

LIFE IN CHRIST



focus
fellowship of catholic
university students



Chapter VIII

Missionary Discipleship

UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

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DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

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WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Missionary Discipleship

This Bible study began with Jesus' calling of Peter. Jesus chose him as a disciple, called him to a deeper trust, and invited him to leave everything and follow Him (Lk 5). Yet, there is one additional element of Peter's story that cannot be forgotten: a call to mission. "And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men'" (Lk 5:10).

From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, He didn't only call His disciples to follow Him; He also invited them to share in His mission to reach the world with the Gospel of the Kingdom. After calling Peter, He choose the twelve and sent them out (Lk 6:12-16). And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal (Lk 9:1-2). His mission didn't end with the twelve, either. In His desire to reach more lost souls, He appointed seventy others, saying, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Lk 10:1-2).

Then, at the end of His earthly ministry, He made clear His full plan for mission,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Mt 28:18-20).

This is the most authoritative statement in the history of the world. Jesus Christ, God-in-the-flesh, through whom the entire universe was created, cites His own credentials, saying “all authority” has been given to Him. Presidents, CEOs, and all other leaders on the planet do not have any authority comparable to Christ’s. And with this authority, He commands His body, the Church, to “make disciples of all nations” (v. 19). This is our mission. Pope St. Paul VI said it beautifully when he wrote, “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”¹ What began with the calling of the first disciples, extending to the twelve and the seventy, also extends to the entire Church. Even today, two-thousand years later, His followers receive His call to reach the world with His message of salvation. This is the mission Christ entrusted to His Church, and each one of us is called to participate in that mission.

Several facets of Christ’s mission merit particular attention. Let’s consider a few:

¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 14, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html August 17, 2023.

An Indispensable Mission

Christ's mission is indispensable. Speaking of the missionary mandate for all Christians, the Second Vatican Council stated: "On all Christians therefore is laid the preeminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world."² Even the Church's law states Catholics have the right and the duty to evangelize.³ Truly, mission is an indispensable aspect of Christian discipleship.

Unfortunately, for some it can be tempting to think that mission is an optional part of discipleship, something we should do, but not a necessity. If we maintain our personal devotion to God, the thinking goes, what more is necessary? But Jesus never envisions mission as an "extra." As we learned, to be a disciple is to imitate the master. And if Christ's mission is to save the world, then our mission is to imitate Him, to join Him in His saving work. It is a contradiction to say that we desire to follow Jesus but don't care about His mission. Like St. Paul, we must say, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

In fact, Pope St. Paul VI tells us evangelization is the surest sign that we are disciples,

Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself

² Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html August 31, 2023.

³ *The Code of Canon Law*, Can. 225 §1, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann208-329_en.html#TITLE_II. August 31, 2023.

*to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.*⁴

Pope Francis articulates a similar idea, calling all Christians to missionary discipleship,

All the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization.... [W]e no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”.⁵

Do you think of yourself this way? Are you a “missionary disciple?” You might be thinking, “Evangelization isn’t for me.” But that is simply not true. Not only is Christ commanding you to go on mission, He is also giving you His grace and His Spirit to empower you. It is His mission, and as a member of the Church, you are called to participate in it.

A Mission to Make Disciples

Jesus calls us to “make disciples” (Mt 28:19). At the very heart of the Church’s evangelization is the proclamation of the Gospel, which St. John Paul II described the Gospel as “the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith.”⁶ Indeed, just as Peter “left

⁴ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 24, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html August 17, 2023.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 120, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#We_are_all_missionary_disciples August 17, 2023.

⁶ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, par. 25, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html August 17, 2023.

everything and followed him” so too are we called to invite others to “leave their nets behind” and begin a life of discipleship, following Jesus unreservedly. Said simply, our mission is to make disciples.

This reality is essential for us to remember as we set out on mission. There are many good ways of contributing to the work of evangelization—giving to the poor, teaching someone about the Faith, modeling the Christian life by our conduct, etc. And we all have different gifts that can contribute to building up the kingdom—teaching, healing, hospitality, etc. What we must keep in mind, however, is that our primary goal in all these activities is making disciples of Jesus Christ. Whether we are serving in a Diocese, a Parish, in campus ministry, or just witnessing to the people in our daily lives, we cannot lose track of this goal. If our missionary efforts are not contributing to disciple-making, then we ought to reevaluate them carefully. We are not simply called to do what we enjoy or what makes us feel good about ourselves; we are called to “make disciples” (Mt 28:19). That is the mission Christ is entrusting to our care. We cannot be content to let lesser goods get in the way of our primary goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

A Mission to Reach the Entire World

Christ’s mission is to all people. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). And with such great desire, Christ calls His Church to reach the entire world with His saving truth (CCC 849). It is truly for “all nations” (Mt 28:19).

The Church is keenly aware of this responsibility. As Christ’s body on earth, She is entrusted with the mission of bringing the Gospel to every person. Pope St. John Paul II, in his 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, recognized this responsibility when he wrote,

*The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.*⁷

Pope St. Paul VI wrote similarly in his day,

*The Church is deeply aware of her duty to preach salvation to all. Knowing that the Gospel message is not reserved to a small group of the initiated, the privileged or the elect, but is destined for everyone, she shares Christ's anguish at the sight of the wandering and exhausted crowds, "like sheep without a shepherd."*⁸

Today, the Church, and we as members of it, must recognize our responsibility as well. Pew research estimates that in 2020, the world population was around 7.66 billion people, only about 2.38 billion of which were Christians. This means that today there are likely *at least* 5.28 billion people in this world who are *not* disciples of Jesus Christ.⁹ And that number doesn't even consider those Christians who are not actively practicing the Faith.

These staggering numbers should get our attention. We might not be able to personally reach every individual on the planet, but our hearts should break that so many people are likely to die not knowing

⁷ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, par. 1, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html

⁸ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 57, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html August 31, 2023.

⁹ Pew Research, *Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050*, accessed at <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050/> August 31, 2023.

Jesus Christ. And while the Church certainly teaches that salvation is *possible* for those who do not know Christ explicitly—who, to the best of their ability, are trying to do what is right by the light of reason—She also recognizes that only an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ, through faith and baptism, *ensures* salvation (see CCC 847-56). The Church has always rejected universalism, the idea that everyone will necessarily be saved. Yet, even if we don't subscribe to universalism explicitly, too often today, many people subscribe to what might be called practical universalism. They believe that hell exists, but they are none too concerned that any decent, hard-working person might end up there. But Jesus Himself cautions us against such a view. He tells us, "[T]he gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction" (Mt 7:13). It isn't enough to simply *hope* that the people who haven't heard the name of Jesus will receive a heavenly reward. If any of those 5.28+ billion non-Christians can be saved from eternal damnation and brought to eternal life with God in heaven, why wouldn't we bring them His saving message? And even if certain people were already following their consciences and seeking to live well according to the light of reason, why wouldn't we bolster their eternal hope (not to mention their earthly joy) by telling them explicitly about the saving truth for which they long. Woe to us if we merely affirm their good intentions! Instead, our love for God and for others ought to convict us that every person needs and deserves to hear Christ's saving message.

An Urgent Mission

This leads us to a final point: Christ's mission is urgent. Curtis Martin and Edward Sri write, "As Christians, we don't believe in reincarnation; no one gets a "do-over," a second chance to help people in some

second, third or fourth life. No, the time is now. This generation of Christians is responsible for helping this generation of souls.”¹⁰

Jesus uses the word “go” in the Great Commission (Mt 28:19). It is a word we should take to heart. We can’t sit back on the sidelines, waiting to go on mission until some future date. The people of this world are desperate for a relationship with Christ, even if they don’t know it. They are spiritually starving, and we need to bring them food before they expire of hunger. Therefore, we must go out to them—now!

Many saints of the Church knew how important it was for them to go out and preach the Gospel. The first apostles travelled across the known world. St. Peter traveled to Rome. St. James is purported to have made it all the way to the Atlantic coast of Spain. St. Paul travelled much of the Mediterranean world. Additionally, St. Francis Xavier, one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church, travelled from Europe to India. While there he lamented how many of the “good Christians” of his day failed to take seriously the urgency of Christ’s mission. He wrote, in a letter to his dear friend, St. Ignatius,

Many, many people fail to become Christians, simply for the lack of a teacher of the Christian faith! Often I think of running throughout the universities of Europe, and principally Paris and the Sorbonne, there to shout at the top of my voice, like one who had lost his senses—to tell those men whose learning is greater than their wish to put their knowledge to good use, how many souls, through their negligence, must lose Heaven and end up in hell.¹¹

¹⁰ Martin, Curtis and Sri, Edward (Editors), *Foundations for Discipleship*, p. 142. Published by FOCUS and OSV, 2021.

¹¹ Walsh, Milton. (2012). *Witness of the Saints: Patristic Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2012), 638.

You may or may not be called to travel the world to evangelize, but either way, you should have the same urgency as these saints to reach all peoples with Christ's Gospel. Do you have this urgency? Do you desire to make disciples of all nations? If not, you might spend a little time reflecting: How is my relationship with Christ? Do I care about the salvation of souls? Do I only want to receive from Christ or am I also willing to give? Do I love learning the teachings of the Church but fail to share those teachings with others? There's no need to be ashamed if your conviction isn't yet what it could be—we can all grow. What is essential, however, is to recognize our call to mission and grow in our commitment to it.

Getting Started – Three Habits of Missionary Disciples

If we are going to live Christ's mission, we need to be people totally transformed by Christ, people committed to loving Him with all our hearts, loving others and living His mission in the world. Over the years in FOCUS, we have found three key habits of a missionary disciple that seem most important to helping us become the kind of people who can fulfil Christ's mission: Divine Intimacy, Authentic Friendship and Clarity and Conviction about the Little Way of Evangelization. Let's discuss each of these three habits:

Divine Intimacy

Prayer was at the heart of Jesus' mission. He prayed before and after He preached, healed, and cast out demons (Mk 1:35, Lk 5:16, Jn 6:1, 6:15). He prayed before traveling to a new city (Lk 4:42). He prayed all night before He chose the twelve (Lk 6:12). Constantly, He turned back to His Father in prayer.

Christ teaches us to do the same as we go on mission. We cannot give what we do not have. If we want others to know Jesus Christ, then we must first be deeply committed to Him ourselves. Therefore, as missionary disciples, we should have as our primary goal cultivating a deep, personal friendship with Jesus Christ. Evangelization is first and foremost the work of God, and we will be fruitful in mission only to the extent that we ourselves are abiding in deep union with Him. Jesus tells us, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

To grow in our intimacy with Christ we must commit ourselves to the four key practices to which the earliest disciples of Jesus dedicated themselves: prayer, fellowship, the sacraments and forming our minds with the teachings of Christ (see Acts 2:42). These are the four main ways we continually renew our encounter with Christ and grow in divine intimacy, without which we will not bear fruit in mission.

Authentic Friendship

Jesus called His disciples “friends” (Jn 15:15). This is a profound statement. If the God of the universe, Who came down from heaven to save humanity, Who is infinitely beyond human comprehension, can call His apostles friends, what does that mean for us and our missionary efforts? How does this impact the way we view the people we are evangelizing?

In forming missionary disciples, it is not enough to pass on the Gospel message and the teachings of the Church. That is essential, but we must do more. We must genuinely love the people we are serving, accompanying them in life and personally investing ourselves in them through authentic friendship. Pope St. Paul VI wrote, “The work of evangelization presupposes in the evangelizer an ever increasing

love for those whom he is evangelizing.”¹² Similarly, St. Paul writes, “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess 2:8). As true missionary disciples, we must love the people we serve. We must give them not simply a message, but our very selves. This involves actively going out to them, taking interest in them, visiting them on their turf and being a true friend, not simply a formal leader. This kind of deep, personal investment in the people we’re serving matters. Consider Pope Francis’ words, “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives... Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep,’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.”¹³ Indeed, our efforts at fulfilling Christ’s mission of evangelization will prove fruitless if we do not love those we serve through genuine, authentic friendship.

Clarity and Conviction about the Little Way of Evangelization

Jesus’ way of evangelization was not a big way, but a little way. He did not travel the world to preach the Gospel to everyone on earth himself. Rather, He invested deeply in a few whom He formed in the Gospel of the kingdom and trained them to go out and do the same for others. Though He preached to the masses sometimes, He spent most of His time investing in His small group of disciples. He spent three years living with them, teaching them and showing them how to preach, heal and lead as He did (Mt 10:5ff, Lk 10:1ff). Then, He sent them out to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). Jesus’ approach

¹² Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 79, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html August 31, 2023.

¹³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 24, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html August 31, 2023.

to evangelization is what we call the “Little Way of Evangelization.” It is the approach to evangelization that Jesus modeled for us, the “Method Modeled by the Master.”

As we aim to fulfil Christ’s mission, we must have both clarity and conviction about Jesus’ “Little Way of Evangelization.” First, do we have *clarity* about the way Jesus evangelized? Do we think that we need to have a big social media platform or teach theology classes to go on mission? Or do we have clarity that by imitating Christ and investing deeply in a few, we can transform the world?

Second, do we also have *conviction* that Jesus’ example models for us the best way to evangelize? Do we have the conviction that if we imitate Jesus’ way of evangelization we can be most effective in our mission and help transform our world today with the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Do we have the conviction to prioritize this mission in our lives, making time for this urgent task and pouring our lives out into it? Do we have the conviction that this mission is not a job or something extra but is truly at the heart of our identity as disciples?

By having both clarity and conviction for Jesus’ “Little Way of Evangelization,” we will not only bring others to Christ, but we will also begin to see a kind of “spiritual multiplication,” in which more and more souls are brought into Christ’s kingdom. Consider this example,

Imagine one person pursuing a deep, personal relationship with Jesus and desiring for others to know him. She starts intentionally investing in three others who also have a desire to know Jesus. As they grow together, each of these missionary disciples begin investing in friends of their own—three, six or more—who eventually go on to do the same, forming more and more missionary disciples with each new cycle of growth.

The effects begin slowly: For example, one missionary disciple who reaches three others makes four. If each of those three new disciples reaches three others, the total becomes thirteen. For illustration purposes, imagine if all continued to go ideally well—after seven cycles, the total number could reach nearly 1,000, and after 13 cycles, more than 500,000. At this rate, the entire world could be reached in just 22 cycles—that’s within one lifetime of the original disciple! While human weakness and failure will always be present along the way, this model, while purely mathematical, still beautifully illustrates the potential effect one person can have.¹⁴

Conclusion

If we put these three habits into practice, we will begin to see incredible fruit. By continuously deepening our intimacy with Jesus Christ, loving others through authentic friendship, and investing deeply in a few with clarity and conviction for the “Little Way of Evangelization,” not only will we have the potential to reach the entire world for Jesus Christ but also each person will be known, loved, and cared for along the way by another missionary disciple. Just imagine what could happen if we began to live this mission today. The time is now. Let’s get started.

¹⁴ Martin, Curtis and Sri, Edward (Editors), *Foundations for Discipleship*, p. 146-147. Published by FOCUS and OSV, 2021.

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Passages: Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 1:35-39, Luke 5:12-16, John 15:12-17

Introduction

1. Launching Question: Have you ever been given a challenging task to complete? What was it and how were you successful or unsuccessful in fulfilling that task?

Allow the group to discuss.

Last time we discussed the works of mercy and the importance of serving poor. Today, we are going to look more deeply at Christ's mission and our role in that mission.

Missionary Discipleship

Read Matthew 28:18-20

2. This passage, referred to as the Great Commission, begins with "all authority on heaven and earth has been given to me" (v. 18). Why do you think Jesus mentions His authority here, and what does this tell us about the words that follow?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Christ makes the most authoritative statement in the history of the world. Jesus Christ, God-in-the-flesh, through whom the entire universe was created, cites His own credentials, saying “all authority” has been given to Him. Presidents, CEOs, and all other leaders on the planet do not have any authority comparable to Christ’s. With this authority, Christ commands His body, the Church, to “make disciples of all nations” (v. 19). This is the mission Christ entrusted to His Church, and each one of us is called to participate in that mission. By citing His authority Jesus is emphasizing the importance of this command and His full authority to see this mission fulfilled.

An Indispensable Mission

Please read aloud: Let’s look at a few aspects of Christ’s mission that appear in the Great Commission. The first aspect we will look at is indispensability. In other words, why mission is an essential part of the Christian life.

3. If you think back to the very first chapter of this Bible study, what did it mean to be a disciple in Biblical times?

Allow the group to discuss.

*Answer: The key answer is that disciples **imitated** their rabbis.*

Note to the Leader: Keep this question short; it is simply meant to set up the following question.

4. If disciples are called to imitate their rabbis, and Jesus (our rabbi) has a mission to save the world, what does that mean for us as His disciples?

Answer: If Christ's mission is to save the world, then our mission is to imitate Him, to join Him in His saving work. It is a contradiction to say that we desire to follow Jesus but don't care about His mission to save souls. The Second Vatican Council stated: "On all Christians therefore is laid the preeminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world."¹ Even the Church's law states Catholics have the right and the duty to evangelize.² Truly, mission is an indispensable aspect of Christian discipleship.

5. Pope Francis has said, "All the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization.... [W]e no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries', but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples.'"³ Do you think of yourself as a "missionary disciple?" Why or why not?

Allow the group to discuss.

A Mission to Make Disciples

6. Going back to the Great Commission, Jesus commands us to "make disciples." What does it mean to "make disciples?" Why

¹ Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html August 31, 2023.

² *The Code of Canon Law*, Can. 225 §1, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann208-329_en.html#TITLE_II. August 31, 2023.

³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 120, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#We_are_all_missionary_disciples August 17, 2023.

didn't Jesus simply say, "Share the good news" or "Show mercy to others?" And what impact does this have on the way that we live out mission?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: At the very heart of the Church's evangelization is the proclamation of the Gospel, which St. John Paul II described the Gospel as "the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith."⁴ Indeed, just as Peter "left everything and followed him" so too are we called to invite others to "leave their nets behind" and begin a life of discipleship, following Jesus unreservedly. We preach the Gospel and have mercy on others so that we can make disciples. Whether we are serving in a Diocese, a Parish, in campus ministry, or just witnessing to the people in our daily lives, we cannot lose track of this goal. If our missionary efforts are not contributing to disciple-making, then we ought to reevaluate them carefully. We are not simply called to do what we enjoy or what makes us feel good about ourselves; we are called to "make disciples" (Mt 28:19).

A Mission to Reach the Entire World

Please read aloud: Jesus says that we are to make disciples of "all nations" (v. 19). In the Book of First Timothy, we read that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Truly, Christ's mission is meant to reach everyone.

⁴ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, par. 25, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html August 17, 2023.

However, Pew research estimates that in 2020, the world population was around 7.66 billion people, only about 2.38 billion of which were Christians. This means that today there are likely *at least* 5.28 billion people in this world who are *not* disciples of Jesus Christ.⁵ And that number doesn't even consider those Christians who are not actively practicing the Faith.

7. What comes to mind when you hear these numbers? Do you get angry? Discouraged? Motivated to go on mission? Something else entirely?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud: When we hear these numbers, it's important for us to understand what the Church teaches about salvation. While the Church certainly teaches that salvation is *possible* for those who do not know Christ explicitly—who, to the best of their ability, are trying to do what is right by the light of reason—She also recognizes that only an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ, through faith and baptism, *ensures* salvation (see CCC 847-56). The Church has always rejected universalism, the idea that everyone will necessarily be saved. Yet, even if we don't subscribe to universalism explicitly, too often today, many people subscribe to what might be called practical universalism. They believe that hell exists, but they are none too concerned that any decent, hard-working person might end up there. But Jesus Himself cautions us against such a view. He tells us, “[T]he gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction” (Mt 7:13). It isn't enough to simply *hope* that the people who haven't heard the name of Jesus will receive a heavenly reward.

⁵ Pew Research, *Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050*, accessed at <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050/> August 31, 2023.

8. Given the Church's teaching, how ought we to respond to the reality that so many people are not Christians? Why must we do more than simply hope that things will work out?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: If any of those 5.28+ billion non-Christians can be saved from eternal damnation and brought to eternal life with God in heaven, why wouldn't we bring them His saving message? And even if certain people were already following their consciences and seeking to live well according to the light of reason, why wouldn't we bolster their eternal hope (not to mention their earthly joy) by telling them explicitly about the saving truth for which they long. Woe to us if we merely affirm their good intentions! Instead, our love for God and for others ought to convict us that every person needs and deserves to hear Christ's saving message.

An Urgent Mission

Please read aloud: This leads us to a final point: Christ's mission is urgent. Many saints of the Church knew how important it was for them to go out and preach the Gospel. The first apostles travelled across the known world. St. Peter traveled to Rome. St. James is purported to have made it all the way to the Atlantic coast of Spain. St. Paul travelled much of the Mediterranean world. Additionally, St. Francis Xavier, one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church, travelled from Europe to India. While there he lamented how many of the "good Christians" of his day failed to take seriously the urgency of Christ's mission. He wrote, in a letter to his dear friend, St. Ignatius,

Many, many people fail to become Christians, simply for the lack of a teacher of the Christian faith! Often I think of running throughout the universities of Europe, and principally Paris and the Sorbonne, there to shout at the top of my voice, like one who had lost his senses—to tell those men whose learning is greater than their wish to put their knowledge to good use, how many souls, through their negligence, must lose Heaven and end up in hell.⁶

9. You may or may not be called to travel the world to evangelize, but either way, you should strive to have the same urgency as these saints to reach all peoples with Christ's Gospel. Do you have this urgency? Do you desire to make disciples of all nations? In what ways do you struggle to make evangelization a reality in your life?

Allow the group to discuss.

Getting Started – Three Habits of Missionary Disciples

Please read aloud: If we are going to live Christ's mission, we need to be people totally transformed by Christ, people committed to loving Him with all our hearts, loving others and living His mission in the world. Over the years in FOCUS, we have found three key habits of a missionary disciple that seem most important to helping us become the kind of people who can fulfil Christ's mission: Divine Intimacy, Authentic Friendship and Clarity and Conviction about the Little Way of Evangelization. Let's look at how Jesus lived each of these habits, so that we can learn how to begin living out Christ's mission.

⁶ Walsh, Milton. (2012). *Witness of the Saints: Patristic Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2012), 638.

Divine Intimacy

Read Mark 1:35-39

Read Luke 5:12-16

10. What do we see Jesus doing before and after His work of building the kingdom? What does this teach us about going on mission?

Answer: Prayer was at the heart of Jesus' mission. He prayed before and after He preached, healed, and cast out demons (Mk 1:35, Lk 5:16, Jn 6:1, 6:15). Constantly, He turned back to His Father in prayer. Christ teaches us to do the same as we go on mission. We cannot give what we do not have. If we want others to know Jesus Christ, then we must first be deeply committed to Him ourselves.

11. Jesus also tells us in John 15:5, "Apart from me you can do nothing," Why is union with Christ so essential for us as we seek to live out Christ's mission?

Answer: As missionary disciples, we should have as our primary goal cultivating a deep, personal friendship with Jesus Christ. Evangelization is first and foremost the work of God, and we will be fruitful in mission only to the extent that we ourselves are abiding in deep union with Him.

Authentic Friendship

Read John 15:12-17

12. Jesus called His disciples "friends" (Jn 15:15). This is a profound statement. If the God of the universe, Who came down from heaven to save humanity, Who is infinitely beyond human

comprehension, can call His apostles friends, what does that mean for us and our missionary efforts? How does this impact the way we view the people we are evangelizing?

Answer: In forming missionary disciples, it is not enough to pass on the Gospel message and the teachings of the Church. That is essential, but we must do more. We must genuinely love the people we are serving, accompanying them in life and personally investing ourselves in them through authentic friendship. Pope St. Paul VI wrote, "The work of evangelization presupposes in the evangelizer an ever increasing love for those whom he is evangelizing."⁷ Similarly, St. Paul writes, "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thess 2:8). As true missionary disciples, we must love the people we serve. We must give them not simply a message, but our very selves. This involves actively going out to them, taking interest in them, visiting them on their turf and being a true friend, not simply a formal leader.

Clarity and Conviction about the Little Way of Evangelization

Please read aloud: Jesus' way of evangelization was not a big way, but a little way. He did not travel the world to preach the Gospel to everyone on earth himself. Rather, He invested deeply in a few whom He formed in the Gospel of the kingdom and trained them to go out and do the same for others. Though He preached to the masses sometimes, He spent most of His time investing in His small group of disciples. He spent three years living with them, teaching them and

⁷ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 79, accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html August 31, 2023.

showing them how to preach, heal and lead as He did (Mt 10:5ff, Lk 10:1ff). Then, He sent them out to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). Jesus’ approach to evangelization is what we call the “Little Way of Evangelization.” It is the approach to evangelization that Jesus modeled for us, the “Method Modeled by the Master.”

13. Do you have *clarity* about how you are called to evangelize? How can your missionary efforts be more like Jesus’ efforts?

Allow the group to discuss.

14. Second, do you also have *conviction* that Jesus’ example models for us the best way to evangelize? Do you have the conviction to prioritize this mission in your life, making time for this urgent task and pouring your life out into it?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud: By having both clarity and conviction for Jesus’ “Little Way of Evangelization,” we will not only bring others to Christ, but we will also begin to see a kind of “spiritual multiplication,” in which more and more souls are brought into Christ’s kingdom. Consider this example,

Imagine one person pursuing a deep, personal relationship with Jesus and desiring for others to know him. She starts intentionally investing in three others who also have a desire to know Jesus. As they grow together, each of these missionary disciples begin investing in friends of their own—three, six or more—who eventually go on to do the same, forming more and more missionary disciples with each new cycle of growth.

The effects begin slowly: For example, one missionary disciple who reaches three others makes four. If each of those three new disciples reaches three others, the total becomes thirteen. For illustration purposes, imagine if all continued to go ideally well—after seven cycles, the total number could reach nearly 1,000, and after 13 cycles, more than 500,000. At this rate, the entire world could be reached in just 22 cycles—that’s within one lifetime of the original disciple! While human weakness and failure will always be present along the way, this model, while purely mathematical, still beautifully illustrates the potential effect one person can have.⁸

If we put these three habits into practice, we will begin to see incredible fruit. By continuously deepening our intimacy with Jesus Christ, loving others through authentic friendship, and investing deeply in a few with clarity and conviction for the “Little Way of Evangelization,” not only will we have the potential to reach the entire world for Jesus Christ but also each person will be known, loved, and cared for along the way by another missionary disciple. Just imagine what could happen if we began to live this mission today. The time is now. Let’s get started.

15. (Optional) We have now completed this Bible study, *Life in Christ*. What parts stood out to you most? Where do you think you still need to grow? What are you looking forward to next?

Allow the group to discuss.

⁸ Martin, Curtis and Sri, Edward (Editors), *Foundations for Discipleship*, p. 146-147. Published by FOCUS and OSV, 2021.