



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

April 1, 2018 ~ Easter Sunday

Parochial Year for Evangelization: April Tip of the Month

Our Parochial Year for Evangelization continues. Last month, March's tip of the month for evangelization was: become a person of welcome and develop relationships of care and trust, as part of the art of accompaniment with others on their journeys of faith and discipleship formation.

April's tip of the month is: establish a common interest with those whom we accompany on their journeys. Forming common interests with others seems to be just plain common sense when we want to get to know other people. As instruments in the hands of God, we strive to work with patience and perseverance in establishing mutual interests with others in evangelizing them, starting first where *their* interests lie, so as to prepare the ground for profitable discussion together later on with regard to spiritual matters.

This takes a great deal of active and engaged listening. The person whom we are working to evangelize may have no greater interest in watching the grass grow or the paint dry. So be it! Let that, therefore, be our interest, too! And active, engaged listening truly is a skill and an art. We may not actually be *doing* anything because listening is so passive, it seems; but in very truth, listening to a person takes hard effort, requires much activity (not passivity), and in the end produces great fruit.

Active and engaged listening is made easier for us when we track carefully what the other is saying and when we ask questions that further the conversation along and keep them talking so that we can better learn from them and get to know them: if the other person says "A", we should reply with "A-prime." If the other person then says "B", we should reply with "B-prime." And then, if the other person suddenly jumps to "M", and we are left to wonder how they could possibly have gotten so side-tracked when we expected "C", we do not reply with "C-prime" but with "M-prime."

Active and engaged listening is what empowers us to establish common interests with other people; listening to them long enough helps us to know them, where they are coming from, so that in this manner, we can gain their trust and their docile willingness to listen to *us* when, at last, it is our turn to speak and thus share with them our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesuit missionaries traditionally have been stellar in this regard; they would live and work in the village with the people for weeks, months, a full year simply to get to know them and their ways before making an initial attempt to speak to them about Jesus Christ and His Church.

The Dominicans, too, are great models for us in this holy endeavor: our saint of the month for April is a Dominican Sister and Doctor of the Church, St. Catherine of Siena, whose Memorial is April 29. She had to work very hard to bring about reconciliation and peace during some incredibly troubled times in Medieval Europe, in an era where two and even three different cardinals claimed to be the pope, and the papacy resided not in Rome but in France. Her efforts certainly required a great deal of active and engaged listening, for how else can enemies be really and truly reconciled if they cannot even speak with and listen to one another? Her endeavors sapped her life of energy so that she died rather young: at age 33.

May it be that her holy model of striving to listen to others so as to form common interests with them with the greater aim in mind of reconciliation, peace, and bringing the Light of Christ to others inspire us in our own efforts to relate with others, so as to share Christ with them and thus accompany them in their pilgrim's journey of faith toward the ultimate goal of the Kingdom of God.

~ Fr. Lewis