



saying **YES**



A Catholic Study on Why & How To Share Your Faith

By Jeremy Rivera



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It's an exciting time in history to be Catholic. While there seems to be no end in sight to the bad news we see day after day in the media, there's a tremendous door of opportunity for a Catholic voice to share the Good News. But will that voice be heard? And will the language of that voice be understood by today's culture?

This is what the 'new evangelization' is all about – reminding ourselves that God has called all Catholics to reach out to others with the timeless gospel of Jesus Christ. We must learn how to do that in a way the culture around us can understand and respond to, and build bridges for the world that “God so loved” in order that all people may know the love of God in Jesus Christ.

But let's be honest. The reality is that the vast majority of Catholics in the United States are not inclined to evangelization, though we're beginning to see hopeful signs of change. The term 'evangelization' itself for most Catholics sounds Protestant. But the Church teaches that she is missionary by her very nature.

Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelization in the Modern World* states:

“We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”

In 1990, Pope John Paul II wrote in *Mission of the Redeemer*: “*I sense that the moment has come to commit all the Church’s energies to a new evangelization...No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.*”

So how do we fulfill this call? Recently, Timothy Cardinal Dolan uttered a profound, yet simple statement: “The new evangelization will be fulfilled with a ‘yes,’ not a ‘no.’” This is our opportunity to tell the world all of the true, good and beautiful things the Catholic Church is *for*, and not just what she is *against*. It’s an opportunity to propose (not impose) a new way of life, based on the love and truth revealed in Christ.

Every person is created with unique gifts, talents and temperaments – all of which can be used to reach others who have yet to hear or understand the good news of God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Whether you are an extrovert and like to engage others in faith conversation or are more reserved and prefer to let your life do the talking, as Catholics, we’re all called to this work, not just priests and religious.

When John Paul II uses the term “a new evangelization” he does not mean a new message. Evangelization cannot be new in its content since its very theme is always the one gospel given in Jesus Christ. But he does provide some detail about how to go about fulfilling the new evangelization in *The Church in America*:

The new evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers (pg. 70)... It is more necessary than ever for all the faithful to move from a faith of habit, sustained perhaps by social context alone, to a faith which is conscious and personally lived (pg. 72).

In order to share Christ with others in their own ‘language and culture’ we need to know where people are today in their worldview. Often in Catholic circles, we presume that the world outside the Church has some understanding of our traditions or our Faith. But this couldn’t be further from the truth, which is why Christ and the Church are calling us to use ‘new methods, ardor and expression’ in our effort to bring the riches of Christ and His gospel to them.

God is changing the world one soul at a time and wants to reach others through *you*.
Welcome to this labor of Love!

Healing Our Image of God

Modern science confirms the fact that if the initial premise of a hypothesis is false, every subsequent conclusion thereafter will also be false. Consider golf. If a golf ball is struck inaccurately at impact, by even two or three degrees, the consequence will be magnified in flight, with the ball usually ending up somewhere other than the fairway. The same is true with our image of God. It's critically important to begin with a premise that is true and accurate because if we get 'God' wrong at the outset, it is difficult to get much else right down the road of faith.

Have you ever met someone who thinks or lives as if God is perpetually disappointed or angry with them? Do you know someone who thinks God is distant from the world and uninvolved with the daily affairs of life? Do you have any friends or family members who you wish had a more accurate understanding of who God is and what He desires for their lives?

As an exercise to get us thinking as evangelists, please make a short list of people who you wish had an accurate understanding of the God that Jesus Christ reveals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Remember this list, as we'll refer back to it in later chapters. For now, say a brief prayer for those on this list as a starting place in your evangelization effort

How Do We Know?

A quick glance at human history reveals a simple fact: Man is a religious being. Temples, mosques, churches and totems; the varied people-groups, nations and cultures on earth reveal that it's not a question of whether or not we're a people of worship, but a question of what or who we worship. The debate is as long as history itself, "who is God?" and "how can you know for sure?"

General Revelation

As believers rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, we've come to know God as One who desires to be known. The Catechism teaches that "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in Himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man" (CCC 1).

God draws close to man. How does God reveal Himself to us? First, He does this in a general or universal sense through the created order such as nature and natural law.

St. Augustine, a Doctor of the Church, approaches this subject with a challenge:

Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air distending and diffusing itself, question the beauty of the sky...question all these realities. All respond: "See, we are beautiful." Their beauty is a profession. These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One who is not subject to change (Sermon 241).

Read Romans 1:19-20

What does St. Paul say people can know from the created world? What experiences with nature have helped you to see or understand God?

Specific Revelation

Beyond nature and natural law, two other means which are specifically helpful to us in our evangelistic efforts are the Incarnate and written Word of God.

Jesus of Nazareth

The clearest picture we have of God the Father comes to us in the life, death and resurrection of the second Person of the Trinity: the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. While we can understand the teachings of the Trinity, we also embrace the mystery that we cannot fully comprehend the intricate details of the Godhead. However, while we know Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh (Immanuel = God with us) and is the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets as the Messiah, we also know He was fully human, taking on our earthly nature in all ways except for sin (Hebrews 4:15). History and the calendar itself revolve around the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

When thinking about the life of Jesus, have you considered how He reflects God? Consider his mercy and compassion for the suffering, his righteous anger in the Temple, his humility in leading the disciples through service, his discipline to wake and pray early, and ultimately, his love for all of us upon Calvary's cross. Everything Jesus said and did was for a purpose. In Jesus, we come to know and see God.

Read John 14:9-10 and Luke 7:36-50

If Jesus reveals God the Father, how does the story from Luke comfort you about God's posture toward sinners? Discuss your own understanding of God, both prior to an adult commitment to Christ and currently.

Sacred Scripture

For centuries, Christians throughout the world have clung to the inspired word of God recorded in Sacred Scripture. Written in three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic) over 1,500 years, the Bible is the most published and widely distributed book in history. From the earliest days of Christianity, the Holy Spirit guided the Church to determine which books were to be considered Canonical. As St. Augustine says, "But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me" (Contra epistolam Manichaei 5, 6: PL 42, 176).

God draws near to us through His written Word. While Jesus is the Word incarnate, the Bible is the inerrant and inspired written word of God given to us to further reveal the nature, character and will of God the Father. In other words, Scripture tells us who God is and gives us countless examples and true stories of individuals who walked with Him by faith.

All Scripture is inspired (transliterated = God-breathed) by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16).

In the Gospel writings, the Parables are some of the most revealing and powerful stories people remember about Jesus' teaching. Parables (transliterated = a word alongside) are earthly stories that reveal heavenly truths. Whether we're talking about the parable of the "Prodigal Son" or the parable of the "Mustard Seed", these stories reflect the truth about God's priorities and His Kingdom.

Read 1 Timothy 2:4, John 3:16, 2 Peter 3:9

What do these verses convey about God's desire for all people? How ought this understanding of God guide and direct our motivations and efforts to reach others?

When taken into consideration as a collective whole, it's great news to discover that the God who made us not only loves us, but also likes us and desires to be in relationship with us. To discover God is for you and not against you, that He yearns to give His grace to you, is a very life-changing and liberating realization. When we have an accurate and true understanding of who God is, as revealed in nature, Scripture and Jesus Christ, we can begin to move into true freedom. He came to give liberty to the captives!

Life Application

So many of those we encounter in life are weighed down by the bonds of unhealthy shame and self-hatred. Many simply do not know they were created to love and be loved, to know and be known. As people turn to counterfeits for love and acceptance, may we pray for the courage to feel their pain, to sit in their loneliness and contemplate their dilemma deep enough that it would drive us to action; that we would be compelled by love to risk rejection in order to share the love of God with them. True compassion means to suffer with people, not simply to feel bad for them. Compassion and evangelization have a great deal to do with each other as both call us to action.

ACTION POINT

Please re-visit the list of names on page 3. Re-write their names or add new ones to your list of people who you are praying to have an encounter with Christ. Ask God to give you greater compassion for those far from Him.

Getting Over Our Fear of Rejection

We cannot underestimate the debilitating effects of fear. In the Old Testament, as Moses and Aaron sent out the 12 spies to investigate the land of Canaan prior to crossing the Jordan River, we see what happens when people give in to their fears. Ten of the 12 spies gave a negative scouting report to the Israelites after they returned. Only Joshua and Caleb remained faithful. Although the ten acknowledged the land was indeed good and plentiful, they made the Israelites' hearts melt with fear by saying, "The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven. We also saw the sons of Anakim there" (Deuteronomy 1:28). God's frustration with the Israelites was evident, "Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb...because he has followed the Lord fully" (Deuteronomy 1:35-36). For the full story, read Numbers, chapter 13.

Throughout the gospels, and echoed throughout the Pontificate of John Paul II, "Be not afraid" was and continues to be a direct command for all Christians. As we'll learn in this chapter, we will need a healthy dose of courage if we're going to be faithful and effective in our evangelization efforts.

It is no secret that sharing your love for Jesus Christ and the Church can be very intimidating and challenging at times. In this chapter, we will address many of the common fears associated with evangelization and hopefully equip you to overcome the fears you have.

Identify Your Fears

First, we have to name them. Just as the Israelites had to wage war against the various enemies in the Promised Land (Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Cannanites), so too must we battle with spiritual enemies, and "Fear" is one of them.

Consider the following list and rank them in order from 1-5, one being the greatest fear or hesitation to sharing your faith:

- _____ Afraid I will be asked a question I do not know
- _____ Afraid they will ask about a moral issue I may not be equipped to answer (i.e., same sex marriage), in which my response could turn them off from Christ and the Catholic Church
- _____ Afraid of what their perception of me will be if I do share with them
- _____ Afraid it will cost me my friendship or relationship with them
- _____ Afraid I will offend them in some way

We will come back to this list but first, while it may do little to comfort us, it's important to begin our discussion by reminding ourselves what our Lord Jesus said we should expect in living and sharing our faith:

Read John 15:18-20 and 2 Timothy 3:12

What do Jesus and St. Paul say will happen to Christians?

The Gift of Rejection?

Believe it or not, rejection for the sake of Christ is considered one of the greatest gifts of grace an individual could receive. How? For centuries, the Catholic Church has given special acknowledgment to those men and women who have given their lives for the sake of Christ; they are the ones given the crown of martyrdom in the book of Revelation. We remember them with special honor in the Liturgy of the Mass when our Priests wear red colored vestments, such as the feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch on October 17th. St. Ignatius, who was fed to lions in the Colosseum in Rome, was following in the footsteps of the original apostles. Ten of the original 12 disciples and St. Paul were all martyred (transliterated = witness) for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Read Luke 6:22-23 and Matthew 10:26-32

Why does Jesus say to rejoice when you are persecuted for His Name's sake? How might we develop a heart that rejoices in persecution? What does Jesus say about those who confess Him before others?

While rejection is never fun, it can do great things for our faith, especially if we struggle with being lukewarm. Historically, the Church has experienced Her greatest growth in times of trial and persecution.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19

Why does St. Peter tell us we are “blessed” if we are rejected for the name of Christ?

Facing our Fears – Paper Tigers

Have you ever heard of the phrase “paper tigers”? A paper tiger is a term that describes something which appears to have power but in reality is ineffectual. This expression became known in the West as a slogan that Mao Tse-Tung's Chinese communist state used against their opponents, particularly the US government. Understanding our fears with evangelization as ‘paper tigers’ is important. Our fear actually lacks substantive power to harm us even though at first glance, the fear can be paralyzing.

Examine again the “Paper Tigers” stated below. Consider specifically why the fear we have is irrational, and how we should properly think about, and respond to, these fears. After you’ve gone through and discussed each one, see the endnotes at the end of this chapter for further advice on how to discern these paper tigers.

PAPER TIGER #1

I’m afraid I will be asked a question I don’t know how to answer or that I will misrepresent God or the Church. Discuss.

Read the story of the man born blind in John 9:1-34

What does the man say, “I don’t know” to? What does he say in regard to what he does know? What application does this have for our own lives?

PAPER TIGER #2

I’m afraid they will ask about a moral issue I may not be equipped to answer (ie same-sex marriage or contraception), which could turn them off from Christ and the Catholic Church. Discuss.

PAPER TIGER #3

I'm afraid of what their perception of me will be if I do share with them. Discuss.

PAPER TIGER #4

I'm afraid it will cost me my friendship or relationship with them. Discuss.

Read Matthew 10:34-39

What does Jesus say He came to bring to the earth? What does this passage say about how we prioritize relationships?

PAPER TIGER #5

I am afraid I will offend them in some way. Discuss.

Read Colossians 4:5-6

How does this Scripture say we are to conduct ourselves with those outside the Church? Specifically, how are we to speak with those outside the Church so as to avoid offense?

Endnotes: Suggestions for our Fears

PAPER TIGER #1

I'm afraid I will be asked a question I don't know how to answer or that I will misrepresent God or the Church.

Suggestion #1: Not knowing an answer to a question is okay. While we strive to be prepared to give a reason for our hope, in no way does this make us responsible to respond perfectly to people's often challenging and complex questions about Christianity or the Catholic Church. Give yourself permission to say, "I don't know, but I can find out and get back to you." Sometimes we make the opposite mistake of coming across as a 'know it all,' and it's refreshing for a non-Believer to meet a Christian who is still seeking and has the honesty to say, "I don't know."

Suggestion #2: Tell your story. No one can argue with the power of a changed life. God has called us to be faithful witnesses, people who confess Christ before men. It can be very effective to learn how to share your personal story of how your life has been touched and transformed by the Risen Christ.

PAPER TIGER #2

I'm afraid they will ask about a moral issue I may not be equipped to answer (i.e., same sex marriage or contraception), which could turn them off from Christ and the Catholic Church.

Suggestion #1: Often, moral issues like these serve as smoke screens to the real issues going on in their lives. Instead of surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we often want to look for excuses to justify our lifestyle or behavior that is in contradiction to the Christian faith; such as problems with the organized Church hierarchy or moral teachings. We cannot let these smoke screens prevent us from engaging in dialogue about Jesus Christ, his life, his teachings and his death and resurrection. There is often a question behind the question and it is there at the root that we bring the light and love of Christ.

PAPER TIGER #3

I'm afraid of what their perception of me will be if I do share with them.

Suggestion #1: Though funny, the saying also tends to be true that "you wouldn't care so much about what people think about you if you realized how little they did." Often, our concern with our image is an issue of unhealthy pride and vanity. Sometimes, the greatest way to get over our fear of rejection is to be rejected. Everyone will not always like us, especially if it means remaining faithful to our loyalty and devotion to Christ as Lord.

Suggestion #2: While their perception of you may change, how do you know it will not change for the better? In the relativistic culture of our time, it is rare to meet people who live with conviction and stand for something they believe in. Speaking the truth in love or refusing to go along with the crowd is also a form of evangelization.

PAPER TIGER #4

I'm afraid it will cost me my friendship or relationship with them.

Suggestion #1: While we hope and pray that sharing Christ with a friend or family member would strengthen the relationship, being a Christian (as we learned previously) doesn't come without its cost. However, since we are called to continually reach out and love non-believers, ending a friendship or relationship, except for extreme circumstances, is never what we would hope for. God is all about relationship; therefore, we shouldn't allow someone's rejection of Christ keep us from remaining involved in his or her life. God never gives up on people and it is often this slow kind of patient love that penetrates the hardened heart. If someone does not want to be in friendship with you because of your faith or your attempts to share Christ with him or her, continue to pray for them and for grace to bear the rejection for His sake.

PAPER TIGER #5

I'm afraid I will offend them in some way.

Suggestion #1: Even though the Gospel, which by itself can at times offend one's sense of independence and worldliness; as the messenger, you do not have to be. For example, declaring certain truths to be absolute can irritate someone who believes all truth is relative, but the manner and tone in which you share your beliefs and convictions (when coupled with compelling reasons) can say even more.

Finding What You're Looking For

When Jesus first encountered two of his disciples fishing in the Sea of Galilee, he said to them, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Before this encounter with Peter and Andrew, Jesus knew what He was looking for: fishermen who could learn to become fishers of the hearts and souls of other men. After all, if you want to catch fish, you have to place yourself in a position to do so. But being on a boat in the sea surrounded by fish isn't quite enough; you would have to cast your net into the water as well. In today's language, you're not going to catch any fish if your line isn't in the water. Similarly, if you want to become effective at evangelization, you will have to put yourself in a position to share Christ with people who do not know Him. If you're looking for them, you will find opportunities everywhere!

Revisit the “Great Commission” from Matthew 28:19

What is the first word of this verse? How is this different than inviting someone to Mass or a FOCUS-related function?

In several gospel passages, Jesus refers to the Church as the “light of the world,” “a city set upon a hill” and “the salt of the earth.” The time has come for us to get out of the saltshaker and into the world!

Training Our Eyes and Ears

Have you ever experienced getting your heart set on something, perhaps a certain kind of car for example, and as soon as you knew it was what you really wanted, you began to see that kind of car everywhere?

Why do you think this happens? Do you believe those cars were always there before you began noticing them? What changed?

Read the story in Luke 7:36-50

What are the two differing perspectives of Jesus and the Pharisee about the immoral woman? Who did Jesus see as opposed to whom the Pharisee saw?

What Do You See?

How we view the world, and especially people outside the Church, is critically important to the work of evangelization. We need to pray that we would see those far off from God as Christ sees them and be creative in our effort to bring Christ into view.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5

What does St. Paul say he is taking captive in order to obey Christ? How do our thoughts affect our efforts or lack thereof to share our faith?

Read Romans 12:2 and Philippians 4:8-9

How does St. Paul tell us we can be transformed in the Romans verse? What are we encouraged to set our minds on in the Philippians verse?

Listening to the Question Behind the Question

Active listening is one of the best disciplines an effective evangelist can develop. By listening closely to what others are saying, like a good physician, we will be able to better identify the root of their pain and frustration. From there, God will guide us in knowing where to begin and what to say when the opportunity presents itself. Often, especially in cases of hostility towards Christ or the Catholic Church, there is usually an underlying pain or hurt the person has experienced which is masked in anger or arrogance. By becoming avid listeners and with God's grace, we will be able to move past the smoke screens of anger or debate, and eventually speak into their wound with the healing balm of truth found in God's unconditional love.

Read James 1:19

What does St. James encourage us to be quick to do? How well are you able to listen intently to other people?

Learning a New Language: Relating to A Broken World

In 1999, Pope John Paul II wrote the post-synodal Apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, (*The Church in America (EA)*). In it, Chapter VI is entitled, “The Mission of the Church in America Today: The New Evangelization.” FOCUS is one of many ministries to have sprung from this call for a “new evangelization” in America.

He notes:

It is more necessary than ever for all the faithful to move from a faith of habit, sustained perhaps by social context alone, to a faith which is conscious and personally lived (EA 72).

The new evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers (EA 70).

Based on the quotes above, what does having a faith that is “conscious and personally lived” have to do with evangelization?

Why do you think John Paul II stresses the need to learn to communicate the gospel in the language and culture of its hearers’? Discuss how well you do this.

Building Bridges by Meeting People Where They Are

Historically, one of the common roadblocks keeping the masses from Christ has been the struggle of individual Catholics to relate to those they are trying to reach. The Second Vatican Council was partially motivated because of this reality. In our pursuit of holiness, there is a fine line between retreating from “worldliness” and drawing near to “the world” that God so loved. It can be a difficult balancing act. However, the paradox of this delicate tension is that both are necessary. Our universal calling to holiness and evangelization is a “both and” and not an “either or” command.

The hard work of the ‘new evangelization’ is all about building bridges with people who have left the Church or who have never come to faith in the timeless gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is critical that we be able to relate with them and speak to them in a manner they can relate to as well. Leadership requires the virtue of Prudence. As Christians in various stages of spiritual growth and maturity, we ought to know our limits and our weaknesses in regard to the extent we go in relating to the lost. Our encouragement is that you start evangelizing. You do not have to be good at evangelization in order to start, but you have to start in order to become good.

Read Acts 17:22-23; 28

**How is St. Paul building a bridge with the people of Athens?
In verse 28, what does St. Paul quote as a means to engage them further?**

Finding Common Ground

God has given each of us a unique life: where we were born, our size and stature, our facial features, our ethnicity, our temperament and personalities, our families, our spiritual gifts. No human life is the same. However, despite the unique differences each person has, we should never forget that as human beings, we share a great deal in common. All people seek to be loved and to love, to know and to be known; we all have fears and insecurities, we all have experienced pain and suffering. As St. Augustine has noted, “God had one son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering.” To be an effective evangelist, we need to be able to find this common ground with those outside of the Church in the hope of helping them discover and respond to God’s love.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Why does St. Paul say he ‘becomes all things to all men’? How can you do a better job of relating to those who do not believe or follow Christ or the Church? Discuss this with the group.

The Love Motivation

Briefly examine your heart in order to find what motivates you to share your faith with others. The motives of our evangelization efforts are important to evaluate since we know God is the One who searches our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7). Not everyone has a passion or conviction to share Christ with others, as many Catholics find faith a very private matter, one that doesn't need to be shared with others. In this case, it is best to be honest about our lack of zeal and ask God for the grace to share in His compassion for the lost, the unaware, the misguided, the disillusioned and the hurting and broken. Pray for all members of the Church to be stirred with a love so great that they cannot keep it to themselves.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14 and John 13:35

What does St. Paul say motivates or compels him in his ministry? How does Jesus say we will be recognized as His disciples?

Sometimes, the greatest love we can express to another is to tell them the way of salvation. Sharing the truth in love is one of most challenging things to do well, and we will fail at times. The key is to get back up and continue praying and trying with those you find it most difficult to reach. Remember, evangelization is a labor of love!



Final Thoughts

As previously mentioned at the beginning of this study, we cannot give what we do not have. Evangelization begins and ends with a living and vibrant relationship with the Risen Christ. As Pope Paul VI proclaimed, “people are more likely to listen to witnesses than they are to teachers, and the teachers they are willing to listen to, are those who are first witnesses.”

May God bless you in your desire to proclaim the riches of Christ with the world around you. As God said to Joshua prior to crossing the Jordan River, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

Peace of Christ be with you,

- Jeremy Rivera