

# The Church Is Missionary

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***Quote from Vatican II: The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.***

**A Bit Of Theology:** As God the Father sends his Son into the world, and as the Father and the glorified Son together send the Holy Spirit to dwell in all who belong to Christ, so the whole Church comes to share in the work of the incarnation.

In the coming of Jesus, God entered the history of humanity in a definitive way, which made incarnate the whole fact of God. In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the power of what had been accomplished by Jesus - the Cross and the Resurrection - was sent out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

So the Church journeys through history, charged to make present, in its ministry of word and sacrament, not only the whole Word of God to the world, but also the real presence of Christ.

**Where We Are:** The average Catholic is quite happy that the Church should be busily missionary, particularly if this means priests, nuns, and brothers being exported to Africa bearing gifts for the poor. Most Catholics are glad to donate funds for this to happen.

But when it comes to being missionary ourselves, we tend to find ways of deferring the honour! It sounds like being a Mormon, or a Jehovah's Witness: the archetypal unwelcome guest. We may have experienced missionary efforts even closer at hand, which we may have found offensive or inappropriate. We don't want to be dismissed in the same terms, as zealots or invaders of privacy.

So widespread is the "post-modern" fear of proselytism, that people have almost universally accepted the principle that "private" attitudes are all equally respectable, and are entitled to the polite indifference of others. What you or I believe, think, and want are matters of no interest to anyone else, and, so long as the law isn't infringed, what we do is equally of no concern to others. So any sort of missionary activity is considered as (at best) bad manners and (at worst) some kind of assault on privacy.

If you return to the statement at the top of the page, you will see that there is a diametric opposition between this attitude and the Church's self-understanding. If God has really reached out to his earth in Christ, it isn't open to the Church to treat this as a "private" matter. It is public, urgent, a matter of life and death.

***The Question: What does this mean for a Catholic - more precisely, for me?***

**Some potential answers to consider, over the page:**

1 It's the clergy who are responsible for preaching the Gospel

Perfectly true. But if the missionary role of the Church is truly characteristic, it impinges on every member of the body to take a share in the mission. "Preaching" is a term of abuse; but our lives can "proclaim" the Gospel...or not....

2 We witness to the Gospel in various ways - not always in words

A good deed already speaks of God who is good, and the Author of all good. But if can't speak of Christ (as the Gospel demands) if it remains *anonymous*. Good deeds can be ascribable to (say) the decency of human beings, or the power of friendship, or the presence of a guilty conscience, or any other motive; a deed done "for Christ's sake" carries a further significance, and packs a further punch.

3 We should "incarnate" Christ in our community: "see how they love each other".

This is probably the most powerful way we can be missionary. We should spend some time teasing out the implications: what must our community look like, if it is to embody the Gospel for its members, and for those who are outside? Some suggestions:

*Fidelity* - we must be a sustained community, to which people are loyal and give their time and effort. We have to be faithful to each other and to the faith which unites us. A community that simply finds itself thrown together won't do.

e.g. Sunday Mass in the rain, after a party: Nazareth House: Cathsoc cttee

*Depth* - we should be serious about our belonging, so that people can read in us the "infinite treasure of Christ" - the depth and mystery of the God we worship

People should feel there is something extra at work besides mateyness.

e.g. prayer: thoughtfulness: serious discussion: responsible attitudes

*Charity* - the community should not just be a gathering of friends, but a place where love is at work, uniting disparate and unlikely people as much as natural buddies. And the uniting must be in function of the Christian life the community is living.

e.g. sensitive care of the outsider, the lonely, the not-instantly-loveable

*Consciousness* - Christians ought to have their personal act together about faith, so that they can, *when asked or challenged*, give a decent account of their faith and their belonging to Christ. We don't do this simply in order to make sense to ourselves, but as a service to others we meet.

e.g. reading about, discussing, reflecting on questions of faith

*"This Council appeals to all lay people to give a willing, noble, and enthusiastic response to the voice of Christ, who at this hour is summoning them more urgently: and to the urging of the Holy Spirit. The younger generation should feel this call to be addressed to them in a special way: it is the Lord himself who invites them to unite themselves with him ever more intimately, to consider his interests their own, and to join in his mission as Saviour. It is the Lord who is again sending them into every town and every place where he himself is to come. He sends on an apostolate where they are to show themselves his co-operators, knowing that their labour cannot be lost."*