

had ceased to be at the center? Why was this a concern? Do you think the effort to restore the primacy of God to the center of people's lives has been successful in the 50 years since the Council?

C) Do you have a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church? Are there any parts of it that have been particularly meaningful or helpful to you?

D) If you had the tools (such as a daily reading plan) would you consider reading a bit of the catechism and the Scripture each day as part of your personal prayer?

Scriptures for further prayer and meditation: Matthew 13: 53-58; Hebrews 11:6; John 20:24-31

¹ Pope Francis, Lumen Fidei 6. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei_en.html

Section 17 Facing our Fears

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 19: *“Go make disciples! In his closing homily at World Youth Day in Rio, Pope Francis reassured young Catholics and the whole Church saying, “Do not be afraid! When we go to proclaim Christ, it is he himself who goes before us and guides us. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised: I am with you always (Mt. 28:20). And this is also true for us! Jesus does not leave us alone, he never leaves you alone! He always accompanies you.”*

In presenting to you this pastoral letter and the challenge to ‘Go Make Disciples’ I rely on the Lord’s faithfulness. He accompanies us. With confidence in her motherly concern for the whole Church, I entrust our archdiocese and this mutually shared vision to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Star of the New Evangelization.”

A) What fears, if any, do you have around the call to the New Evangelization?

B) Will you offer yourself to the Lord for this work?

From Pope Francis: *“Christ opened the path to us. He is like a roped guide climbing a mountain who, on reaching the summit, pulls us up to him and leads us to God. If we entrust our life to him, if we let ourselves be guided by him, we are certain to be in safe hands, in the hands of our Savior, of our advocate.”*²⁵

Scriptures for further prayer and meditation: Matthew 6:25-34; Matthew 28:20; John 14:18; Philipians 4: 6-7

²⁵ Pope Francis, Audience, April 17, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130417_udienza-generale_en.html

Section 16

Being Missionaries Where We Are

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 16 to p. 17: *“Discipleship leads to evangelization. Mature disciples become disciple-makers. They become missionary disciples. Speaking to bishops and priests about young people at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro Pope Francis said, ‘They too have heard the mandate of Jesus; ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’ (cf. Mt 28:19). It is our responsibility to help kindle within their hearts the desire to be missionary disciples of Jesus. Certainly, this invitation could cause many to feel somewhat afraid, thinking that to be missionaries requires leaving their own homes and countries, families and friends. God asks us to be missionaries where we are, where He puts us!’ This is the vision I set before you today: Go make disciples!”*

A) As a Catholic in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, what do you think we need to stop, start, or do differently so we can each become a true disciple, and lead others to do likewise?

B) If it were to come to your attention that someone wanted or needed to come to know Jesus in a deeper way and asked for your help, what would you do to help them?

C) Where do you feel the greatest need is in your own life—do you need to become a more intentional disciple yourself or do you feel ready to learn how to make disciples of other people?

Section 2

Renewed Conversion to the Lord

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 3: *“[T]he Year of Faith is ‘a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the One Savior of the World’ (PF 6). This Year of Faith has been an opportunity for Catholics to renew and rediscover their relationship with Jesus Christ and with his Church. It has been an occasion of grace.”*

A) What do you think it means for a person who is already baptized to experience an authentic conversion to the Lord?

B) When you think of your own faith, would you see it in terms of a need for the renewal of your relationship with Jesus, or as a relationship you need to discover for the first time?

C) Do you know anyone else in your church whose faith was lived out as a personal relationship with the Lord? In what concrete ways did he or she give witness to that relationship? Do you experience your own faith as a relationship with the Lord? Can you describe your lived experience of your relationship with the Lord up to this point?

D) If this concept seems surprising, or new for us as Catholics, share your reaction.

Section 3

A Call to Intentional Discipleship

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 5: *“Go make disciples. This is God’s word addressed to us as we conclude this Year of Faith. It is our mandate. For all of us and for each of us it is both an invitation and a challenge; a call and a mission.*

The vision is rooted in who we are and why we are here. Our sacred purpose, as the people of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, is to joyfully witness to our Catholic faith in central and western Oklahoma through the teaching, sanctifying, and governing ministry of Christ and His Church so that the Body of Christ is made present, the universal call to holiness proclaimed, and all people are welcomed into the promise of eternal life.”

The archbishop has crystallized the mission of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City as follows: “Go make disciples,” which is the same mission that Jesus gave to the apostles (Matthew 28:19).

A) If you had to explain to someone else what a disciple is, what would you say?

B) If you wanted to explain to someone else the process by which disciples are made, how would you explain it?

C) Would you feel able to help someone come to know Jesus in a personal way? Do you feel like you know him personally yourself? (Explain.)

C) If you haven’t experienced this kind of encounter, would you like to? Would you pray for it?

D) Do you sense in yourself the impulse/desire to lead others to experience this kind of personal encounter with Jesus, or are you hesitant? (Discuss.)

From Pope Francis: *I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”.[1] The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace”.²⁴*

Scriptures for further meditation: John 1:4-42; John 4

²⁴ Pope Francis, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, EVANGELII GAUDIUM http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

Section 15

A Personal Encounter with Jesus Christ

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 16: *“Before his unexpected resignation, Pope Benedict wrote a letter for World Youth Day 2013. He spoke to young people about the meaning of evangelization. ‘To evangelize means to bring the Good News of salvation to others and to let them know that this Good News is a person: Jesus Christ. When I meet him, when I discover how much I am loved by God and saved by God, I begin to feel not only the desire, but also the need to make God known to others. At the beginning of John’s Gospel we see how Andrew, immediately after he met Jesus, ran off to fetch his brother Simon (cf. Jn 1:4-42). Evangelization always begins with an encounter with the Lord Jesus. Those who come to Jesus and have experienced his love immediately want to share the beauty of the meeting and the joy born of his friendship. The more we know Christ, the more we want to talk about him. The more we speak with Christ, the more we want to speak about him. The more we are won over by Christ, the more we want to draw others to him.’ Our witness and efforts in the work of the new evangelization will be fruitful to the extent that we are aflame with the love of Christ. ‘The love of Christ urges us on!’ (2 Cor 5:14).*

Commentary: This is a good working definition of evangelization. It emphasizes personal experience of Jesus Christ, a personal encounter with him. People are sometimes reluctant to talk about these personal encounters because they fear what people will think. This has created a culture of silence, in which we are reluctant to give witness to how the Lord has touched our lives. On the other hand, we may sense within ourselves the desire for such an encounter. A simple prayer can be the beginning: “Lord, I want to know you. Reveal yourself to me.”

A) Have you ever had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ? What was it like?

B) Have you ever talked about that encounter with someone else?

D) Has the Catholic faith been “life-changing” for you? (Or another way of putting it would be, what difference does it make in your life?) When you meet people outside the faith who are challenged by life’s big questions and issues, would it occur to you to lead them toward Jesus and the Catholic faith as a place to find answers?

From Pope Francis: *The word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him “to go forth”. Abraham received the call to set out for a new land (cf. Gen 12:1-3). Moses heard God’s call: “Go, I send you” (Ex 3:10) and led the people towards the promised land (cf. Ex 3:17). To Jeremiah, God says: “To all whom I send you, you shall go” (Jer 1:7). In our day Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples” echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary “going forth”. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel.²*

Scriptures for further prayer and meditation: Mark 8: 34-38; John 8: 31-32; John 13: 34-35; Matthew 28: 18-20.

² Pope Francis, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, EVANGELII GAUDIUM http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

Section 4

The Challenge of Holiness

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 6: *“This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1Th 4:3). This truth, so clearly expressed in the scriptures, is the principle and foundation of the Christian life, of all pastoral planning and pastoral work. It has practical and far-reaching consequences for each individual Christian, for every household, for every parish community, indeed for the whole Church. God creates us for holiness. God calls us to become saints.”*

Commentary: Every day when I pray the Our Father, I pray “thy will be done.” God’s express will for me, his plan for my life, is that I become “holy.” The process of transformation is not something I can achieve by my effort alone. Rather, it is a cooperation with God’s grace. John Paul II wrote, “Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus sets himself to follow Christ and learns more and more within the Church to think like Him, to judge like Him, to act in conformity with His commandments, and to hope as He invites us to.”³

A) What does it mean to be holy?

B) What are some of the negative or “stuffy” connotations sometimes associated with holiness?

C) Do you think of yourself as someone who could become a saint, with God’s help?

A) Do you think you “have” that kind of friendship and relationship with Jesus that characterizes Christian discipleship? Do you experience it as Fr. Pedro Arrupe described it, “falling in love?”

B) If not, would you like to?

C) What are some of the practical ways that you could go about “sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning from him”? (i.e. dedicated daily prayer time, meditation on Scripture, adoration, etc.)

From Pope Francis: *“Saint John brings out the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus for our faith by using various forms of the verb “to believe”. In addition to “believing that” what Jesus tells us is true, John also speaks of “believing” Jesus and “believing in” Jesus. We “believe” Jesus when we accept his word, his testimony, because he is truthful. We “believe in” Jesus when we personally welcome him into our lives and journey towards him, clinging to him in love and following in his footsteps along the way.”²³*

²² Pope Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 33. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html

²³ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 18. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei_en.html

Section 14

Falling in Love with Jesus Christ

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 15: *“But we cannot give what we do not have. To evangelize others is to invite them into friendship and relationship with Jesus Christ. Before we invite others, we the evangelizers must ourselves be truly evangelized. The evangelizers must first become disciples. We have to be in relationship with Jesus. We have to know him and know that we are loved by him. It is not enough to know about Jesus. We have to become his friend. We have to sit at his feet and learn from him as did Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (Lk 10:39). We have to fall in love.*

‘Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.’ These words of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., former Superior General of the Jesuits, describe the experience of discipleship rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only the disciple can effectively evangelize others.”

Commentary: If Catholics don’t evangelize, it could be because they have not yet been evangelized themselves. They may go to Mass, but have not yet come to know Jesus in a personal way and to experience his power, presence, and love in their lives. Pope Paul VI once said, “The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.” However, the inspiration to evangelize is not driven by a sense of guilt, but rather the desire that others should come to know and experience the love of God that you have come to know and experience. Pope John Paul II echoed Fr. Arrupe’s insight: “[O]ur Christian communities must become genuine ‘schools’ of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening, and ardent devotion, until the heart truly ‘falls in love.’”²²

D) What do you think of the idea that God has a plan for you?⁴

From Pope Francis: *“The Saints are not supermen, nor were they born perfect. They are like us, like each one of us. They are people who, before reaching the glory of heaven, lived normal lives with joys and sorrows, struggles and hopes. What changed their lives? When they recognized God’s love, they followed it with all their heart without reserve or hypocrisy. They spent their lives serving others, they endured suffering and adversity without hatred and responded to evil with good, spreading joy and peace. This is the life of a Saint.”*⁵

Scriptures for further prayer and meditation: Matthew 5: 17-30; 1 Peter 1: 10-16

³ Pope John Paul II, Catechesi Tradendae 20. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html
⁴ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1.

⁵ Pope Francis, Angelus Address on the Feast of all Saints, November 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20131101_en.html

Section 5

A Spirituality of Communion

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 7: (*The Church as Mystery*) *“The Church is clearly more than meets the eye. Though having a visible hierarchical structure, established by Christ upon the foundation of the apostles, the Church is also a ‘mystery,’ that is, a sign and instrument of the unity that God intends for the human race. As such, the Church is a people gathered together into the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to share in the very holiness of God, who is love.*

The Church is a communion of love. As Blessed John Paul II wrote at the dawn of the new millennium, ‘Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us, to make us all ‘one heart and one soul’ (Act 4:32) (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 42).

Commentary: Pope John Paul II said, “To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings.

But what does this mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. *A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as ‘those who are a part of me.’ This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality*

B) In the context of all the other faith formation activities that we do in the Church (catechesis, RCIA, Bible studies, etc.), what is unique about evangelization?

C) Do you sense a need to understand “how” to evangelize? What kind of resources would be most helpful to you to learn how to evangelize? (i.e. workshops, conferences, books, training, web-based resources, etc.)

From Pope Francis: *Each particular Church, as a portion of the Catholic Church under the leadership of its bishop, is likewise called to missionary conversion. It is the primary subject of evangelization, since it is the concrete manifestation of the one Church in one specific place, and in it “the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative”. It is the Church incarnate in a certain place, equipped with all the means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but with local features. Its joy in communicating Jesus Christ is expressed both by a concern to preach him to areas in greater need and in constantly going forth to the outskirts of its own territory or towards new sociocultural settings. Wherever the need for the light and the life of the Risen Christ is greatest, it will want to be there. To make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform.²¹*

²¹ Pope Francis, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, EVANGELII GAUDIUM http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

Section 13

Becoming a Missionary Church in Oklahoma

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 14: *“The faith of believers in our post-Christian culture needs to be re-awakened. The new evangelization calls for a re-evangelization. This is our challenge! ‘You are the light of the world’ (Mt 5:14). The Church exists in the world to bear witness to Christ. ‘Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father’ (Mt 5:16). Many Catholics shy away from their responsibility to become evangelizers. Perhaps they misunderstand their role. While each and every member of the Church has a proper part in the evangelizing mission of the Church, some as pastors, parents, or catechists, all are called to be witnesses to Christ. ‘Preach the Gospel always; use words when necessary.’ This saying, attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, reminds us that the witness of a holy, joyful, and virtuous life is the most effective and compelling evangelizing influence. This is the lesson that the saints teach us! Holy and joyful men and women will renew the Church and bring the world to Christ.”*

Commentary: Evangelization was, and continues to be, in many ways, unfamiliar territory for many Catholics. Nearly twenty years after the promulgation of *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Cardinal Avery Dulles observed that “the vast majority of Catholics are not strongly inclined toward evangelization. The very term has for them a Protestant ring. ... Too many Catholics of our day seem never to have encountered Christ. They know a certain amount about him from the teaching of the Church, but they lack direct personal familiarity.” Speaking to a group of Catholic scholars, the then Bishop Francis George said, “We speak of what we love. If U.S. Catholics do not speak of Christ to those who do not know him, the intensity of our love as well as the quality of our faith can be questioned. ... If evangelization is weak, is it because our link with God is feeble?”

A) Do you agree with Cardinal Dulles—does the word “evangelization” sound like a Protestant word? What might be some of the special difficulties for Catholics in the Bible Belt with the call to the New Evangelization?

of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God, not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a ‘gift for me.’ A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each other’s burdens’ (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: *Unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose.* They would become mechanisms without a soul, ‘masks’ of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.”⁶

Although the Catechism teaches that “The faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity” (232), for many of us, the Trinity is kind of an abstract principle, a doctrine we say we believe, although, if we were to be honest, we don’t really know why.

A) The inner life of the Holy Trinity is a relationship of total, mutual, self-giving love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If a “spirituality of communion” springs from the “heart’s contemplation of the Holy Trinity,” do you have confidence in your own grasp of this foundational Christian reality? What insights, if any, has your prayerful contemplation of the Holy Trinity yielded in terms of your lived experience of faith?

B) God also “gives himself” to us, holding nothing back. He gave himself by becoming man, by teaching and healing, and by dying on the cross for us. He gave us the gift of life, the beauty of the natural world to live in, food to eat, water, family. He continues to give himself to us in the sacraments, which “equip us with the supernatural grace, the virtues, and spiritual gifts necessary to grow toward full maturity in Christ as saints. All of this is God’s merciful gift to us. In order for these gifts to bear fruit in a holy life, however, our cooperation with God’s grace is necessary.” (Pastoral letter, p. 9)

How have you experienced the power of grace through the sacra-

ments in your life? (Or, alternatively, do they perhaps seem like empty rituals that don't really impact your life that much?)

C) Since I am made in the image and likeness of God, I am also made to make a gift of myself. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World says, "Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, 'that all may be one ... as we are one' (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."⁷

Do you feel that you've found a meaningful way to make a gift of yourself to God and others? How has that "giving of yourself" enriched you?

D) The ability to think in this "Trinitarian way" enables me to think of brothers and sisters in faith in terms of the mystical body, as 'part of me,' and to welcome and prize them as a gift, even though they may be very different from me. When you think about the atmosphere and spirit of our parishes, schools, and other resources for transmitting the faith, how would you evaluate them in terms of making our church a "home and school of communion"?

Section 12

Preparing for a Conflict of Cultures

From the Pastoral Letter, page 13: *"Rather than evangelizing the culture, that is, transforming the culture according to the truth, beauty, and goodness of the Gospel, many Christians are being 'evangelized' by the anti-gospel values that the secular and atheistic culture espouses. This is strikingly evident as we witness how rapidly so many otherwise faithful people are losing a sense of the unique meaning of marriage as a permanent relationship between a man and a woman."*

A) As our secular culture seems poised to depart from the way culture has always understood marriage, what is needed to help Catholics to continue to hold on to a Christian understanding of marriage? What are some of the practical issues that may arise from this conflict, which the Church will need to prepare for in order to remain faithful?

From Pope Francis: *The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple. As the French bishops have taught, it is not born "of loving sentiment, ephemeral by definition, but from the depth of the obligation assumed by the spouses who accept to enter a total communion of life".²⁰*

For further prayer and meditation: Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-11; Revelation 19:7-9; Catechism of the Catholic Church, Par. 1602-1620.

²⁰ Pope Francis, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, EVANGELII GAUDIUM http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazioni-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

D) Can you think of examples wherein the lack of integrity between someone's faith and life caused damage?

From Pope Francis: *"All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives. In your heart you know that it is not the same to live without him; what you have come to realize, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you also need to communicate to others. Our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing. The witness of faith that each Christian is called to offer leads us to say with Saint Paul: "Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Phil 3:12-13)."*¹⁹

Suggestions for further prayer and meditation: Matthew 7: 21-23; Matthew 15: 7-9; 1 John 4: 20; James 1:26; Acts 4:1-22

17 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 43. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

18 Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 21. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html

19 Pope Francis, *APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, EVANGELII GAUDIUM* http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazioni-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

E) *Pope John Paul II wrote, "Without doubt a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about what is needed is to first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself present in these countries and nations".*⁸

What do you think would help the Church to "repair the fabric" so that it can be more of a home and school of communion?

F) Recently, the image of Pope Francis embracing a man who was disfigured by boils has captured the imagination of the world. Why do you think this gesture was so meaningful?

From Pope Francis: *"I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up."*⁹

6 Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 43. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html

7 Gaudium et Spes, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

8 Pope John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*, 34. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

9 Pope Francis, interview 30 September 2013.

Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. The above questions will ask, whether they are people to whom Christ has never been proclaimed, or baptized people who do not practice, or people who live as nominal Christians but according to principles that are in no way Christian, or people who are seeking, and not without suffering, something or someone whom they sense but cannot name. Other questions will arise, deeper and more demanding ones, questions evoked by this witness which involves presence, sharing, solidarity, and which is an essential element, and generally the first one, in evangelization.”¹⁸

A) Who has exemplified this kind of witness in your own life?

B) Can you remember a time when you experienced this kind of “irresistible question” being stirred in you by someone else’s witness?

C) Why is the integrity of faith and life so important in the Church’s mission of evangelization?

Section 11

Why a New Evangelization is Needed in Oklahoma

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 13: “The work of evangelization that is particularly urgent in our time and place, however, is what Blessed John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI referred to as the new evangelization. Its focus is on the nations and cultures where the Gospel has been proclaimed, but where the flame of faith has been reduced to a barely glowing ember. A once fervent faith has given way to a lukewarm indifference. We all know many people today who are nominally Christian or nominally Catholic. They still claim to believe but act as though God does not exist. They compartmentalize their faith, as though it pertained only to Sundays or certain religious exercises. Their faith has little or nothing to do with the way they live their lives each day. Though they have not formally rejected Christ or his Gospel, the lives of many Catholics are informed far more by the conventional values of the secular culture than by the liberating truth of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church.

Commentary: At the Second Vatican Council, it was noted that one of the most serious problems of our times is the split between faith and life. “This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.”¹⁷ This was reiterated by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelization in the Modern World*, in which he underscored the power and importance of giving personal witness to the Gospel. He writes: “Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. *Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them?*

Section 6

The Conversion of the Baptized

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 8: “Through baptism into the Church, which is holy, we become holy. Through a living faith we participate in the Church’s holiness. The Sacrament of Baptism begins our initiation into the holiness of God. Through baptism and the other sacraments of initiation we become living members of the Body of Christ, the Church (1Cor 12:12f).”

Commentary: Pope John Paul II talked about bringing baptized people to conversion. One particularly poignant passage is found in *Catechesi Tradendae* 19:

“The specific character of catechesis, as distinct from *the initial conversion-bringing proclamation of the Gospel*, has the twofold objective of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But in catechetical practice, this model order must allow for the fact that the *initial evangelization has often not taken place*. A certain number of children baptized in infancy come for catechesis in the parish without receiving any other initiation into the faith and *still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ*; they only have the capacity to believe placed within them by baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit. . . . This means that ‘catechesis’ must often concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, *with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ* on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith.”

Catechesi Tradendae 20: “[W]ithin the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, *having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given Him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself*, to know His ‘mystery,’ the kingdom

of God proclaimed by Him, the requirements and promises contained in His Gospel message, and the paths that He has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow Him.

It is true that *being a Christian means saying 'yes' to Jesus Christ*, but let us remember that this 'yes' has two levels: It consists in surrendering to the word of God and relying on it, but it also means, at a later stage, endeavoring to know better and better the profound meaning of this word."¹⁰

A) What is it like to have a "living faith" as opposed to a "dead faith"?

B) When you reflect on your own life and experience of being catechized, do you feel that it led you to an "explicit personal attachment to Jesus"?

C) When you think of your own experience and that of the Catholics you know, would you say that "self-entrustment to Jesus" has been an important part of your experience?

15 Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 25. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html

16 Pope Francis, *Message to Conference on Evangelizing the Americas*, November 2013. <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/francis-video-message-to-conference-on-evangelizing-the-americas>

C) What do you think of the Holy Father's observation that "gestures and signs of faith" can be repeated, yet "fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus"? How would you characterize the "mental shift" that the Holy Father is prompting us to?

D) When there is a disconnect between the faith practiced on Sunday and life lived Monday through Saturday, what do you think would help people to live a more fully integrated life, wherein they see all of life through the lenses of faith?

Suggestions for further prayer and meditation: John 4:23-24; Matthew 11:28-29.

From Pope Francis: *"The objective of all pastoral activity is always directed by the missionary impulse to reach everyone, without excluding anyone and taking into account the circumstances of each one. All must be reached and share the joy of having encountered Christ. It is not about going as one who imposes a new obligation, as one who remains in reproach or complaint in face of what is considered imperfect or insufficient. The evangelizing task implies much patience, much patience, looks after the wheat and does not lose peace over the darnel. And it is also able to present the Christian message in a serene and gradual way, with the scent of the Gospel as the Lord did. It is able to privilege in the first place what is most essential and most necessary, namely, the beauty of the love of God who speaks to us in the dead and risen Christ. Moreover, it must make an effort to be creative in its methods; we cannot remain enclosed in the topic 'it was always done this way.'"*¹⁶

D) From your point of view, how central is the word of God to our lived experience as Catholics?

E) Pope Francis has said (see below) that by our baptism we are missionary disciples. He grounds this calling in the "the experience of God's saving love" and the "encounter with the love of God." To what extent have you encountered — or do you have yet to encounter — God's personal love for you?

From Pope Francis: *In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him "because of the woman's testimony" (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, "immediately proclaimed Jesus" (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?"¹¹*

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, Catechesi Tradendae 19. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html

¹¹ Pope Francis, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, EVANGELII GAUDIUM http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

Section 7

Don't Settle for Mediocrity!

From the Pastoral Letter p. 9 to p. 10: *"When we begin to recognize our high calling we see how utterly unworthy of our dignity it is to settle for a life of moral or spiritual mediocrity and shallow religiosity. The call to baptism is the call to heroic sanctity, the call to become a saint. 'If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God' (Col 3:1-3).*

'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48). Our challenge is to embrace and proclaim anew this high standard of ordinary Christian living. Holiness is not the prerogative of an elite few. It is the fundamental vocation that every Christian receives in baptism. As Vatican II stated clearly, 'All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity' (Lumen Gentium, 40). This is the essence of holiness: perfect love of God and neighbor."

Commentary: Pope John Paul once wrote, "[I]t would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, *they would be not only mediocre Christians but 'Christians at risk.'* They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of 'substitutes,' accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions."¹² He went on to say, "Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding, in the context of 'globalization' and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures. Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the new evangelization. I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardor of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel'

ation and solidarity in order that the saving work of Christ may continue in the history of America with ever greater effect. Open to the unity which comes from true communion with the Risen Lord, the particular Churches, and all who belong to them, will discover through their own spiritual experience that 'the encounter with the living Jesus Christ' is 'the path to conversion, communion and solidarity'" (Ecclesia in America, 7)

After the European synod He wrote an apostolic exhortation Ecclesia in Europe, where he wrote:

"Everywhere, then, a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptized. Many ... today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all. Often they are lacking in knowledge of the most basic elements and notions of the faith. Many of the baptized live as if Christ did not exist: The gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus" (Ecclesia in Europa 47).

A) Why is the personal encounter with Jesus Christ "prior" to the renewal of the Church? Why is renewal unlikely to happen unless the personal encounter with Christ is made more central to our experience?

B) When the Holy Father refers to a "renewed proclamation," he means "the Gospel kerygma – the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith".¹⁵ What do you think about "the decision to entrust yourself to Jesus Christ"? Is this life of self-entrustment to Jesus a reality for you and the people you know? What has made the Lord's trustworthiness real to you?

Section 10

The Church Exists in Order to Evangelize

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 12: *“Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners to God and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious Resurrection” (Pope Paul VI, On Evangelization in the Modern World, 14). The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the One in whom all people find salvation. ‘Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations’ (Mt 28:19). There are still people who have not yet heard the Good News. Sadly, there are an increasing number of people even in formerly Christian lands who have not heard the Gospel. In these places and in many postmodern secular cultures a new atheism has been gaining new adherents. Our support and prayer for this mission “to all nations” (ad gentes) must continue. We are all called to share in this mission.*

Commentary: The publication of the apostolic exhortation On Evangelization in the Modern World in 1975 marked the beginning of what Cardinal Avery Dulles referred to as “the evangelical turn in the ecclesial vision of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II . . . one of the most surprising and important developments in the Catholic Church since Vatican II.” Evangelization seemed to emerge from the shadows as the total mission of the Church.

At the same time, the faith in many traditionally Christian countries seems to be flagging. To encourage the renewal of the faith, Pope John Paul II hosted a series of continental synods that focused on the New Evangelization. After the Synod on the Americas, he emphasized the necessity of a personal encounter with Christ in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America*:

“If it is genuine, the personal encounter with the Lord will also bring a renewal of the Church: as sisters and neighbors to each other, the particular Churches of the continent will strengthen the bonds of cooper-

(1 Cor 9:16). This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of ‘specialists’ but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves; they must proclaim Him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups.”¹³

A) What do you think about the fact the God is calling you to become a great saint?

B) What, in your opinion, would be an effective strategy for rejecting the temptation to settle for mediocrity or shallow religiosity?

C) There can be a temptation to think that radical holiness is just for nuns and priests or people who minister professionally in the Church. In what ways does Jesus call you to a more courageously Christian lifestyle in the context of an otherwise ordinary life?

D) The Holy Father refers to recovering the “impetus of the beginnings” which followed Pentecost. Have you ever had a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit? Do you cultivate a sensitivity and an openness to the action of the Holy Spirit in your own life?

E) Do you detect that the kind of “passion” that can drive a new apostolic outreach, lived as an “everyday commitment” is present in the Church in Oklahoma right now?

For further prayer and meditation: Revelations 3:1-6; Romans 12; Colossians 3; Psalm 31:14.

From Pope Benedict XVI: *“... we cannot forget that the first task will always be to make ourselves docile to the freely given action of the Spirit of the Risen One who accompanies all who are heralds of the Gospel and opens the hearts of those who listen. To proclaim fruitfully the Word of the Gospel one is first asked to have a profound experience of God.*

As I stated in my first Encyclical Deus Caritas Est: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (n. 1). Likewise, at the root of all evangelization lies not a human plan of expansion, but rather the desire to share the inestimable gift that God has wished to give us, making us sharers in his own life.”¹⁴

For further prayer and meditation: John 15: 1-17.

¹² Pope John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ineunte 34. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html

¹³ Ibid. 40.

¹⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Ubimque et Semper. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper_en.html

Jesus"? If you were to characterize your own experience of faith, which of these phrases is more apt?

B) What, if anything, helps you to "live in union with Christ?" What habits and disciplines support a deepening of intimacy with him?

C) What gets in the way of your intimacy with the Lord?

D) If someone were to ask you how they could "know" Jesus, how would you go about helping them?

F) What desires has the Lord put on your heart that might be an indicator of the particular charisms and mission to which he might be calling you?

Section 8

A Freely Bestowed Experience of Love

From the Pastoral Letter, p. 10 to p. 11: *"This high calling is beyond our mere human strength to realize, but not beyond our hope 'because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us' (Rm 5:5). Pope Benedict wrote about this divine source of love in his first encyclical letter. 'Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable; they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a 'commandment' imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love' (Deus Caritas Est, 18). Holiness, too, grows as love is put into action."*

A) Do you ever feel overwhelmed, intimidated, or turned off by the call to holiness?

B) Have you had the experience of being personally loved and accepted by God? If so, what was it like? Have you ever wished others could have this experience?

C) What obstacles could make it difficult for yourself or others to believe that the Lord loves you personally?

D) When it comes to cooperating with grace in the transformation of your character, what's the difference between attempting to get there by force of will, versus allowing the Lord's love to change you?

E) How does this understanding of God's personal love for each of us warrant against a tendency toward an unrealistic "perfectionism" and yet lead us toward the kind of perfection he wants?

F) It can be said that "Virtue is grace under pressure." Many canonized saints were ordinary people whose life circumstances unfolded in such a way as to expose virtue that might otherwise have remained hidden. People such as Saint Thomas More, Saint Maria Goretti, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Saint Edith Stein, Saint Gianna Mola, Saint Faustina Kowalska, Blessed John Paul II and Servant of God Stanley Rother have all been recognized for this, but there are others who have not been canonized whose courageous example can still inspire us, such as Father Walter Ciszek, Sophie Schall, Corrie Ten Boom, Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty and many others.

Who are some of the saints whose lives and stories have particularly resonated with your experience? What aspects of their story do you find particularly moving? Are there any other faith role models that stand out in your experience?

For further prayer and meditation: Philippans 1; Romans 12:2.

Section 9

Our Faith is Personal AND Communal

From the pastoral letter, p. 11: *"We must be clear that the call to holiness is not a license to indulge in a privatized and individualistic spirituality. On the contrary, it is a radical call to communion. Living our faith from the heart of the Church, living as disciples of Jesus, and sharing in the very life and love of the Holy Trinity, moves us to serve the needs of others, as Christ served. "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). To be holy is to live in union with Christ, to know him, to love him, and to imitate him in his concern for all. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council is insistent on this point: 'The Christian message does not inhibit men and women from building up the world, or make them disinterested in the welfare of their fellow human beings; on the contrary it obliges them more fully to do these very things' (Gaudium et Spes, 34)."*

Commentary: The first line of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is John 17:3—"Eternal life is this, to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." To know that I am loved and treasured by God is in itself a deeply healing experience. It prompts in me the desire for relationship and communion with others who have had that same experience. It answers a deep loneliness, arising from which is a desire to draw those who do not know God to experience his healing love. The call to mission is a burning desire to bring people into union with God. He will give us a way to do so that fits with our vocation and state of life.

A wise man once explained evangelization in this way: "It's like one blind beggar helping another blind beggar to find food." We don't evangelize in response to a guilt trip. When we've truly discovered the treasure of the Christian faith, evangelization is not a burdensome duty, but a consuming passion, lived out in different ways, according to the particular charisms given to us by God. "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. ..." (Ephesians 4:11).

A) What is the difference between "knowing about Jesus" and "knowing