



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

October 7, 2018, Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Parochial Year for Evangelization: October Tip of the Month

Our Parochial Year for Evangelization continues. Our evangelization tip of the month for September was: facilitate incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ. We are challenged now to inquire as to a person's readiness to receive the Church's Sacraments of Initiation and to arrange for it accordingly.

Our tip of the month for October is: do not condemn. Our primary model and example in this, of course, is Jesus Himself. "Neither do I condemn you," He said to the woman who had been caught in adultery. "Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more." Each of us is a sinner, and even though we are open to hearing His beautiful message of repentance and conversion, and we try very hard to cooperate with His grace to resist temptation and avoid sin, we are fallen, broken men and women nonetheless, and lapsing back into sin is all but inevitable.

But Jesus does not condemn; and neither should we when we reach out to others in a spirit of evangelization and faith formation, inviting them and welcoming them into the Church. And we find that the harshest words Jesus ever has to say to anyone are words condemning their actions or their hardness of heart or their closed minds to the Truth, the Gospel of salvation that He came to bring to all of us. He certainly condemned their actions, their behaviors...but never *them*. And as we look more closely at these instances of His condemnation of actions and behaviors, even then, His aim and end is to wake people up to repentance, conversion, and acceptance of the Gospel.

Jesus did not condemn anyone who simply had honest and heartfelt questions, maybe even objections. The rich young man had simple, honest questions about what he needed to do in order to inherit eternal life, and Jesus did not condemn him for asking questions. Even the Blessed Virgin Mary had questions: "How can this be," giving birth to the Messiah, "since I have no relations with a man?" And obviously, she was not condemned either.

When others ask questions and even express objections, first of all, we are invited once again to not condemn; we are invited also to explain and defend our faith. The irreligious and the sinners will have all kinds of questions for us, all kinds of objections, and just as Jesus welcomed them with love and mercy, so do we. And like Jesus, we can draw them to His Kingdom by means of a loving and compassionate proclamation of virtue, holiness of life, and ultimately salvation.

And so, we strive to imitate the Lord's compassion and merciful love, striving as He Himself did to associate with those whose lives may not be all that God desires of them, with those who may have questions and even objections about the faith. And all the while, we pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in their hearts as He has done in ours, while we humbly acknowledge that we ourselves have not merited the faith that we profess but have received it purely as a gift from Jesus, our loving, compassionate, and merciful Lord.

Our saint of the month is exemplary for reaching out to others in this manner: Pope Saint John Paul the Great, whose Memorial is October 22. A saint whose earthly life was in the lifetime of almost all of us here and now, we remember well how popular he was with Catholics and non-Catholics alike – even non-*Christians*. We remember the ecumenical prayer services that he led or participated in. Maybe the most striking and memorable moment of him refusing to condemn is when he visited his would-be assassin in prison, Mehmet Ali Ağca. If ever there was an occasion when it would have been understandable that one person would condemn another, it would have been then. But even then, the Pope was compassionate, loving, and merciful.

- Fr. Lewis