



## Basic Evangelization Training

Course 1: The Basics

### 1.2 Introduction: Mercy for Sinners

#### Introductory Story

Meagan, an evangelist for Saint Paul Street Evangelization, was attending a Corpus Christi procession with some of her fellow evangelists. She saw a man who looked homeless, in shabby clothing and with missing teeth, and approached him. She offered him a miraculous medal. The man's name was Michael. Michael refused to accept the medal, saying, "I'm not worthy to have that." Meagan sat down next to him and told him, "None of us are worthy!"

Michael was deeply aware of his failures. He didn't blame anyone else, but accepted that he had chosen to do wrong, again and again, harming himself and others, closing off opportunities to bring goodness into the world. During their conversation, Michael told Meagan and another evangelist, Scott, that he had "squandered all the good things in his life, all the opportunities." He cried softly, with his head down.

While Michael was deeply aware of his failings, he did not have the same awareness of God's mercy. He told Meagan, "When I get right, I'll go back to God." Meagan exclaimed, "Michael don't wait! God doesn't want you to wait until you are all better to come to Him! Come to Him now!" She told him that if he would allow Our Lord to help him, His mercy would transform him. But Michael thought his sins were too great for God's mercy. Softly crying, looking down and shaking his head, Michael said, "This can't be it ... this can't be it..."

During the conversation, Meagan and Scott each told Michael about where they had come from and what God's mercy had done for them. Meagan had been an alcoholic and prescription drug addict. She eventually became addicted to heroin, and, too selfish to stop using, lost two of her children to the state. She too had been homeless. She had multiple felonies, and had done jail time. She had given herself over to promiscuity and perversion, and lived in a fog of darkness. She had attempted suicide.

Scott's sins were more "glamorous": he had robbed banks and spent time in a maximum-security prison.

Meagan reports, "I knew that if Michael would just give Jesus a chance, He would change his whole life. I told Michael about how much Jesus loved him, how He would have chosen to die on the cross even if it had been ONLY for him! I asked him to imagine this type of love!"

She continues: "After we spoke to Michael for a while, we got up to keep going; the procession having trailed many blocks ahead without us. Patting Michael's back, I asked him if he would now take the miraculous medal. Smiling, he nodded "yes," and I asked if I could put it around his neck. He accepted gratefully, and as I placed Our Lady's medal around his neck, I silently prayed for the Blessed Virgin Mary to bring him to her Son."

"We left Michael with Our Lady's medal around his neck, and caught up with the procession. As we were walking back to the Cathedral later on, Scott reminded us to look for Michael again. Thankfully, we spotted him across the street. We all raised our voices to him gleefully, saying 'Hi Michael!' as he smiled and waved back at us..."

## Mercy for Sinners

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Lk 15:1-10)

In the face of Jesus Christ, we see the face of God. Jesus said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). Jesus is the eternal Word of God, made visible for us. In Jesus Christ “the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion.”<sup>1</sup> In Him we know who God is, and what His plan is for the world.

So if Jesus characterizes His outreach to those who are lost in sin as a shepherd seeking out a single lost sheep “until he finds it,” and a woman sweeping the house and searching diligently for a single lost coin “until she finds it,” *we know that God genuinely and passionately desires the salvation of sinners*. Indeed, “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” The very reason that He permitted sin in the first place, it seems, is that He might have mercy on sinners: “God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all” (Rom 11:32). We, for our part, rejoice in this mysterious merciful plan of God. In the Holy Mass for Easter, we proclaim, “O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!”<sup>2</sup>

“The Gospel,” according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “is the revelation in Jesus Christ of God’s mercy to sinners.”<sup>3</sup> “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). The Gospel is the “good news” that Jesus Christ has come into the world to fulfill all the saving promises of the Old Testament<sup>4</sup> and the desires of the human heart,<sup>5</sup> saving us from all that enslaves us. And sin is the worst slavery possible.

In this lesson we will begin to answer the question, “What is Evangelization”? “The Gospel” that we have just described has a great deal to do with evangelization. *Simply put, evangelization is the proclamation of the gospel*. And the gospel concerns salvation, especially from sin. So in a nutshell, then: *Evangelization is the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ*. In this lesson, we hope to unpack this statement a bit for you, while making some introductory

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* [Dogmatic constitution on divine revelation], November 18, 1965, sec. 7.

<sup>2</sup> From the Easter Exultet. “There is no reason why human nature should not have been raised to something greater after sin. For God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom; hence it is written (Rm. 5:20): ‘Where sin abounded, grace did more abound.’ Hence, too, in the blessing of the Paschal candle, we say: ‘O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer!’” St. Thomas Aquinas, ST III, Q.1, Art.3, Repl.3.

<sup>3</sup> CCC, sec. 1846.

<sup>4</sup> CCC, sec. 2763.

<sup>5</sup> CCC, sec. 27.

## Introduction to Evangelization

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points about how to evangelize according to the Spirit of mercy with which our Lord Jesus Christ ate with sinners. This is an intro to the very basics.

*“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever. O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures for ever” (Ps 136:1)!*

#### Topic Areas

- What is evangelization?
  - What does the word “evangelization” mean?
  - What is the basic message of the gospel?
- What does an evangelist do?
  - Witness of life
  - Proclamation of the gospel
  - Prayer and Four-Step Method

