

My friends in Christ...during his pontificate, Pope Benedict called for a year of Saint Paul, wherein we learned a lot about Saint Paul, his life, his writings, and so on. A couple years later (in fact the year when I entered seminary and began formation for the priesthood), he began the year for priests; later on, a year of faith. Pope Francis, so far, has had a year for religious life. And of course most recently, he has called for the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy.

And as I look back at these last ten years or so when the popes got to dedicate these various years for certain specific themes, I think to myself: why should the popes have all the fun? Perhaps priests of the Church can do the same for their own parishes. Well...why not? And so as of today, I hereby declare this coming year to be a Parochial Year for Evangelization.... But why? Why start this Parochial Year *today* of all days? It is because Christ is King. He is King and He is Lord of the universe. Christ is King of all Creation – King of kings and Lord of lords.

Christ is King of our *lives* – and even more importantly, He is King of our salvation...of our *eternal* lives. And in the end, this really will be the only truth that matters. The greater glory of God and the eternal salvation of our souls are all what matter at the last and in the end; and Christ is our King, our Lord and our God and our Savior. To *Him*, we offer praise; and *through* Him, to God the Father. And so, enough of this talk of how Christ is just a great moral teacher amongst great moral teachers, or a great preacher amongst many great preachers, and so on; as C.S. Lewis famously says in his “trilemma” in *Mere Christianity*, either Jesus is a lunatic...or a liar...or Lord. If a lunatic, then we “shut Him up for a fool.” If a liar, then “spit at Him and kill Him as a demon.”

But if He is *Lord*...then we can – and, in fact, we *must* – “fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.” We have no other recourse really (if He *is* Lord) but to fall on bended knee – especially when He is in our midst and truly present in the Eucharist...to fall on bended knee and pledge our lives to Him.... These, then, are our three options – our only options...and regardless of which we ultimately choose, as C.S. Lewis warns us, we must cease all “patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher.” For “He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” Yes, enough of this talk of how Christ and Mohammed and Buddha and Confucius are all on equal footing with one another; enough of this talk of how Christ is good for *me*, but perhaps Mohammed is good for

*you*, and maybe Buddha is good for that other person – because in the end, Mohammed did not die on the cross for my redemption, and Buddha did not open the gates of Heaven for me and for my salvation. In the end, it is Christ and Christ alone Who has done this, and He has done this for *me*, and He has done this for *you*, and He has done this for absolutely every single human being who is alive right now, who has ever lived, who ever will live. Christ is King. And whether or not you or me or anybody else freely chooses to accept that fact and so receive His gift that He *really* wants to give to us – that is our own affair. But whether we accept or reject it, the Truth remains. It is not subject to personal feelings or majority vote. Christ is King and He *alone* is the Giver of that most sublime gift of eternal life – the greatest and most supreme of all blessings and goodness.

And so, why this Parochial Year for Evangelization? It is because if we really do believe all of this to be true about Christ the King, then how can we not be so filled with joy and zeal to share this with everyone around us, going out to all the world to proclaim this glorious Gospel? Because the fact of the matter is that there are two-point-two billion people living on this planet Earth right now who claim the name of Christian. Which sounds great I suppose...*until* we remember the fact that there are about seven billion people on this planet. Only thirty percent, therefore, of people in this world are any variety of Christian. Thirty percent! That got me a solid “F” on a midterm exam one time in college! We are *not* succeeding.

Consider something a little closer to home. I had Peter look this up for me. Right now – in our very own ZIP code, 99223 – there are some thirty thousand people living here. And so if we go with the world-wide average of thirty percent, then thirty percent of thirty thousand is a little bit less than ninety-five hundred.... Are ninety-five hundred people coming to Mass here at Saint Peter any given Sunday? We are well below the world-wide average.... Consider the *state*-wide average. Here in the Pacific Northwest, we are remarkably *unchurched* compared to the rest of the nation – about ten percent Christian; and ten percent of thirty thousand is three thousand.... But do we have even *three* thousand folks coming to Mass here any given Sunday? We are well below the *state* average.

Now maybe that sounds just so depressing, so discouraging. I disagree. This is challenging, sure – but it is also a great opportunity for us to get out there and do the Lord’s work. I think of all

those poor suckers who live in parts of the world that are one-hundred-percent Christian; they have *nobody* to evangelize! We however have *lots* of people to evangelize! And *this* is why I am calling for a Parochial Year for Evangelization.

How this Parochial Year will unfold and what it will look like for us. First, perhaps I might propose something of a clever motto for this Year to help us keep in mind what our primary focus should be throughout this Year; after all, I *did* get my MBA from Wazzu with a focus in marketing, and clever mottos are the crown jewels of marketing! “Bring them in...keep them in...send them forth.” As a Catholic Church, we do pretty well I think with *catechizing* and *sacramentalizing* – that is the “bring them in” and “keep them in” parts. But we are just so terrible at *evangelizing*. We have a most difficult time of it using what we have, taking what we are given out there into the world thus to keep the train rolling. “Bring them in...keep them in...and *stop!*” As if *that* is how we do things around here, how we tend to operate. But no! We need to “send them forth,” send *you* forth, and send *me* forth, so that now *we* are out there, working in the Lord’s vineyard, bringing in the harvest, bringing in *new* people, keeping them in, that we can then send *them* forth...and the cycle continues.

To help us in all of this, there are several things that will be offered during this year; we will have evangelization “tips of the month,” for example, to be presented in the Sunday bulletin, in my Pastor’s Columns – along with “Saints of the month,” who exemplify these evangelization tips – a Saint recruited, as it were, to be our monthly patron saint of discipleship and evangelization. Also, we will have monthly bulletin inserts that will offer prayers and reflection materials on discipleship and evangelization – fuel, I hope, for our personal prayer and family prayer at home.

These will be great for helping us learn more about how to evangelize, but we have heard it before several times already and I say it again now, that we cannot give what we do not have. If we ourselves are not yet already evangelized – if we are not yet active and intentional disciples of Christ Jesus, faithful and joyful in giving glorious witness to God – then we cannot hope to be effective in *any* effort to evangelize others. In order to disciple the nations, we ourselves must first *be* disciplined; and to that end, something else during this Parochial Year for Evangelization are opportunities for us to *be* disciplined. I hope, then, to start a number of Scripture-based faith-sharing groups. Groups

of ten to fifteen people getting together with me on a regular basis to pray with the Gospel text for the Mass of the upcoming Sunday. Now these will *not* be Bible Study groups; we already have *that* going on. They are faith-sharing groups, and if you are interested in finding out more about these faith-sharing groups, please visit with me after Mass or come by the parish office during the week.

I also plan to offer a five-part series of brief faith formation presentations during Lent, after Stations of the Cross on Fridays, during the soup suppers. I did this up in Chewelah – and to some rather great success (if I do say so myself). The presentations will be based on a book called *Return*, by Brandon Vogt, who works with Bishop Robert Barron and his Word on Fire ministry. And still more, I hope to make greater use of Formed.org; for example, there is a fantastic Bible Study video series on the Eucharist, which I plan to make part of our Corpus Christi Novena in the spring, nine days of prayer and other parish activities, leading up to our Eucharist Procession on Corpus Christi Sunday. Also, throughout the year, I plan to invite members of FOCUS to visit us. Fellowship Of Catholic University Students. They are an amazing evangelization ministry working right now both at EWU and at WSU. In fact, the FOCUS regional coordinator for the whole region of the Pacific Northwest, Jeremy Cassidy, lives right here in Spokane; he and his family are all members of Saint Thomas More parish; he will come and visit with us, too.

I have been here now for five months, and I am profoundly enthusiastic for how awesome this parish is right now...*and* how awesome we are going to be very soon! Other priests have been telling me that *our* parish, more than any other parish in the whole diocese, *maybe* even in the whole of the Pacific Northwest, is the best parish, because as Bishop Daly himself would say, we are right on the cusp of “blowing it up.” We are a nucleus of awesome Christianity, and we cannot possibly be contained for very much longer. And when that dam bursts...then awesome evangelization will begin; and evangelizing (faithfully, boldly proclaiming the Gospel to all the world) is the surest sign that we have *finally* made it to the highest level of true, authentic discipleship. But is it even *possible* that *we* can do this? In the words of Doctor Strangelove, it is not only *possible*, it is *essential*. Christ wills it; Christ calls for this; Christ is King.... What, then, do we answer Christ the King?