

OUR JOYFUL ENCOUNTER WITH THE LORD



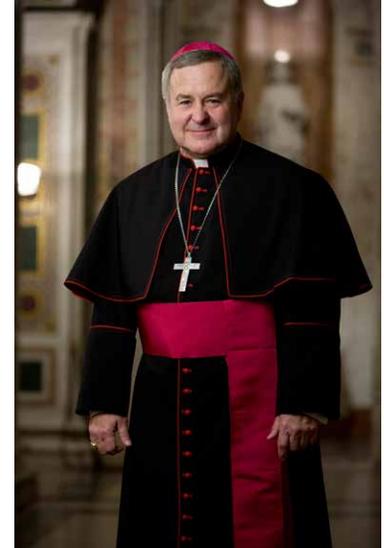
LIVING THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

In the summer of 2017, the U.S. bishops and diocesan leaders from across the country gathered in Florida. Listening to each other, we sensed the Holy Spirit calling us to a time of urgent renewal. As I thought about how to bring that urgency and renewal to the Archdiocese of St. Louis, my mind went back to Pope Francis' exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel."

This reflection on living the joy of the Gospel in St. Louis was published in sections in the *St. Louis Review* — Oct. 23, Dec. 18, Feb. 12 and April 2.



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ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

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JOYFUL ENCOUNTER WITH THE LORD

Expressing the joy of the Gospel in St. Louis

Something has to change. Everyday, our news is full of stories of hatred, violence and a clearly divided nation. It's easy to look around at everything that's wrong in the world and not know where to begin. Let me suggest that we begin with the one thing most in our control: us.

Even in the midst of the obvious hurt, confusion and even despair among our brothers and sisters, we can be a people of hope — a hope that's rooted in our Redeemer and the gift of life that He offers us.

The first and best way to maintain our hope, and to spread hope to others, is to encounter Jesus. I echo the invitation of Pope Francis in the beginning of his apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” (“*Evangelii Gaudium*”):

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.’” (“*Evangelii Gaudium*” 3).

What a profound invitation! The Holy Father gives us an essential reminder: Whether we have been on this journey of discipleship for many years or we are just beginning, we can only continue on our path if we are willing to encounter Jesus anew each day. Even when we don't feel ready for the encounter, we can create room in our hearts and let Jesus do the rest.

An encounter with Jesus cannot help but change us, just as it did for Matthew the tax collector, Mary Magdalene, Zaccheus and so many more. Jesus didn't allow them to let their sinful pasts hold them back. Their pasts simply became an occasion for Him to demonstrate His rich mercy. He can

do the same for each of us. And, building on us, He can do the same for our city, our country and our world.

This first step of encountering Jesus, then, will transform our world, for “if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (“Evangelii Gaudium” 8) When we begin to share this love in meaningful ways with everyone with whom we come in contact, the world is a better place and we have done our part to help overcome the despair that is prevalent in our society. Imagine the power of the more than 500,000 Catholics in the Archdiocese of St. Louis living this way.

I invite each of us to consider this daily encounter in our own lives and to reflect upon how we may foster this encounter in the lives of those around us: our family, our neighbors, our parishes. If we hope to truly live and share the joy of the Gospel in St. Louis, we must begin with encountering the living Gospel, Jesus Christ. It’s one small step that will have a lasting impact on us and all with whom we share our lives.

PRACTICAL STEPS: HOW TO ENCOUNTER

While there are many ways we can encounter Jesus, two of the most basic ways have a long standing tradition in the Church: Word and Sacrament.

St. Jerome is famously quoted as saying “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” How many of us know the Scriptures as well as we should?

The first step in getting to know Christ through the Scriptures is simply to read the Gospels. There are 89 chapters in the four Gospels. If you read one chapter a day you’ll finish in three months. If you begin again, you can read them all through four times in a year. If you do this every year, the Word of Christ will penetrate your heart and life.

In addition, as an aid to understanding the Scriptures, a great variety of dynamic Scripture study tools are readily available online.

Participating in the Eucharist at Mass and through Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is another central way to encounter Christ. This encounter unites us with Christ and the Church around the world and history through the communion of saints.

Many times, in order to encounter the Lord, it helps to step out of our daily routine and create time and space for the Lord to speak to us. This is why retreats are an important and transformative part of the Christian life. Many parishes host ACTS retreats, or offer silent retreats to help foster encounters with the Lord.

Do not wait! As Pope Francis reminds us, this encounter must be daily; I implore you to accept the same invitation Jesus gave to the disciples “Come and you will see.” If we’re willing to encounter the Lord, He will transform our hearts, our parishes and our world.



ENCOUNTER. REMEMBER. GIVE WITNESS.

As Christians, we are called to 'be more' in expressing the joy of the Gospel

An encounter with Jesus is at the heart of the Christian journey. But that encounter is not the end. After we have encountered the Lord, we must remember this encounter as the source of our life and witness.

Salvation history teaches us the significance of remembering our encounters with the Lord. The Book of Judges recounts a repeated cycle in which Israel forgets its covenant with God and the disastrous consequences of this failure to remember. Psalm 105 provides a beautiful recollection of God's faithfulness, and a call to remain mindful of all that God has done: "Remember the wonderful works He has done, His miracles, and the judgment He uttered, O offspring of His servant Abraham, children of Jacob, His chosen ones." As Pope Francis points out: "The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance" ("Evangelii Gaudium" 13).

From reading the Gospels and from the examples of holy men and women, we know how important this grateful remembrance is. To put it starkly: Even Judas had a profound encounter with the Lord. He failed, as the Pharisees failed, to foster a grateful remembrance of that encounter. If we don't foster grateful remembrance, we court their fate.

In addition to encounter and grateful remembrance, we must give witness to our experience of the saving love of God in Christ Jesus. This is true even when we don't feel prepared or seem to have all the answers. Pope Francis challenges us on this point:

"(A)nyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love ... If we are

not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim Him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” (John 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in Him “because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:39). So too, St. Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 120).

BEING MORE: PRAYER AND ACTION

Encounter. Grateful remembrance. Joyful witness. It might seem overwhelming. The question nobody probably wants to hear is: How can we do more?

But let’s step back for a moment. Our first call as missionary disciples isn’t necessarily to do more. Our first call is to *be* more.

What does that mean?

In part, it means avoiding the temptation to jump into mission without cultivating fertile ground in which to plant seeds of evangelization. When the soil is rich, the outward manifestations of our faith come more easily and bear greater fruit.

How do we build a foundation in Christ? First and foremost, by becoming a people of prayer.

Too often our contemporary world is skeptical, distrustful and hostile toward prayer. Many struggle to find the value and effectiveness of prayer, especially when confronted by human brokenness, tragedy and violence. Appeals to prayer can be interpreted as inauthentic: “But it doesn’t do anything.”

We aren’t asked to choose between prayer and action — Christians know that’s a false dichotomy. Rather, we’re called to make prayer the root of our action.

Mother Teresa was a great example of this. She spent an hour every day praying before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. She made it part of the Rule of Life for all Missionaries of Charity. When asked why they



took this precious time for prayer, especially when there were so many practical demands on their time and energy, she explained: “because we find that through our daily holy hour our love for Jesus becomes more intimate, our love for each other more understanding, and our love for the poor more compassionate.”

For Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity — and for us — there’s no choice between prayer and action. Instead, there is an intimate connection between the two.

In the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42), Jesus reminds Martha that being with Him is what matters most, whatever tasks we may have to face. The Martha in each of us needs to recognize that being in communion with God in prayerful contemplation comes first. When we have listened attentively to Jesus’ words, our solidarity with others will be more profound.

To be missionary disciples we have to remain attentive to these two interrelated dimensions of our Christian journey.

“(W)ithout prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty. Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence.”

“Evangelii Gaudium” 259

MODELS OF BEING MORE

The Catholic tradition contains great examples of women and men who have lived this careful balance of prayer and action.

St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, one of the patrons of our archdiocese, is an excellent example of what it means to “be more” through prayer and action. St. Rose Philippine’s witness has a timely significance for us today in our local Church. As a woman, religious, immigrant and missionary, her story might speak to us at different levels. In this brief reflection on her life and work, I want to highlight her identity as an immigrant-missionary (I encourage you to visit her shrine in St. Charles for a more detailed appreciation of her story and contributions).



It’s truly amazing to see God’s work in her life as an immigrant-missionary. We can only imagine how difficult it must have been for her to undertake the journey from her homeland to the New World. She had to leave behind the comforts of her close friends, family, religious community, culture and language. Yet, she never abandoned her childhood dream of the mission.

We know from her biographies that she remained committed to her deeper longing of one day serving as a missionary to the Native Americans in the New World. And, after a lifelong wait, at age 72, she finally realized her own ambition of serving Native Americans through a mission to the Potawatomi in Kansas. As an immigrant-missionary she struggled with learning at least two new languages, English and Potawatomi. Rather than let this be an obstacle to her witness, she became known as the “woman who prays always.” Even though she wasn’t able to speak to the Native Americans in their own tongue, they recognized her faithfulness and zeal. Many came to know Jesus because of her witness.

We’re called to imitate St. Rose Philippine Duchesne in her faithfulness to God’s call no matter what the circumstances and the worldly view of success. Her commitment to her dream of being a missionary, her devotional life and prayer are good examples of a life lived in contemplation and action.

Another example of “being more” in prayer and action is **St. Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower**. This great 20th-century saint is the patroness of missions for the Universal Church, even though she lived most of her short life in a cloistered convent. St. Therese dedicated herself to “the little way,” offering up her every moment and act of every day to Christ for the salvation of souls. For St. Therese, “Holiness consists simply in doing God’s will, and being just what God wants us to be.”



St. Therese is an especially potent example for our young people. She entered the convent while quite young. She didn’t let her youth stand as an obstacle for gaining holiness or having a profound impact upon the Church. Her example of prayer and little acts of kindness shows all of us how significant our ordinary lives can be. As she says, “Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love.”

Finally, consider **Mary, the Mother of Jesus**. Father Jean Corbon once wrote that “the most fruitful human activity is to receive the love of God.” Mary is the perfect example of this truth. Mary received the Word of God, nurtured the Word in her womb, and brought Him forth for the salvation of others. She is a great model for what it means to be more. Each of us, in our own way, can receive the Word, nurture Him in our hearts in prayer, and bring Him forth in our actions.



But is it really possible for us to follow Mary’s example? Pope Francis thinks so. He states: “The close connection between Mary, the Church and each member of the faithful, based on the fact that each in his or her own way brings forth Christ, has been beautifully expressed by Blessed Isaac of Stella: ‘In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary. ... In a way, every Christian is also believed to be a bride of

God's word, a mother of Christ, His daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful... Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb. He dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church's faith. He will dwell forever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul" ("Evangelii Gaudium" 285).

We have our own ways of receiving the love of God, nurturing it in prayer, and bringing it forth in action for the sake of others. We don't need to do big things. We need to do every little thing in God's love.

If we begin, even in little ways, to live like these holy women in our daily lives, we, too, will make Jesus known in a profound and powerful way that can transform the world.



Lisa Johnston | St. Louis Review

PRACTICAL STEPS: WAYS OF BEING MORE

In our effort to live the Joy of the Gospel and to be missionary disciples, we must be willing to be challenged and to grow, so allow me to challenge you to be more in a few different areas of your life.

At home: Commit to daily prayer and personal accountability. Invite a roommate, your spouse or a friend to walk with you in your pursuit of Christian virtue and holiness. This shared discipleship is a great aid in pursuing missionary discipleship.

As a parish: Commit to providing opportunities for parishioners to grow as missionary disciples together. Offer a monthly communal adoration night, faith formation opportunities for youth and adults and set up extra opportunities for confession beyond the normal Saturday hours.

In your community: Let your life and your words witness the joy of the Gospel. Talk to a neighbor or co-worker about your faith. Share your energy and your passion for growing closer to the Lord as a missionary disciple and invite others to evaluate their relationship with God. Commit to regular acts of service that require your time, not just your money.

“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers and if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses.”

“Evangelii Nuntiandi,” 41



AN ENCOUNTER IN SOLIDARITY AND LOVE

As pilgrims and missionary disciples, we are called to choose compassion over indifference

“We, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another.” — **Romans 12:5**

As missionary disciples who seek to be more, we know how important it is to share our faith, hope and love with others. From our own encounters with Jesus, we’ve seen how He leads us to embrace one another just as He has embraced us. This kind of intentional being-together-in-community is called “solidarity.”

Our life in the Church testifies to the truth and the importance of solidarity. We never really walk or stand alone. And our Gospel identity as a pilgrim Church — a Church on the way — signals how much of our faith journey involves a deliberate encounter with others. In Pope Francis’ words: “True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.” (“Evangelii Gaudium” 88).

This exhortation to encounter one another implies moving closer to those who aren’t readily in our circle, both physically and emotionally. It means opening our minds and hearts and giving our time and energy to the lives of others, especially the most poor and vulnerable. At the core of our human encounters is the call to love others as God has loved us — up close and personal.

The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37) illustrates how Jesus summons each one of us to a greater solidarity.

In the story and person of the Good Samaritan, we discover that our faith requires more than simply words or beliefs. It isn’t the priest with his faith, nor the Levite with his knowledge of the law, who shows us the path of

discipleship. Instead, the Samaritan, the supposed “stranger” who acts with mercy and kindness, shows solidarity with the one he encounters on the way.

In the Good Samaritan, we see that compassion and solidarity mean being with and for others in concrete ways. Through the story, Jesus invites us to imagine ourselves on the road. He asks us to stop and reach out when we behold the brokenness of humanity. How we respond to others in their need for mercy, healing and reconciliation becomes the core of our discipleship. It’s the perfect illustration of what St. James says: “So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17)

Like the priest and the Levite, we have turned our gaze away from the hurt at times, or haven’t stopped to tend to it. We can be honest and repent for those times when our actions haven’t mirrored God’s love.

But sometimes we’ve received that love through others. And sometimes we’ve given that love to others. We can be thankful for God’s grace in those times.

In the Good Samaritan, we recognize a challenge: a call to solidarity. Our faith requires us to be open to others on the way, to be willing to show care and compassion for them. The Good Samaritan also illustrates the need to be courageous in transcending our own class and cultural distinctions in order to show God’s love more fully. As pilgrims and missionary disciples, we are called to choose compassion over indifference.

CONTEMPLATIVE LOVE

Pope Francis tells us that another essential part of missionary discipleship is encountering those in need with contemplative love. He wrote, “What the Holy Spirit mobilizes is... above all an attentiveness which considers the other ‘in a certain sense as one with ourselves.’ This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good. This entails appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experience of life, in their culture, and in their way of living faith. True love is always contemplative” (“*Evangelii Gaudium*” 199).

What does this contemplative love mean for us in our daily lives? It means, for example, being fascinated by others. It means wanting to know what they think, how they feel and what they want. It means wanting to

know the joys and the hurts in their past, where they are now, and what they hope and fear for the future. It means sharing their joys and sorrows and hopes and fears. It means looking on them the way God looks on us, and sharing their lives the way Jesus shares ours.

Learning to cultivate a contemplative encounter with others takes time and courage. We do it naturally with those closest to us. We need to do it more readily for the poor and vulnerable who are among us, but often go unnoticed.

It isn’t easy to leave our familiar surroundings. We may have grown up in a relatively homogeneous social environment or neighborhood that provided limited encounters with others of a different race, ethnicity, political persuasion or socio-economic background. We may have had negative encounters with others that discouraged us from going beyond our personal comfort zones.

Yet we know in faith that we’re part of a universal Church. We know that our Catholic faith, life and values are present in every culture and place in the world. In some instances we’ve been directly exposed to other cultures, ethnicities and languages through the missionary work of the Church. The Archdiocese of St. Louis, for example, has been a missionary community for more than fifty years! Through the work of our archdiocesan **Mission Office** we have shared resources with our sisters and brothers in Bolivia and other parts of Latin America. And, in recent years, we have been able to join in the missionary work of the **Messengers of Peace** in Colombia. We have reached out to our brothers and sisters in faraway places, and learned to behold them with contemplative love.

We’ve been missionaries at home, too. Each year, through your prayers and generosity, the **Annual Catholic Appeal** allows archdiocesan ministries and offices to respond to the needs in our own backyard. The Appeal supports **Catholic Charities**, the **St. Charles Lwanga Center**, the **Respect Life Apostolate**, **Hispanic Ministry**, the **Regina Cleri** priest retirement home, and others to reach out to our brothers and sisters in need in our own place and time, and learned to behold them with contemplative love.



ANNUAL
CATHOLIC
APPEAL

BUILD MY CHURCH

But the mission still calls to each of us. Growing in contemplative love isn't only a task for someone else. We're called to see people in need with new eyes. Be fascinated by those you encounter. Desire to know their story. Ask about their lives. Be drawn to where the hurt is, not away from it. A physician or nurse or physical therapist is especially attentive to where the hurt is because that's where their help is most needed. As missionary disciples we need to do that for each other.

The Archdiocese of St. Louis is blessed to have three patron saints — St. Louis IX, St. Vincent de Paul, and St. Rose Philippine Duchesne — who were outstanding examples of responding to the needs of the poor and most vulnerable. In their own ways, they went beyond the cultural and socio-economic limits of their own upbringing. They crossed physical divides; they crossed social and cultural barriers where many of their contemporaries held back. Our own Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis contains beautiful mosaics depicting their lives of service to those who were poor, excluded and marginalized. I encourage us all to take time to study these beautiful images. They will inspire us to grow in contemplative love.



Kathryn Ziesig | St. Louis Review

SOLIDARITY AND CONTEMPLATIVE LOVE FOR TROUBLED TIMES

Our patron saints challenge and encourage us: live up to our example. They call us to bring greater solidarity and contemplative love to our own troubled times.

It isn't difficult to see a number of pressing issues and challenges that confront the world today: abortion, euthanasia, secularism, a culture of indifference, a growing social and political polarization, poverty, racism, global migration, religious persecution, violence, human trafficking, domestic violence and other social ills that corrode the inherent dignity of humans.

Locally, we have been challenged by issues rooted in the sin of racism. We have seen our neighborhoods divided by painful and tragic events that have surfaced disappointments, resentments and mistrust between communities and established institutions of leadership and power. But we have also witnessed how our larger community has come together to march, protest, pray and dialogue about practical solutions that can have a positive impact.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the number and magnitude of the challenges. But, in facing the need for reconciliation that still remains, we have to be vigilant and not give into the temptation to grow cynical or isolate ourselves from one another. Rather than spending most of our time and energy bemoaning the problems, might we spend more of our time and energy addressing them? We have a history of troubles that plagues us. We also have a history of leadership that can guide us.

For example, the courageous leadership of Cardinal Joseph E. Ritter shows us the way. He said: "Yes, racism is a heresy, there is no doubt about it. Segregation is a sin, a sin against both justice and charity... We cannot delay longer in this matter no matter how difficult but must face our responsibility as pastors to teach and guide, and thus prepare our people for the full acceptance of the Christian principles that are at the base of many aspects of this problem." His prophetic words and actions still remind us of the work before us, especially as we strive to become more

aware of our personal and systemic biases and prejudices.

We can also find direction in the testimony and actions of the late Sister Antona Ebo, FSM. Her commitment to the civil rights movement, and her work on behalf of racial justice and reconciliation, continues to be a guiding light for us in the Church and society. Her courageous life and witness continue to inspire our local communities. The annual **Sr. Antona Ebo Social Justice Conference** helps us learn to be better instruments of racial justice and reconciliation in our parishes and neighborhoods.



My brother bishops in the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) have echoed this clarion call to be agents of transformation and racial reconsolidation. In establishing a new **Ad Hoc Committee on Racism**, they remind us that the responsibility to address the sin of racism in our Church and society falls on each one of us. Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, president of the USCCB, speaking on behalf of the bishops — and of all Catholics — said: “Recent events have exposed the extent to which the sin of racism continues to afflict our nation. The establishment of this new ad hoc committee will be wholly dedicated to engaging the Church and our society to work together in unity to challenge the sin of racism, to listen to persons who are suffering under this sin, and to come together in the love of Christ to know one another as brothers and sisters.” With equal measures of honesty and hope in our hearts, we, in the archdiocese, will continue to remain attentive to the suffering that is caused by the terrible sin of racism and its consequences in our community.

For more than forty years, now, our Catholic community and allies have come together to commemorate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and gathered to celebrate the **Archdiocesan Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice**. Let’s take this annual event and make it a daily reality — each one of us deepening our commitment to work for racial justice and reconciliation.

May God bless our personal and collective efforts as we strive to be missionary disciples — growing in solidarity and contemplative love to meet the needs of our troubled times.

PRACTICAL STEPS: TAKING STEPS TO GREATER SOLIDARITY AND CONTEMPLATIVE LOVE

Below are practical suggestions to assist you in giving greater witness to the spirit and practice of solidarity in your life and in your parish community.

- **Personal prayer:** Bring your concerns and desires for reconciliation, justice and solidarity to your regular prayer life. Don’t just think about God in relation to them. Talk to God about them.
- **Common prayer:** Encourage your parish community to organize prayer opportunities for the whole parish to come together in prayer for a particular social justice issue. Make these a regular part of your general intercessions (Prayers of the Faithful). Sponsor evening prayer to pray for these intentions.
- **Participate in archdiocesan initiatives** that are designed to increase our awareness and commitment to peace, justice and reconciliation (events such as Annual Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice, Annual March for Life, Annual Memorial Mass, Sr. Antona Ebo Social Justice Conference, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, National Migration Week Celebration, etc.)
- **Learn more about the work** and services of Catholic Charities agencies. www.ccstl.org
- **Invite archdiocesan offices and agencies to assist** you and your parish community in learning more about the diverse communities in the Archdiocese of St. Louis.
- **Learn more about our Catholic social doctrine.** Read the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, or check out the U.S. Bishops’ resources at: www.stlouisreview.com/jPP



CHALLENGED TO BE MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

Each of us is called to grow in love and knowledge of Jesus and witness to Him constantly

So, what does it mean to be missionary disciples? It means that we're called to encounter Jesus, to be committed to growing in our love and knowledge of Him and to constantly give witness to Him in our deeds and words.

All too often we look for easy solutions, for boxes to check that will help us fulfill our obligations as Catholics and guarantee our place in heaven. The reality is that living our faith can be messy. While we're called to encounter, grow and witness as missionary disciples, we have no exact formula to follow.

At no point are we ever finished encountering God, who is inexhaustible and reveals Himself to us anew each day. As Scripture states: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

There is no conceivable moment in which we can assume we love Jesus enough or know our faith deeply enough. Imagine a husband saying to his wife: "I told you I loved you on our wedding day, what more do you want?" He can always know her better. And the more he gets to know her, the more opportunities he has to love her, and to demonstrate his love for her by laying down his life for her as Christ did for the Church.

Finally, our journey doesn't stop with ourselves. Being a missionary disciple is a fundamentally relational activity. St. John Paul II, a master of the discipleship model of ministry, loved to remind us of this concept from the second Vatican Council. "Man, the only creature God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" ("Gaudium et Spes," 24). Because of this spiritual reality, we're called to give witness to the saving love of God through our everyday lives.

ENGAGING THE WORLD

In his address at World Youth Day shortly after his election, Pope Francis famously encouraged young people to go into the world and “make a mess.”

He said: “I want people to go out! I want the Church to go out to the street! I want us to defend ourselves against everything that is worldliness, that is static, that is comfortableness, that is clericalism, that is being shut-in on ourselves. The parishes, the schools, the institutions, exist to go out!”

All too often, we sit in our churches with the doors open and wonder where the people are. Or worse yet, the doors of our churches are locked, except for Mass. Sometimes, the reluctance or resistance to go out into the streets is more passive and internal. We cultivate attitudes in our hearts that keep others at a distance.

It’s easy to blame the modern world or the culture of today for our decline and propensity to isolate ourselves. In our current media environment, people are bombarded with messages contrary to the Gospel and are given opportunities to choose comfort rather than the greatness to which we’re called in Christ.

But we’ve often failed to fully engage. While trying to be faithful to what Christ is calling us to do, we sometimes close ourselves off from the modern world, to protect ourselves. But this is wrong.

Blessed Pope Paul VI taught us that the Church “exists to evangelize” and that “evangelizing is the grace and vocation proper to the Church” (“*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” 14). If our churches are unhealthy or shrinking, it’s partly because we’ve forgotten who we’re called to be. We’re fundamentally a missionary Church. If we’re anything else, we aren’t who God created us to be.

Pope Francis often preaches against clericalism. Some have interpreted this as a wake-up call for priests and hierarchy. And it is! But it’s also an urgent cry to the laity. As missionary disciples, we have not only the right but the duty to be agents of evangelization, to be missionaries of joy to the peripheries of our communities.

All too often, we’re tempted to make the work of sharing the faith the job



of only our priests. While we're right to look to our clergy for leadership, each of us has been baptized as priest, prophet and king in our own right. We have been given the commission to "go out and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Because of the unique role of the laity in the modern world, no one is more equipped to go the peripheries than you. Each of you share life, work and social activities with people who have yet to encounter Jesus in a meaningful way. Each of you know people in your lives who are in difficult situations or are leading lives of quiet desperation. They need the gift of God. If you do not bring it to them, who will?

This will be messy, because real life is messy. We're called to meet people where they are and accompany them into a life of grace. For most, the path into the Church isn't a straight line.

St. Augustine famously wrestled with God for years before his conversion, even praying, "Lord, give me chastity but not yet." Imagine if St. Ambrose, who brought Augustine into the Church, wasn't willing to enter into Augustine's clearly (and very publicly) broken life and walk with him as he journeyed toward living a Christian life.

We're called to go to the peripheries as missionary disciples and reach out with the joy of the Gospel because the love we've received from Christ compels us to do so.

It's a matter of both charity (love) and justice. Charity calls us to imitate Christ in His authentic gift of self, and justice reminds us we owe it to people to give them the chance to hear and respond to the Gospel. We must share the gifts we have been given, as "one beggar telling another where to find bread."

We see this in the Gospels when Andrew, after first encountering the Lord, runs to invite his brother Peter. We see this in the woman at the well, who after meeting and speaking with Jesus, goes out and tells her whole town about Jesus. Neither Andrew nor the woman knew Jesus for very long or had lengthy training by Him about evangelization (see "Evangelium Gaudium," 120). They simply knew what a gift Jesus was and that they couldn't keep it to themselves — the world needed this gift.

SENT OUT

An excellent example of this charity and justice in action is one of the patrons of our archdiocese, St. Vincent de Paul. Many of you know of the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul through the wonderful work of our many St. Vincent de Paul Societies in our local parishes, serving the needs of the poor in our communities. Inspired by the life of St. Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frederick Ozanam founded the Society in 1833 to serve the poor and people on the peripheries of his society.

St. Vincent de Paul had countless opportunities to advance his career as a diplomat or to serve as a priest for the wealthy families in Paris, but as he listened to the call placed on his heart by the Lord, he felt called to invest in the poor and people on the peripheries of his own society.

A more modern example is Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. Blessed Pier Giorgio lived in the 20th century and was the son of a powerful Italian journalist and politician. He had a deep and devoted spiritual life which led him to join the Society of St. Vincent de Paul at a young age and rather than seek the same wealth and power of his family, he used his means and status to serve the poor.

His love for the poor was so great that he often gave his bus fare to the poor and ran home, always late for dinner. "God gave us health so that we could serve the sick," he would say. He spent much of his free time while at a university serving others. At the age of 24, he contracted polio, most likely from the poor and sick he served, and died.

On the day of his funeral, much to the surprise of his family, the streets of Milan were lined with countless numbers of the poor he served.

The story of Blessed Pier Giorgio following in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederick Ozanam teaches us an important spiritual principle; we don't know the impact that our witness has.



St. Vincent de Paul



Bl. Frederick Ozanam

Through prayer and discernment, St. Vincent de Paul said “Yes” to God in simple every day actions. Inspired by that example, so too did Blessed Frederick and Blessed Pier Giorgio. While their actions were generous, they also were very simple.

St. Francis of Assisi is often quoted as saying, “Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words.” It’s a lovely sentiment. But the reality is that for many years, Francis traveled the countryside proclaiming the word of God to anyone who would listen, even to the animals! This quote rings true with us because we know that our words mean little without our lived witness. But we shouldn’t forget that many times, it does take words to preach the Gospel, to witness to the word made flesh.

If we’re willing to listen and to say “Yes” to what God is calling us to do in our daily lives in this same way, imagine the impact we’ll have on our families, our parishes and our communities that live in both material and spiritual poverty.

Let us follow the example of these great saints and all the holy witnesses of the Church and be not afraid to live as missionary disciples, to proclaim Christ constantly in both word and deed.

The world needs your “Yes” to missionary discipleship.

PRACTICAL STEPS: BEING MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

1. **Share with a friend, co-worker or parishioner** why your faith is important to you. Ask them to share the same with you.
2. **Ask someone how you can support them** in their faith journey, no matter where they are on the path.
3. **Help your parish or community organize a service day.** Serve the needy, but also incorporate elements of sharing/speaking about the Gospel with each other and/or those you serve.
4. **Use the tools of social media to share your faith.** e.g. particular family devotions, stories of faith, images of your favorite saints, etc.
5. **Invite a colleague, friend or family member** to attend a church activity with you.



“A Church which goes forth is a Church whose doors are open.”

“Evangelii Gaudium,” 46

