

Guidance & Responsibility

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I have tried to imagine the spiritual condition of the brother we are currently evangelizing after setting out on the journey with the Holy Spirit and the evangelizer over a period of time and in terms of sharing and clarification – basically the situation spoken about today by Stefania and Andrea and by Sofia and Linda yesterday.

The resulting image is this:



At this stage of the evangelizing process, our brother finds himself in a dilemma, whether to abandon worldly affairs or to choose the things of God, whether to dethrone the self, or give priority to God.

I think we can all say from experience, that the task is difficult, and even if our experience is considerable, we nevertheless need to continually give assent to the Lord.

With the grace of the Holy Spirit we can achieve success, just as our brother can if the “evangelizers” are able to be sensitive, caring and accessible guides.

In this regard, and before going deeper into this further stage of our evangelizing mission, it might be useful to review certain definitions which are always worthwhile considering.

What does “evangelize” mean?

It means to bear witness, through works and the Word, that Jesus is the Lord. He is alive and present among us.

And, before all else, we must review our answers to these questions:

What does Jesus do and mean for me?

The most evident reply, based on the experience of the disciples which we can make our own, is:

Jesus saves: In Him alone there is salvation.

This topic of salvation features with some frequency in the Gospel readings in the weeks after Easter.

“Salvation is not to be found elsewhere; this alone of all the names under heaven has been appointed to men as the one by which we must needs be saved.” (Acts, 4:12)

Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, the liberator and the savior of His people by virtue of having sacrificed His life for the sake of many and His resurrection which raised Him to the right side of His Father from whom he was given power over heaven, the earth and everywhere.

He is the Lord.

This is the first profession of faith of the disciples when the Risen Christ appears to them in the supper room. A profession of faith which we ourselves should profess daily, because we cannot announce to our brothers that Jesus is the Lord if previously we have not undergone the profound experience.

St Paul comes to our aid when he tells us ***“The heart has only to believe, if we are to be justified; the lips have only to make a profession of faith, if we are to be saved.” (Romans 10: 10)***

What follows is important. The profession of faith is important but, if it is not accompanied by that first instance which unfolds within the very depth of the heart, then it is quite hollow and valueless.

“It is from the center of the heart that faith arises.” St Augustine said in one of his sermons.

This faith of the heart is the fruit of a special unction of the Spirit. When we are tempted, when we are dejected or indecisive, when we are assailed by sin, we should try to repeat: **“Jesus is my Lord”**

Then we will experience his vitality and power. Vitality and power which will allow us to progress in the faith and instill in our heart the desire to exist for Jesus, for others and for all that is good and beautiful in this world, on account of Jesus.

All this means “entrust your own life to Jesus”. Have everything depend on him after having encountered him. Of course this does not exclude relapsing into our former ways, however, we must be confident that we can start afresh because we know that we are pardoned and invited to begin once more.

Our past, redeemed by Christ and His Grace, can help us to understand the plight of the friend under our care, since, in a certain sense, his experience, far from Jesus, is the same experience, which many of us have personally gone through.

Our approach of total trust in God must be coherent and humble. Humble because I should never forget who I once was and by whom I was pardoned, and only by being humble can I be coherent. With this interior approach can we now invite the brother we are evangelizing to entrust his own life to the Lord.

I should like to bear witness a moment:

When I prepared this teaching it was the first of May, the day on which Pope John Paul II was beatified and for those who could be present at this event can understand what it means to be “entrusted to Jesus”, the Totus tuus which John Paul II achieved during his lifetime.

Even in our poverty we are called upon to strive towards “the sanctification of our life” and to announce He who can sanctify: “Jesus”

Perhaps we have digressed but it is essential to keep in mind that we cannot proclaim what we do not live through ourselves.

Through the stages we are considering, we fulfill the mandate with which Jesus has charged us:

“go throughout the world and preach the Gospel to every creature”
(Mark, 16,15)

If we are able to guide our brother or sister, not with prayer alone, but also through service and bearing witness, in order to achieve this crucial step forward for his spiritual and human life, so that he may be in a position to say:

“ Lord, I do have faith. Help the little faith I have.”
(Mark, 9,24)

How can we overlook controversies, moral rules, the behavior of Christians so as to guide our brother towards the reality of “a new life” entrusted to the Lord?

- ❖ by having him understand that we love and esteem him precisely as he actually is, by opening our hearts to him by bearing witness to our faith in Jesus as the supreme gift of the Father of the world.
- ❖ by Leaving him free to either accept or reject, right away or in his own time, this immense gift, but invoking upon him the light and power of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ by blessing him

I should like to underscore the usefulness and profundity of “benediction”.

I am currently teaching Catechism and have the opportunity of dealing with one youth in particular who has suffered from various psychological disorders and therefore meets with obstacles in his capacity for learning.

Nevertheless, he wishes to be baptized and, following a consultation with the person responsible at the diocese, I was advised, after each meeting, to recite a prayer of benediction accompanied by the laying of hands.

This gesture, performed by Jesus and so dear to him, conveys consolation, peace, a sense of gratitude and fosters the healing process.

To return to our brother, we can recommend an “approach to a New Life in the Spirit which will help him to reinforce his decision, to become acquainted with his fellow brothers and sisters, and to take part in a small group of sharing which, in a certain sense, would precede the successive stage of the evangelizing process.

Every year, within our community, this approach is recommended, an approach which generates conversion and the desire to draw near the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

As far as the Sacrament of Reconciliation is concerned, it is important to underscore that, if it is true that complete conversion is brought about by this sacrament, it is precisely on this account that we offer up our sins to God, asking for His pardon and it is also to be kept in mind that our brother or sister we are evangelizing might be entwined in a human or family situation fraught with difficulty, for instance a civil marriage, cohabitation, a second marriage and so forth.

We should on no account deprive our brother of the comfort offered by an encounter with the priest with whom he can speak of his particular existential condition and, in this manner, come to terms with his relationships from an entirely new perspective.

I should like to end up with the aid of an image. It is the Last Supper painted by Giotto where we can identify the apostle loved by Jesus, his head resting on the Lord's breast. His name is not mentioned in the Gospel, yet it is exactly stated where he is and what he is doing. He was beside Jesus and resting his head on His breast.



Let us reflect for a moment:

That evening the disciple (oneself) loved by Jesus chose the best place: he leans near the heart of Jesus: neither on His shoulder, which symbolizes strength, nor on His arm which bespeaks forcefulness, but rather on that part of the body which brings to mind tenderness and love.

There is no better way to define “entrusting”

Amen.