



Basic Evangelization Training
Course 2: Introduction to the Kerygma

Desires of the Human Heart

Hello, my name is Peter Herbeck and I'm glad to present Lesson 2 of Module 1 of the Online Basic Evangelization Training. The module is "Introduction to Evangelization" and the lesson is "Introduction to the Kerygma." In this lesson, we will introduce a new word, a Biblical word, "kerygma." After this, we will consider the power of the Gospel.

Jesus literally is the fulfillment of all desire. Psalm 145 tells us that he satisfies the desire of every living thing. When we evangelize, we can go forward knowing that in every human heart is the desire to receive all that Jesus has come to give us. In the first chapter of the 1st Letter of John, it begins with this beautiful expression from John saying: "What we have seen, what we have touched, what we have heard, we declare to you, that the eternal life that was with the Father has appeared to us." Every human being, whether they are conscious of it or not, has a desire to pass from death to life, to overcome the "death" problem. And then he goes on to say, he wants to declare it to us, because he wants us to have fellowship with them, because they have fellowship with the Father, with God. Every human being was made for that fellowship, whether they are consciously aware of it or not.

The Scriptures have lots of ways of talking about the coming of Jesus and the person of Jesus fulfills every fundamental human desire. For example, in the Gospel of John, the first chapter, it says this: "The light that has come in Christ shines in the darkness." Everybody, ultimately at some level, is afraid of the dark. What does that mean? Afraid of death. And it is the Light of Jesus that is the only thing that can satisfy the desire to overcome that wall of darkness that every human being has to deal with that is called death. St. Paul called it the "reign of sin and death." [John] goes on to say that, "The true Light that enlightens every man has come into the world." Every human heart wants enlightenment. People talk about it a lot in society, right? They say, I want to know where I have come from. I want to know why I am here. I want to know where I am going. Jesus alone can answer those questions and satisfy that desire. Jesus came to give us power to become children of God. People desire power to live a different way of life: "I want to reach my capacity as a human being." How is that found? It is found by becoming a child of God, and only Jesus has the power to give us the ability to fulfill that desire.

At another place in John's Gospel, verse 1, chapter 14, it says: "'We beheld His glory.'" The Apostles beheld the glory that was present in the person of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us we were made for glory. In fact, Paul in his Letter to the Romans tells us that because of sin we have "fallen from glory." We have something in us that desire to be lifted back up to the place of glory, but it only comes through sharing in the life of Jesus. So John was communicating that they beheld something in Jesus that they longed for in their own hearts.

In another place, a famous passage from John, chapter 10, Jesus says he comes to give us life and have it to the full. What do our hearts long for? Abundant life! And ultimately it is life that can pass beyond the grave into eternal life. At another point, in John's Gospel, chapter 15, verse 11, it says Jesus "came to give us joy, full joy." Every human heart has a longing for joy, but it can only come through the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus comes to bring us freedom. How many cultures talk about freedom constantly? We desire freedom. We don't even know what it is. But ultimately what our hearts long for is the freedom from the powers of sin and death, freedom

from the oppression of Satan and the fallen world that we inhabit, and even the fallen flesh that we ourselves battle with every day. Only Jesus can give us the full satisfaction of the freedom that we long for.

Ultimately the freedom that we long for the most is Love. God is Love. And ultimately what we long for is God Himself. And it is Jesus who brings the Father to us. He is Love Incarnate. And it is being united to Jesus that allows us to come into the relationship as children of God with the Father to become His children and experience the fellowship that the Apostles experienced so tangibly. That should be an encouragement to all of us, to know that whenever we go out to evangelize, what we are bringing -- literally -- is the fulfillment of the desire that's in every human heart, whether they know it or not.

What is the Kerygma?

What is the kerygma? The kerygma is the central proclamation of the Gospel, the story of the person of Jesus Christ, the facts of salvation. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, the Pope's preacher to the papal household, put it this way: he said the kerygma is the "germ cell," the living Word that gives birth to faith in people's hearts. One of the great spots to look at in the Bible is Acts chapter 2, where we see the first proclamation of the kerygma by the Apostles after they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And we can see the key elements of it right here. It begins with Peter standing up, under the grace and anointing of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness to the facts of salvation. They said, we were with Jesus, you killed Him, God raised Him; we are witnesses to the fact that God has raised Him. God has confirmed that Jesus is uniquely the Son of God by the signs and wonders, Peter said, that he worked on behalf of Our Lord. But then Peter moves on. And the climax of the proclamation is really the heart of the kerygma in many ways. He puts it this way. In verses 36-38, he says, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know, assuredly, that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

So the heart of the kerygma is the declaration. It's the proclamation of what God has fundamentally done in His Son. And what is Peter saying? That God has not only raised Jesus from the dead, right? After having been crucified for the sake of our sins, having shed his blood to deal with the human sin problem, Peter said, "death could not hold Him down." And then God raised Him [Jesus] up, and then Peter said, and where is Jesus now? He is at the right hand of the Father, and the Father has made this one, Jesus, the Lord of everything, and the Christ. That means all authority in Heaven and earth belongs to Jesus, and He is the Messiah. That means the one through whom the Holy Spirit, that is going to give birth to the Church, comes forth from the Father and from the Son. And then Peter goes on.

As he preached the reality that Jesus is Lord, those who heard were stirred and they were convicted by the Holy Spirit. And they looked at Peter and said, what should we do? And then what Peter gives is really the foundation stone of Christian identity. He puts it this way. He says, first of all, repent. And that means, respond to the truth about who Jesus is, respond to Jesus' diagnosis of the condition of the human heart, the sin-sick condition. (I mean, we need to have our sins forgiven!) So we turn toward Christ who we now know is Lord and we bring our life under His lordship. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins." What Jesus has come to do - - and He is the only one who can do this, and this is what is declared and why it is such "good news" to the world -- is He is the only one who can take away the sin in us, the sin problem which produces the death problem which separates us from God.

So repent, be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So that is the fundamental and first proclamation of the kerygma that we see in the New Testament.

But it is also summarized in shorter forms in different places in the New Testament. For example, in Romans 10:9, Paul says, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved." In 1 Timothy 1:10, he puts it this way: "Jesus abolished death and He brought life and immortality to light." I used to love the Memorial Acclamation that we used to say at Mass, "Dying He destroyed our death, rising He restored our life, He is coming again in glory!"

And so, I like to summarize that sometimes when I am talking to people as: "He destroyed death, restored life, and He's coming to bring His glory," to bring us into glory. That's kind of another way of summarizing what is at the heart of the kerygma. And then Romans 4:25: "He was put to death for our sins and He was raised for our justification."

So the kerygma is the "good news" that God the Father has come in His Son Jesus, sending Jesus for our sake, to come and seek and save those of us who are under the power and dominion of sin and death, to free us from that bondage through His authority, His power, His death on the Cross; and then [us] receiving that, saying yes to it, and we believe that God has made Jesus now the head of the whole human race and all of His creation. And that's all in His hands now, and the way to salvation is to receive the free gift from Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of our sins. That means turning to Him and giving Him our sin, and being baptized so our sins can be ultimately forgiven and we can receive the new life in us, which is the power -- the living presence -- of the Holy Spirit in us.

Why do we evangelize?

Why do we evangelize? The Scriptures and the Church give us a bunch of reasons for it, so I want to give you some of them, okay? Number one. Pope Paul VI reminded us, he said, "The Church exists to evangelize; it's Her deepest identity." What does he mean? When we evangelize, we're living according to our new nature in Christ that is the nature of the Church. And where does the Church come from? The Church is born of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father in the Son "on mission." The Holy Spirit is the first agent of the Church's mission, and guess where he lives? He lives in your heart. So that's fundamentally the number one reason: we just live according to our nature and our identity. Number two is the great commandment. Jesus said, "Go make disciples of all nations." So we're motivated out of love for Christ in obedience -- right? -- to Him, to express that love, to fulfill the Great Commission. Number three -- and here's one that we don't often hear much about -- this is from 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 verse 11. The fear of the Lord motivates us. Paul says, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." Now, he knows the fear of the Lord which gives him wisdom, that is, what? That ultimately, Judgement Day is coming for the whole human race and Jesus Christ is the judge of the living and the dead, right? So fear of the Lord is not a bad thing. Fear of the Lord is a really, really good thing because it gives us wisdom to understand what's at stake, which I will mention a little bit more as we go along here. So, fear of the Lord is a motive. Another one is 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 verse 13: "We believe and so we speak." What's the motive? We believe it. We believe the message. We believe the Good News. I'm a Believer and I want to speak and communicate what I've been given. And it's my faith that moves me to do that. Another motive: "The love of Christ compels us," St. Paul states. So where does that love come from? Paul tells us in Romans that the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts, the Holy Spirit, which is the love of God. And it gives us the Heart of Jesus to seek and save the lost...to be united to the Heart of Jesus who, to this day, is seeking and saving the lost all over the globe, right?

Okay, the big one -- that it's important to get clear -- is we understand what's really at stake. Evangelization is about seeking and saving the lost. What does that mean? It means bringing people to salvation. What's salvation? Saving people from Hell, for Heaven. That's the bottom line. That's what's at stake. That's the biggest thing that's happening on the planet right now. What's the destiny of every eternal soul? And this is the battle that's going on on the earth, that lots of people just don't see. The two kingdoms are contesting for the eternal destiny of every single person.

Everything else in this world is going to pass away. What's not going to pass away are those who bear the image of God, and they're going to end up either in eternal separation and suffering which we call Hell, separation from God. Or they're going to live with God forever in absolute glory, sharing the glory that belongs to Jesus. Another motive Paul gives at a certain point is to win the crown. He says, he knows that in running the race and fulfilling this mission, that there was a crown waiting for him and having that is a good motive. That's a good one. It's not the only motive. There's lots of motives for it and the Scriptures are very clear and the Church is very clear, so as we mature as Catholic disciples, as we mature in Christ, all these motives should be active. And the Holy Spirit wants to help them be active in us, so that we can step into this mission consistently and with great conviction.

What do we mean by “Power Unto Salvation”?

What do we mean by “power for salvation”? Why does the kerygma have power? Paul tells us in his first chapter of the letter to the Romans. He says the gospel is “the power of God for salvation for all those who believe.” [He was] totally convinced of it. He gave his whole life to it. He saw the power of God in the power of what the kerygma does to the human heart. There's a really wonderful passage in 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 that gives us clear insight as to why the kerygma has power. What is this power? To begin with, first I want to say this: the content of the kerygma is the good news about Jesus. It's the fact that he's Lord and Christ, Savior of the world. But the method of the kerygma is the work of the Holy Spirit. Those two things go together. It's the right message under the right anointing of the Holy Spirit. I'll show you why in this reading.

So this is 2nd Corinthians Chapter 4 verses 1 through 6. In it, Paul says: “Therefore this ministry by the mercy of God...” What is he talking about? He's talking about the ministry of proclaiming the gospel. He said, “We don't lose heart. We've denounced disgraceful or underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” That's a description of evangelization, representing the kerygma. Through the open statement of the truth, which is the kerygma, we make an appeal to every man's conscience, right? So he goes on. Paul said, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ.”

What we're going to see here is that evangelization is fundamentally spiritual warfare. There's a battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The devil's strategy is to blind the human mind and the human heart from the capacity to see what God has done in Jesus. And Paul explains this. He says, “For what we preach is not ourselves, but [we preach] Jesus Christ as Lord.” That's a summary of the kerygma: “Jesus Christ is Lord.” This is the interesting part in terms of understanding the power: “We preach Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.” This is the key. He says, “For it is the God who said let light shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that is shining on the face of Christ.”

Do you get that? Remember what Jesus said to Peter when Peter identified him as the Messiah? What did he say? He said, “Flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you, Peter, but my Heavenly Father made it possible for you to grasp who I am.” [That] is essentially what he said. He said, “No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.” What does Paul tell us right here? He said, knowing the spiritual battle that's going on, that the devil's strategy is to veil the human mind and the human heart, the only way to penetrate that veil of darkness, he said, is to preach and to declare the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord. And he said, “when we preach that, the God who said let light shine out of darkness...” Where's that from? That is from Genesis, right? When God spoke, he spoke light into the darkness. He said, that God “sheds light into the human heart when we preach the kerygma.” It's the Holy Spirit that empowers the proclamation of the kerygma.

So it's not just the words. There is the content, which is the story, the realization, that Jesus Christ is Lord. But the method is the Spirit. And the Spirit opens the human heart because it's the special mission of the Holy Spirit to reveal to every human heart the Lordship and Majesty of Jesus. So that is a miracle. What happens in the human heart, it's a God thing. This is why it has power, right? Paul said very clearly, I didn't come to you with eloquence and lots of persuasion. He said, I presented to you the message that Jesus Christ is Lord and what happened? The Holy Spirit backs this message.

The reason this is the germ cell of the Church's life and faith, and why the recent popes have really exhorted us to lay hold of the kerygma again, is because the Holy Spirit wants to back this. If we're talking about all kinds of things the Holy Spirit doesn't want to talk about, He's not going to anoint it. In order for the human heart to be freed to come to faith, it's a work of God in us. And God has decided through the foolishness of what we preach to save those who believe. And what's preached is this message, that Jesus Christ is Lord. So when you're out there sharing the gospel, don't worry if you're not that eloquent or if you don't feel great that particular day, because it's not about you. It's about us just communicating this truth. We got to make sure we bring the right content and that we trust the Holy Spirit to do his work. That's where the power comes from.

What does “power for salvation” look like?

What are some scriptural and modern-day examples of the kerygma having “power for salvation”? What a good question! One of my favorite spots is Acts chapter 10, the conversion of Cornelius, when the gospel went to the Gentiles. And it's a beautiful example of Peter, again, presenting the kerygma. And how did he do it? First, he is just bearing witness. I'll just read this to you.

He said, “We are witnesses to all that [Jesus] did, both in the country of Judea of the Jews and in Jerusalem and...” Here's the kerygma: “...They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him up on the third day and made him manifest not to all people but to us who are chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after he rose from the dead.” (Acts 10:39-41)

And then he dials in even a little further, he said: “And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Acts 10:42-43)

You see some of these constant themes that are present in the kerygma, right? They witness to the fact that Jesus was crucified, that they saw it, that He was raised from the dead, that they are witnesses to a fact of history. It's not just an idea, it's not just a kind of spiritual inspiration -- it's real. So they declare that fact, right? That Jesus is Lord, that God has made Him the judge of the living and the dead.

This is a big deal. This is one of the things that can stir the human heart to the right sort of fear of God, that allows us to align ourselves in a way that we can hear Him, and hear the message that's about to come. And then Peter underlines again that they were sent to offer people the gift of freedom from their sins -- the forgiveness of their sins is right at the heart. If you don't get to talking about the need to have your sins forgiven, you haven't hit the heart of the kerygma. It's so important for everybody to come to terms with that fact, because we know, because Jesus is Lord, that every human being is going to stand before Him someday. And He is the only one Who can free us of our sin and prepare us for that day.

But you see what happens then: “While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been

poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 'Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'" (Acts 10:44-47) It's an amazing moment! The apostles saw with their own eyes [that] the very thing that they received came upon the Gentiles. And how did it come? Through the preaching of the kerygma. And the kerygma was backed because the power of the Holy Spirit went forward to bring conviction to Cornelius and his whole household.

It's amazing -- I was thinking earlier, just another example from my own life. I was just a young guy and I was kind of coming into my faith, and awakening to the reality of the power of the kerygma, and I was sharing an apartment, at age 20, at the university I attended, with an old highschool friend of mine. He was an academic all-american football player, great guy, and I tried to evangelize him at the beginning of the summer. He was a big guy, and he told me he didn't want to talk about it. He told me not to bring it up anymore. And he was big, so I didn't bring it up anymore for a while.

Toward the end of the summer, one night, we were both going to bed, and our beds were kind of in a hallway between two rooms. And he said to me -- I was laying in bed, quietly praying the rosary -- and he said, "Hey, Pete, turn on the light." And I said, "What? Why? Why?" And he said, "Turn on the light!" So I turned on the light, and he sat up in bed and he looked at me, and he goes, "Is the devil real?" I said, "Yeah, the devil's real." "No," he said, "seriously, is he real?" And I said, "Yeah, he's real." I said, "Why?" and he goes, "Nevermind." And he just laid down and [said] "Turn the light off." So I turned the light off and thought, "That was kind of weird," you know?

A couple of minutes later he said again, "Hey, Pete, turn the light on." So I turned it on and I said, "What's the matter?" And he said, "Pete, seriously, something's wrong. I think I'm being hassled. I've been thinking a lot over the last few months about taking my life." I said, "Really?" I didn't know that, he was like a 4.0 student. And he wasn't going to church, and he was in a bad relationship with somebody and stuff. I said, "Look, I don't know if this is the devil, sounds like him, but I know this: Jesus Christ is Lord, and you were baptized. And if you turn your heart to Him, and if we pray right now, I believe that if it is him, we can chase him away."

I'd never had that experience. It was the first time I ever did this. So I get out of bed, my friend is sitting at the end of the bed, we both have our pajamas on, and he said, "What do I do?" I said, "Just, like, close your eyes and think about Jesus in some way." And then I put my hand on his head and just asked the Holy Spirit to come. And I said, "In the name of Jesus, if there is any spirit, dark spirit, trying to hassle my friend Tom here, I command you to go in my baptism." I was standing [there] and kept thinking about my baptism, you know? That we have authority. And honestly, [as] I was doing this, [I was] just learning it as I was going along. So I prayed in that, and I asked him to accept Jesus, and he did.

And he was quiet, and he had his face in his hands, and after a few minutes, I leaned over and I said, "Hey Tom, are you experiencing anything?" And he goes, "What? You don't see it?" And I said, "No, what? What are you talking about?" And he said, "You don't see the light?" And I said, "No." And he says, "Dude, seriously?" And I said, "I don't see anything!" And he goes, "As soon as you started praying, this light started filling me, and it's still filling me. You want some?" And I said, "What do you mean?" And he went out and he got a Bible from the other room, and he came in and he started reading it. And we ended up praying -- this was about a quarter of eleven at night -- friends, we prayed together, he and I, all night long. In fact, we ended up on the football field at this university at midnight, and we prayed from midnight til 6:30 in the morning, then we went to Mass, and then we went home and went to bed.

And I saw that night the power of the gospel, and the power of the kerygma to bring life in the midst of darkness. I didn't even know what I was doing, but faith had come alive in me, and I knew the Holy Spirit was in me, and you can have that confidence too.

Final Thoughts

Well, friends, it has been great to be with you. It's such a privilege to be a part of something like this, and I want to just end with a prayer. Let's pray.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. Lord Jesus, You've gathered us, and You've gathered these young men and women for this time. And You have called them, You've baptized and confirmed them, and You've called them to go deeper into this mission of proclaiming the kerygma. And I ask, right now, Lord, that You would pour out your Holy Spirit upon them and stir up every gift that You gave them personally in their baptism and confirmation.

And, Lord, I pray that You open wide the doors of wherever it is You're going to be sending them, so they can be conduits of the grace of Your Spirit, and be confident in the power of the kerygma to lead people to salvation, in this really critical time in the history of the Church, in the history of the crazy world that we're living in. May this all be for Your glory. And Mother Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, cover them in your prayer as well.

God bless you, friends. Have a great day.

