

# Practical strategies of evangelization

*Be a bearer of faith; let the language of faith be on your lips*

*This is the fifth in a series of articles encouraging evangelization in the Archdiocese of Chicago.*

---

**By Father Robert Barron**  
CONTRIBUTOR

Over the past several weeks, I have been laying out what I take to be the basics of evangelization. Proclaiming the Good News has to do with announcing the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, declaring that Jesus is divine, celebrating the deep humanism of Christianity, and finally, insisting on the indispensability of the church as the mystical body of the Lord. In this final column, I would like to reflect, however briefly, on some simple practical strategies for evangelization, things that you can do to make this message public.

First, deepen your knowledge of the Catholic tradition. A recent survey showed that, among the various religious groups, young Jews have the weakest sense of their own religious heritage, but second only to the Jews in this dubious distinction were young Catholics. This is nothing short of tragic. We have an extremely smart, rich, and profound tradition, including the incomparable Scriptures, treasures of theology, spirituality, art, architecture, literature, and the inspiring witness of the saints. To know this tradition is to enter into a densely textured and illuminating world of meaning; not to know it deprives one of spiritual joy, and perhaps even more regrettably, renders one incapable of explaining the Catholic faith to those who seek to understand it better. Most Catholics stopped their formal religious education in eighth grade, or perhaps in senior year of high school.

No wonder we are relatively poor evangelists. So resolve this year to read a good and serious book of theology, perhaps a classic such as St. Augustine's *Confessions* or Thomas Merton's "Seven Story Mountain." Make an effort this year to delve into a great Catholic literary master such as Dante, G.K. Chesterton or Flannery O'Connor. Or study the paintings of Caravaggio and Michelangelo, and the sculptures and architecture of Bernini. Enter into the prayerful reading of the Bible.

In a word, learn the tradition of Catholic Christianity, so as to be a better bearer of it to others.

Second, invite someone you know to come back to church. Evangelization can focus on the conversion of the nations, or on the Catholicizing of Protestant Christians, but it can also focus much more narrowly on the re-activizing of inactive Catholics. Everyone reading these words knows someone—a friend, a co-worker, a family member, perhaps even a godson or goddaughter—who has stopped attending Mass or availing himself of the sacraments. Resolve in the next

year to send that person a note, give him or her a phone call, sit down for a good conversation—and urge him or her to come home to church. This overture might cost you; it might prove a bit uncomfortable or embarrassing. Evangelization is always a risk. For the sake of that person's spiritual health, take it.

Third, let the language of the faith be naturally on your lips. Many of us Catholics—consciously or unconsciously—censor our own speech against anything smacking of our religious convictions. We learn early on the etiquette of a pluralist society: it is not polite to talk in public settings about politics or especially religion. To be sure, we should never be aggressive or overbearing in regard to our faith, but we should never acquiesce to social conventions that require a privatization of our religion.

Our faith must be all-pervasive, invading and influencing every dimension of our lives, both public and private, both personal and professional. Thus, at your place of work, at social gatherings, among friends, allow your Catholic convictions to come to verbal expression. And the non-verbal can be just as important: put a crucifix or a picture of a favorite saint up in your office; arrange to have a Biblical quote as the screen-saver on your computer. If this prompts a reaction or a question, so much the better for evangelical purposes. How many people in your circle of acquaintances or in your place of business even know that you are a Catholic? I would submit that if the answer to that question is few to none, then you have been too reticent in your everyday evangelizing.

Fourth, don't be afraid to pray in public. How many times have you sat down with your family or with Catholic friends at a restaurant and have simply dug into your food without offering a word of thanks? Again, you need not be ostentatious, but a simple, unaffected prayer, publicly offered, can be a powerful witness to those around you. Do you remember that sentimental but effective painting by Norman Rockwell depicting an elderly woman and her grandchildren bowing their heads in prayer before taking a meal in a truck stop? What I've always loved are the looks of bewildered admiration on the faces of the regular denizens of the place. Don't underestimate the evangelical power of demonstrating your faith in public.

Jesus told his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. This call went out, not simply to the leaders of the church then and now, but to all of us, to all the baptized, to every one of the people of God. Don't miss the opportunity to be an angel of God, a bearer of the impossibly good news.

*For information, visit [www.missionchicago.net](http://www.missionchicago.net) or [www.chicago.org](http://www.chicago.org).*