

Becoming Intentional Disciples -

Sherry Weddell reminds us that the purpose of evangelization is not waking up a generic “faith”. We are called to bring people to an encounter with the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, and risen from the dead.

Our own personal witness can help illuminate and make living, compelling and believable aspects of Jesus’ story, but it cannot take the place of Jesus’ story. St Paul writes: “How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone who proclaims that Jesus suffered and died for us on the cross and then rose again on the third day to save us?” We can no longer presume that people around us know the story of Jesus. And if they know something, a good deal of what they “know” may be wrong. They might not know how the parts of the story fit together to make a whole and what the story means for them personally.

Many don’t have an understanding of what salvation really is and how that gift is received. Jesus began his earthly ministry in his first century Jewish context by proclaiming the Kingdom of God. What first-century Jews found compelling can also be surprisingly intriguing in the 21st century. God is love and He created us for a life with Him full of love, peace, truth, beauty, goodness and meaning that begins now, lasts forever and cannot be taken away. It is this life that Jesus preached and called the Kingdom of God. Jesus Himself is the presence of the Kingdom. We can help people encounter the actions and teachings of the Kingdom in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus reveals the love of the Father and the nature of God’s Kingdom through His every word and action.

Jesus’ ministry resulted not in “success” as the world understands it but rather in the mystery of His rejection, betrayal, crucifixion and death. Yet it is for us that Jesus embraces the cross in obedience to the Father, as the means of our salvation and access to God’s life. But the cross is not the end. Jesus rose from the dead! And He has opened the way to our own resurrection and to a new life. Jesus is now asking us to follow Him.

Discipleship is not something that just “happens” but is a real decision and turning point requiring all the resources of heart, mind and strength we can muster. Discipleship is expressed by repentance of personal sin and baptism into Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and body on earth – the Church – or by the renewal of baptismal grace through confession and return to the regular practice of the Faith.

One newly baptized woman once said: “I wish that lifelong Christians, especially lifelong Catholics, could understand just for a minute what it is like to be lost. Maybe they would be least afraid to evangelize. It may be hard to explain...9Before I started this process, I thought of myself as a happy person, reasonably confident, proud of my life and how I lived it. It’s not like I saw myself as stumbling around in a pit. I But from where I stand now, wow”. Being without God is a terrible kind of being alone.

Let’s muster the courage to begin speaking of Jesus more!