

5th Sunday of Easter: Yr. B – 2021
[Acts 9:26-31 • 1 Jn 3:18-24 • Jn 15:1-8]

A crucifix elicits two thoughts: First, if that's what it took to save us, we must have been in a dire situation. And second, God must think that we are worth it. This should be our impetus to evangelize wayward souls.

To evangelize we must know where we are currently at in the spiritual life:

1. Pew-potato: a person for whom the Gospel has little to no impact on their daily life and decisions. This was me until halfway through college. I went to Mass because it was a family tradition and an obligation. Though intrigued, I failed to conform my life to the Gospel message.

2. Disciple: a person who had an intense encounter with Jesus through Scripture, a sacrament, another person, or a life-changing event. Borrowing a phrase from the Acts of the Apostles, a person who is "*cut to the heart*." They are intent on learning and growing in the faith and have a stable practice of the faith. This happened my second year of college. I got involved in Catholic Campus ministry as an altar server, communion minister, and special projects for the elderly. I also attended a bible study that finally broke open the Scriptures.

3. Disciple-maker: a person who is living out of the joys of the Resurrection because they have encountered the Risen Christ. They love others by sharing the contagious joy and gift of salvation. They are answering Christ's Great Commission: "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations . . .*" This happened for me as a seminarian. I learned to love the parishioners through utter vulnerability. I shared my life with them and they reciprocated and welcomed me into their lives and families.

Jesus is in desperate need of more disciple-makers, for he said, "*The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.*" Curtis Martin, the founder of a worldwide movement that trains young people to be disciple-makers on college campuses, listed three habits of a disciple-maker: divine intimacy with God, authentic friendship, and spiritual multiplication.

Divine intimacy breathes God's life into our soul. This is the point of our Gospel: Jesus is the vine and we are the branches that bear fruit or not. It is not enough to know about God, we must know him by being in relationship with His family – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This divine intimacy is fostered by sound practices: daily prayer, reading scripture, regular participation in the Mass, praying the rosary, confession, and outreach to the poor.

Authentic friendship is about more than being an acquaintance; it takes time and effort so only a few can be our true friends. Jesus, for instance, impacted many lives, had 70 disciples, but only 12 Apostles or authentic friendships. Saints often come in clusters such as St. Francis and St. Clair, St. Benedict and his sister, St. Scholastica, or St. Paul and the two first bishops, Sts. Timothy and Titus. Why? Proverbs reminds us, "*[As] iron is sharpened by iron; one person sharpens another.*" The easiest way to be a saint is to share our life with like-minded authentic friends. Friends who inspire and encourage us, hold us accountable, pick us up when we fall, and have a common goal: Heaven. Isn't this what Jesus envisioned when he said, "*Love one another as I have loved you?*"

Spiritual multiplication means inviting others into divine intimacy with Jesus. If you enter into authentic friendship with just three people, and they enter into friendship with three more, etc., after twelve cycles we net over half a million disciples! What a harvest! We can grow from a pew-potato, to a disciple, and then a disciple-maker by sharing our faith. Cardinal Avery Dulles said, "*If some of us are weak and vacillating in our faith, this is partly due to our reluctance to share it.*"

The crucifix reminds us that Jesus has invested everything into saving us, can we invest ourselves into evangelizing others? For St. John Paul II wrote, "*Faith is strengthened when it is given to others.*" And, "*the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization . . . No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.*"