

In a discussion of evangelization one would traditionally think of distant lands receiving the message of God by adventuresome and dedicated missionaries. What does evangelization mean today? Rev. 2:17 proclaims; “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.” Cardinal Wuerl speaks of the, “Tsunami of secularization that has swept across society.” In five decades since Vatican II, only 30% of baptized Catholics practice their faith. In the delineation of faiths, the fastest growing category is “none”; those who declare no religion at all. Of those newly baptized into the Catholic faith, over half stop attending weekly Mass within a year of their conversion. If Christian faith isn’t the priority, what is? Many live a secular life as if God didn’t exist; this has been a trend building momentum since the “Enlightenment” of the 17th century. The acknowledgement of the Christian framework of intrinsic truth and sacredness of the family has been unraveling. Pope Benedict sadly predicted that “Faith dies out like a flame that has no fuel.” God is disappearing from the human horizon as a “Militant Atheism” banishes God and lumps together all believers, reflecting hostility to Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular.

The Biblical worldview that helped shape our world over 2,000 years outlined the Creation from Godly love, the Fall, the Redemption, and the promise of eternal salvation when Christ comes again. This Biblical worldview highlights that choices and decisions have *eternal* consequences. But the secular worldview has become depressingly meaningless as many struggle to gain the most possessions, and people “eat garbage out of the dumpster” spiritually.

How does our Church perceive the suffocation of faith by secular indoctrination of the previous Christian society? Pope Francis calls the Church “a field hospital,” where we need to actively attempt a rescue of those fallen Christians. Christians are to serve, minister, testify to truth, and heal in Christ; to bring people out of the secular darkness. We are to re-evangelize our western culture through our personal involvement, as we all are missionaries who follow Jesus to share our vital, life-giving faith with others.

How do we accomplish this transfusion of life into our faith? We need to examine the first evangelization explosion at the time of Jesus and the Apostles, when

ordinary people turned the world upside down. The *Acts of the Apostles* narrate an exemplary missionary effort that left a mark on Church history. The Acts serve as a model of how to preach effectively, and address all concerns of how to lead others in our faith to live our faith. Our culture today parallels that of the first century, in ignorance of the gospel and embracing pagan life. Millions of people have heard enough of Christianity to be inoculated against it. It is like wooing a jaded, embittered divorcee in contrast to a young maiden.

Saint Luke, the only Gentile writer of the Bible, reverently portrayed the Savior as concerned with humanity and His identification with the poor, the outcast, and the criminal. Luke also meticulously recorded the work of the Holy Spirit upon St. Peter and St. Paul, in enlightenment and disclosure of the inner truth of God as revealed in the Acts of the Apostles. Saint Luke highlights what Jesus began to do until He ascended, and what Jesus continued to do and teach through His Church. In Luke 24, the Great Commission was bestowed upon the apostles to share what they witnessed in Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection; but to go and share only after they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. They needed to wait for empowerment from on high; it was not to be *human* work but *God’s* work to go forth into the world and evangelize.

What was the very first Christian evangelization? In Chapter 1 of Luke’s gospel, the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her as she conceived Jesus in her womb, so she could bring Him into the world. It was Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, where she personified the Church as she went forth to bear witness to Christ by sharing with Elizabeth the news of the Messiah who was present within her. Luke shared the preview to the Apostles in the proto-Pentecost event of the Annunciation, as Mary couldn’t keep Jesus to herself; and the Holy Spirit’s vitality was shared with Elizabeth who was filled with the Holy Spirit as John leaped in her womb. In Chapter 2 of Acts, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they “Made bold proclamations as the Holy Spirit prompted them.” The word of Christ needs to be present in all of us by the Holy Spirit; which allows the divine light to burst forth from us. Do we need a New Pentecost?

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, baptism became the sacrament where one was baptized by the Holy Spirit. "Jesus went to those most in need (to all of us sinners), meeting them where they were, and lifting them out of their oppression" in His following ministry. The power to do this was obtained through the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, where Jesus, the apostles through Pentecost, and we through Baptism and Confirmation, "are plunged into the depths of God, drenched and soaked in divine life." This is the key to the mission of Jesus and the apostles—and ours. "When Jesus came up from the waters of the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as the dove," and from that point forward, Jesus, the apostles, and we are anointed and baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately after His baptism Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit. At the end of the 40 days of fasting and praying (physically weakened but spiritually empowered by the Holy Spirit), Jesus resisted the evil of Satan's temptations; foreshadowing the total victory over evil on the cross...

Jesus then began His ministry, ushering in the Kingdom of God. He began preaching at the synagogue in Nazarene and reading from the scroll of Isaiah. He claimed the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him because the Spirit has anointed Him. This moment of formal anointing as Messiah determined that Jesus is to evangelize the materially and spiritually poor (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus accomplishes His public ministry as a Man in the power of the Holy Spirit. Why is this significant? The disciples and we also receive that same Holy Spirit at Baptism. As the anointed with oil of God, "we are all little Christs."

Jesus told the apostles that after they receive the Holy Spirit, they will witness to all nations, to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). In Acts 1:9-10, after Jesus ascended into a white cloud, two men in white robes spoke with the apostles. Dr. Mary Healy reminded us that in the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, God led the people by cloud by day. A cloud also covered Mt. Sinai as Moses received the gift of guidance for his people in the 10 Commandments. "Jesus Christ, the new Moses, with His new gift of the Holy Spirit, has a new law written upon our hearts to love God and neighbor with power beyond our own human capacity." And the two men in white robes? Think of the Transfiguration when Jesus, robed in dazzling

white, appeared in the cloud with Moses and Elijah, speaking of his own exodus (Lk 9:28-36).

In the 12 apostles a New Israel was reconstituted; Mathias was selected by lot (the method Jewish priests were chosen) to replace Judas. From that point forward, with the Gentiles included, evangelization to the world became the goal of Christianity.

Pentecost was the Jewish holy day celebrating the gift of God's Law, the Torah, at Mt. Sinai. The mighty wind and tongues of fire evoked the image of the fire and wind at Mt. Sinai. In Acts 2:4, the Holy Spirit came with a great gentle power on Pentecost. The revelation of the Father's love that poured into the disciples' hearts was an overwhelming experience that enabled them to freely love God in return, with peace, trust and joy.

When Peter was empowered to address the thousands that included the previous enemies of Israel who had enslaved the Jews in the past like the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians, God fulfilled the promise of Isaiah 19:23, "that on that day the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians." This, indeed, was the same Peter who denied knowing Jesus to a servant girl during the Passion of Christ.

In Genesis 11, God confused the languages of the people who had tried to organize and obtain pinnacles of wealth without God at the Tower of Babel. Now on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit performed a reversal in unifying the different languages so all hearts could be conquered in God's love.

In creating humans with free will, God never compelled or coerced faith; so signs provided to people by God are sometimes twisted into alternate explanations by those who do not want to accept God. At Pentecost, those who mocked God claimed the apostles were drunk as an explanation of the miraculous happenings. The irony of that explanation is that the prophets, (cf. Amos 9:13) used wine as a description of joy, celebration, and life. In Matthew 9:17, what Jesus came to do through the "new wine" of the Holy Spirit, was to create new human hearts as new wineskins to contain the overflowing abundance of divine life God has for us! Saint Ambrose' hymn verse states, "let us drink with joy the sober intoxication of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit symbolized by wine gives life and joy to our hearts and kills sin... as in Ephesians 5:18, The Spirit of God is both drink and light.