

You Wait Here

If you have ever brought a non-Catholic friend to Mass, you have probably felt the tension. They become a bit uncomfortable as they enter the church; everyone around them is dipping their fingers into water and then wiping it off on their heads and chests. As they sit down, people around them are falling to their knees, as if they were Roman soldiers in the presence of the Emperor. When the priest comes in, he speaks to the congregation, and everyone, except your friend, seems to know the right responses. Then when it is time for Communion you have to say, "Wait here, I'll be right back." What you had hoped would be an occasion to share your faith with a friend seems to be an awkward moment that only alienates him.

Is the Church saying "no" to non-Catholics? Not exactly. What the Church really says is, "Wait."

Imagine that you have a daughter who, after graduating from college meets a great young man, who is virtuous, faithful, and loves her very much. She brings him home to meet you, and he asks your permission to marry her. You find yourself wanting to

welcome him into your family. This is how the Church feels about non-Catholics. She is eager to welcome them into her fold. But first things first; before there is going to be real intimacy, there needs to be a wedding.

In marriage, the physical intimacy, which would be sinful before the wedding, becomes sacred afterwards. The sacrament of Holy Matrimony is the door through which the spouses must pass through before they become one. So too, for non-Catholics who want to receive the Eucharist, the physical intimacy of receiving Jesus Christ bodily is designed for a lifelong covenantal relationship with Jesus in His Church. Everyone is welcome, but first things first.

The Mass is the wedding feast of the Lamb, and if we are to attend, we are to do so as the Bride.¹ “The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery, it is so to speak the nuptial bath [cf. Eph. 5:26–27] which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist” (*Catechism*, no. 1617).

The Book of Revelation presents Jesus Christ meeting His Bride, the Church, for a wedding feast that precedes the unveiling. This is profoundly intimate language. Spousal love is a God given icon of the relationship Christ desires with us, a relationship that reaches full communion in the Mass.

Mass is the consummation of a love story, and to understand it, we must go back to the beginning. This love story begins through evangelization. In evangelization, our goal is not simply to get people to go to Church, or even simply to get them to go to Heaven. The goal is to allow Jesus to reach their hearts—to woo them into full earthly Communion.

When I asked my wife Michaelann on our first date, I asked her to go to dinner with me. Did I want her simply to go to dinner with me? No! I wanted her to *want* to go to dinner with me. If she had

¹ For norms regarding Communion, see *Code of Canon Law* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), can. 844.

accepted merely because she was hungry, I would have failed. As our desire for one another blossomed into romance, we found ourselves wanting to be together more and more. Eventually, our shared desire led us to come before God and pledge our lifelong love in the sacrament of Marriage.

So how do we as Catholics share our faith and draw others into relationship with Jesus? What would you say to someone who wanted to know why you were Catholic? If you are like many Catholics you might begin with, “Umm. . . . Well, I was raised Catholic. . . .” This is a good reason for being Catholic, but it does not really answer the question. Being raised Catholic is a great way to become a Catholic, but what about those who were not? The real question, behind the one asked, is, “Is there any reason why I should consider becoming Catholic?”

We should be ready to explain our faith at all times; Saint Peter put it this way, “[B]ut in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet. 3:15). Our willingness and ability to share our faith should overflow naturally from the joy in our lives. As we share our faith, the Mass plays an irreplaceable role, but in a way you might not at first think.

The Mass and Evangelization

Evangelicals invite people to their church services to evangelize them. Using the Mass the way Evangelicals use their church services can be awkward. Just as the Holy Eucharist is more than a mere piece of bread that only symbolizes Jesus, the Mass is more than a mere church service. Because of the radical difference between the Mass and other church services, we can’t do what Evangelicals can—we can do much more.

Imagine a man who goes down to the local dealership to buy a Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV). He selects the one he wants, haggles over the price, and buys it. He walks out to the lot, opens the door, throws the keys on the seat and begins to push his new car home. After a very short distance, he begins to regret his

purchase. Maybe he should have purchased a smaller car; this one is so hard to push. As he passes other cars parked on the side of the road, he sees one car after another that would be easier to push than his SUV, and his regret turns to frustration.

We all see his problem; the man is frustrated because he is not using his SUV in the way it is intended. If he got into his SUV, he would see that it was not a great burden; rather it would be able to carry great burdens for him. So it is with the Mass and evangelization. We need to see the Mass for the gift it is, given to us by Jesus Christ. When we *use* it properly, it prepares, inspires, and completes our efforts.

The role of Mass in evangelization is explained in the Second Vatican Council. "The Eucharist is 'the *source* and *summit* of the Christian life' [LG 11] 'The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it' [PO 5]" (*Catechism*, no. 1324, emphasis added).

The Eucharist is the *source* of our evangelistic efforts; it is from our communion with Jesus Christ that all of our efforts must flow. The Eucharist is also the *summit* of our evangelistic efforts; it is towards full communion that our evangelistic efforts should flow. But, in between, we are to take the reality of the Mass into our own lives and make Christ present in the world through our actions and words. As the *Catechism* explains, "The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church' [SC 9]: it must be preceded by evangelization, faith and conversion. It can then produce its fruits in the lives of the faithful; new life in the Spirit, involvement in the mission of the Church, and service to her unity" (*Catechism*, no. 1072).

More Than Meets the Eye

When we come to Mass, we enter into worship of God. I say "enter into" because the worship exists whether we are there or not. In the heavenly Jerusalem, the Blessed Trinity is worshipped day and night. The Mass is a real, but veiled participation in the heavenly worship. This is how the Church describes the Mass:

"[B]y the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life" (*Catechism*, no. 1326). "In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem" (SC 8).

In the Mass, we are united with all the saints and holy angels, including your particular guardian angel and the guardian angels of every person we will ever meet. Think of what Jesus Himself said about the guardian angels, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 18:10). Each person has a guardian angel with the primary responsibility of guiding that person through life. The Mass is the perfect time to ask the Holy Spirit for help in the work of evangelization, to ask your guardian angel to help you be aware of opportunities that arise, and to beseech the guardian angels of everyone you will meet to entreat God for the grace of forgiveness and conversion. It is this sense of mission that gives the Eucharistic liturgy its title, "*Holy Mass (Missa)*, because the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with a sending forth (*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives" (*Catechism*, no. 1332).

Full participation in the Mass is for those who are already fully incorporated into the Church. In fact, in the early Church, catechumens, those who had converted to Christ but had not yet been fully initiated through Baptism, would attend Mass, listen to the readings from Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the priest. Then they would be excused before the second part of the Mass, the liturgy of the Eucharist, began. The Eucharist was reserved for the fully initiated Christians.

Once baptized, the new Christians would receive Jesus in the Eucharist as the consummation of evangelization. "'The liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows' [SC 10] It is therefore the privileged place for catechizing the People of God. 'Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and

sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments especially in the Eucharist that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of men' [John Paul II, *CT 23*] (*Catechism*, no. 1074).

Seen in this light, evangelization is to the Mass, what courtship is to marriage. As a young couple gets to know one another more and more, their hearts long to be together. As they prepare for marriage, they learn what marriage entails. Only then is it time for marriage—a lifelong, covenantal commitment, and conjugal union. So too, evangelization is designed to awaken a love for God, and gratitude for His forgiveness and for all of His gifts. As an individual prepares for Holy Communion, this new convert should learn what the Christian life entails. Only then can the convert receive Baptism—a lifelong commitment, and the intimacy of Eucharistic Communion.

The Great Commission

The last words of Jesus on earth were, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28:18–20).

The "Great Commission," has several distinctive points. First, Jesus Christ has been given all authority. He then sends His disciples out to make disciples of the nations. He says, "Go therefore . . ."—and whenever you see the word "therefore" in Scripture, you should check to see what it is there for. In this case, the authority of Christ is precisely the reason we need to go make disciples of the nations, and He will be with us.

Jesus gives us two gifts to fulfill the Great Commission. First, He gives the fullness of His teaching—we are to teach *all* that He commanded. Second, He gives us Himself—we are to share the Real Presence of Jesus. The Catholic Church is the one place where we find both of these gifts.

The goal of evangelization is to introduce someone to Jesus Christ and to the Church He founded. We share how Jesus con-

tinues His saving presence on earth through His Mystical Body, the Church. As Christ Himself said to His disciples, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Lk. 10:16). Jesus is the vine and the members of His Church are the branches. In light of Jesus' teaching, to speak of loving Christ without loving His Church makes no sense at all.

Catholic faith is a faith in who Jesus is, and in all that He has done through His life, teaching, death, and Resurrection, and through the Catholic Church. Catholic faith is both described and implored when we pray the *Act of Faith*:

O my God, I firmly believe that You are one God in three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost; I believe that Your divine Son became man, and died for our sins, and that He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches, because You have revealed them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Commitment to Christ through His Church is the commitment that evangelization seeks so that someone can begin to receive the Holy Eucharist worthily.

Reasons Why Catholics Don't Evangelize

So, why don't Catholics evangelize?

Many Catholics are not comfortable as evangelists. In our modern world, we are trained to live and let live, not to *impose* our views upon others. But, as we have seen, these attitudes have to be reexamined in light of Jesus' Great Commission. We ought not to impose our views on others, but we have been commissioned by Christ Himself to charitably *propose* the truth of the Catholic faith to everyone. If we take a deeper look, we can see at least six reasons why many Catholics are hesitant to share their faith with others:

Lack of belief in objective truth.² As long as religion is seen only as a matter of preference, then our missionary zeal is thwarted. Catholics don't believe that Jesus is God only for Christians; we must believe that He is God, period. If Jesus is God, then those who do not accept His claims of divinity are wrong—not evil—but wrong, broken by sin and in need of the healing and forgiveness that only Jesus can give. Telling someone about the forgiveness of Jesus Christ should be like telling someone suffering from cancer about a cure.

A misunderstanding of the Church.³ Many people view separation from God as the only problem caused by sin. This is certainly the most significant effect, but not the only one. God originally created us to share kinship with Him and with one another. Humanity is intended to be a family. Salvation history can be summarized as God's gracious initiative to reconstitute the broken family of Adam into the family of God. Being disinherited from God's family through sin is precisely what we are saved from.

A reluctance to use the name of "Jesus."⁴ Evangelization is essentially making an introduction, and in order to introduce someone, you must know his name. Catholics seem to be comfortable speaking about "the Lord," but find it more difficult to use the name, "Jesus." Ironically and tragically, the name of our Lord is sometimes only heard when used in vain. Others, who would never dream of offending our Lord, show a sort of misguided reverence by never speaking His holy name. Listen to wisdom of Mother Church: "But the one name that contains everything is the one that the Son of God received in his incarnation: Jesus. The divine name may not be spoken by human lips, but by assuming our humanity The Word of God hands it

² For further reflection on this point, see *Catechism*, nos. 172, 174, 181, 843, 849, 851.

³ See *Catechism*, nos. 845–852, 959. For a compelling explanation of the Church, see Henri De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

⁴ For further reflection see *Catechism*, no. 2145.

over to us and we can invoke it: 'Jesus,' 'YHWH saves' [cf. Ex. 3:14; 33:19–23; Mt. 1:21]" (*Catechism*, no. 2666).

If you don't live it, you can't give it.⁵ Witness is absolutely essential. As Saint Francis of Assisi stated, "Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words." Our words mean little if they don't flow from a transformed life. You cannot give that which you do not have.

We may not love Christ, the Church, or others enough. "Our love for Jesus and for our neighbor impels us to speak to others about our faith" (*Catechism*, no. 166). We believe that Jesus is truly God, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which they may be saved" (Acts 4:12). We see the Church, not as a mere human institution, but as the very Family of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ and our Mother, as Saint Cyprian said, "He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his Mother."⁶ Therefore, how can we withhold this good news from others, if we truly love them?

We don't know what to say. The remainder of this chapter is designed to give you some suggestions of how to lead someone to Christ.

Relational Evangelization

All true evangelization is motivated by love: love of God and love of our neighbor. Both the message and the model of our efforts must be Jesus Christ. He spoke to the masses, but Jesus'

⁵ For further reflection see *Catechism*, no. 852–854.

⁶ *On the Unity of the Church*, no. 6 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 423.

See also, Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), no. 16: "[N]ot without sorrow we can hear people—whom we wish to believe are well-intentioned but who are certainly misguided in their attitude—continually claiming to love Christ but without the Church."

style was also deeply interpersonal as he spent significant time with a few. He invested His life in them and asked them to do the same. Saint Paul shares this principle with the early church: “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:8).

By investing our lives in people, we develop relationships, and within those relationships, we will have opportunities to share our faith. Evangelists are most successful when they have earned the right to be heard. Friendship is an end in itself; we are called to love people, period. But, if we love them, we will share what is most important in our life. If we have seen a great movie or read a great book, we will find opportunities to share this with our friends—how much more if we have discovered new life in Jesus?

There are at least three ways to begin a spiritual conversation:

Direct Method:

“How important is God in your life?”

“Do you believe in God?”

“Have you ever thought about becoming Catholic?”

Indirect Method:

FRIEND: “What did you do this weekend?”

Instead of responding “Not much, just relaxed.”

YOU: “I went to an awesome conference in Denver with some great people I’ve met. I learned about Christ centered principles for leadership.”

If your friend is interested, he will ask questions about the conference, providing you an opportunity to share your faith. If not, he will simply change the subject.

Invitational Method:

“Next week Dr. Edward Sri is speaking about Christlike leadership at the University. I’m going, would you like to come? I can give you a ride.”

Principles for Starting a Spiritual Conversation

Before we begin our conversations, we need to be prepared. Here are some helpful steps that prepare us to share the Gospel.

- Pray* for opportunities, and for the grace to recognize them.
- Take genuine *interest* in people, and share your love for Jesus with them.
- Be courageous in *taking risks*—this is the key.
- Take *every opportunity*, even split second ones.
- Always have an attitude of *love*—our motivation should be the same as God’s.
- Leave the *results* to God.

Talking about the Faith

First, we need a useful definition of successful evangelization: It is offering a meaningful introduction to Jesus Christ and life within His Church, and then leaving the results to the Holy Spirit. How do we share the Gospel message? Here are some basic and essential points that we should cover.⁷

A Loving Father. God is our Father; He created us in His image and likeness to be His children. His desire is to share His life and love—both here and in heaven. God is love. Many people today do not understand this and view God as a tyrant who wants to dominate and subjugate us. We can share God’s intent as revealed in Scripture: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you” (Jer. 31:3).

Sin Breaks a Relationship. Through sin, we turn away from God and reject His fatherly love. This rebellion has broken our fellowship with Him, resulting in alienation from God and one another. Sin has also destroyed the family God created. Sin has

⁷ The following is adapted from Real Life © 2003- FOCUS, a Gospel presentation used with permission by Fellowship of Catholic University Students. You can obtain copies of this presentation, as well as other tools to help explain these basic aspects of the Christian life, at www.focusonline.org. Ask for their “Evangelization Follow-ups.”

resulted in spiritual death. We are unable to repair this condition through our own efforts and we are in desperate need of help. As Scripture says: “[A]ll have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Restoration in Christ. By His life, death and Resurrection Jesus restores us to a relationship with God. Through Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, we can receive forgiveness of sins and adoption as sons and daughters of God, and can be welcomed back into fellowship with God and with one another. Jesus is the Savior of the world. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

Reborn in Baptism. Jesus offers His forgiveness freely, but we need to respond. Through Baptism, we are reborn with the very life of God in our souls, and we are welcomed back into the family of God, the Church.

It is not enough to know that Jesus died and rose from the dead; we need to repent and be baptized. We must respond to God’s grace, give up our self-centered life, and allow Jesus Christ to become the Lord of our life. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit is given to us, making it possible for us to begin living the Christian life. The first step is simply to ask God for forgiveness and commit to come home to Him and to His family, the Church. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Members of God’s Family. Jesus saves us into God’s family. Through faith and the sacraments, Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit, making us sons and daughters of God. We are not merely saved *from* sin, but saved *into* God’s family, the Church. Jesus gives us His Father as our Father, His Mother as our Mother, and His brothers and sisters become ours as well. The Church is God’s plan of salvation.

We must see that salvation has consequences. Because of sin, we were alienated from God’s fatherly love and from one another. God’s solution is to reconstitute the fallen family of humanity into the redeemed family of God, the Church. “[F]or in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26–28).

A Moment and a Life Style

Pentecost provides a model for us in our evangelization. After days of prayer in the same room where Jesus offered the first Mass, the Apostles and Mary, the Mother Jesus, are filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter, together with the other apostles, proclaims the Gospel to the crowds. When Peter finishes, the people cry out, “What shall we do?” Peter responds, that they must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (cf. Acts 2:38).

Repentance and Baptism are not the end; they are the beginning of the Christian life. Just a few verses later, we see how the new Christians spent their time. “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Act 2:42). This model of Christian life is, not coincidentally, exactly what the Catholic Church still teaches today. In 1992, the Catholic Church published its most recent universal catechism. Its four-fold structure is exactly the same as the previous universal catechism published in 1566. Notice that it follows the biblical pattern:

Part One: “The apostles’ teaching,” specifically the Apostles’ Creed;

Part Two: “The breaking of the bread,” and the other sacraments, where Christ’s saving work is communicated to individual Christians;

Part Three: “Fellowship,” or how we live out the two great commandments of love of God and neighbor;

Part Four: “Prayer”—God has made us for Himself; the ultimate reason for our creation and our redemption is that we might live in communion with our heavenly Father.

How do we begin to follow the scriptural pattern of evangelization? First, we attend Mass with great love and renewed vision, knowing that Jesus, in the Eucharist, is the source of our life and of our evangelization. Then, we build authentic friendships where we can share what matters most to us—Jesus and the Christian life. Finally, as God leads our beloved brothers and sisters to conversion, we can continue to share the faith with them and prepare them for full covenantal communion with Jesus in the Church. Then they too can faithfully receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion and begin their role in the Great Commission (cf. Mt. 28:18–20).

John Paul II echoes Christ’s words, “The Church’s mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’ (Jn. 20:21). From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both *the source* and *the summit* of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit” (EE 22, emphasis in original).

Curtis Martin is the founding president of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS), a dynamic evangelization and leadership training program for college students, <http://www.focusonline.org>. Curtis is coauthor of Boys to Men: The Transforming Power of Virtue (Emmaus Road) and Family Matters: A Bible Study on Marriage and Family (Emmaus Road), which he wrote with his wife, Michaelann, who is the author of Woman of Grace: A Bible Study for Married Women (Emmaus Road).

CHAPTER XI

Suffering and the Mass

The Great Exchange



JEFF CAVINS

CHAPTER X

The Mass and
Evangelization



CURTIS MARTIN

*Catholic for a Reason vol. 3: Scripture + the
Mystery of the Mass
Emmaus Road Publishing: 2004
Edited by Scott Hahn + Regis Flaherty*