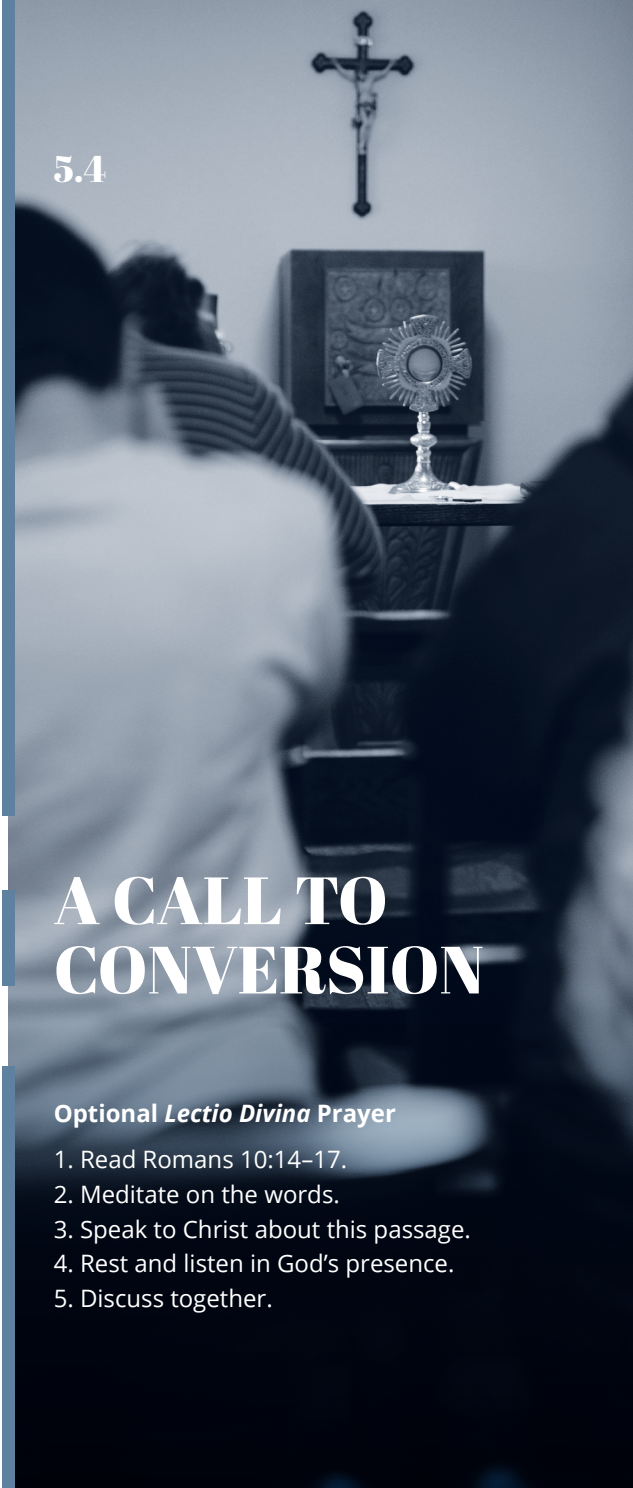


5.4

SHARING THE GOSPEL

A CALL TO CONVERSION

Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read Romans 10:14–17.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

Notes

When starting his religious order, the Jesuits, St. Ignatius of Loyola planned to invite his dear friend Francis Xavier to serve as a scholar and teacher for their growing movement.

But his plans were soon interrupted. King John of Portugal requested that the Jesuits send missionaries to his recently acquired territory in India. Ignatius appointed two of his Jesuits for the task, but when one became seriously ill, he was forced to send someone else. With great hesitation, Ignatius sent Francis Xavier, knowing that he would probably never see his dear friend ever again.

After his departure, Francis Xavier would send letters back to Ignatius to update him on his mission. Francis Xavier described how he invited thousands of people to accept the Gospel and be baptized. He saw hundreds of thousands of conversions, but he was still frustrated that more couldn't be done. He wrote to 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.[1]

While not all of us are called to go to India to evangelize, Francis Xavier's conviction holds true wherever we are. There are people all around us who aren't living in friendship with Jesus Christ and his Church for one main reason: There is no one willing to help them! As St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:14).

As Catholics, each one of us is called to preach the Gospel in two ways: witness and words. As Pope St. Paul VI reminds us, "Modern

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man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."[2] Our witness is essential. Still, "even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained."[3] St. Francis of Assisi is often quoted as saying, "Preach the Gospel at all times, and, if necessary, use words." We have no evidence that St. Francis ever said this; instead, the Church, saints, and Scripture all testify that we must proclaim the Gospel in words also (1 Cor 9:16). Indeed, "there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom, and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed."[4] We can't just hope that those around us will somehow stumble upon the Christian faith on their own. Like St. Francis Xavier, we must proclaim the Gospel to them directly — *with words*.

DISCUSS

Has someone shared the Gospel with you? What was that experience like? Are you convinced of the need to share the Gospel?

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL: THE MESSAGE

The Gospel is the "good news" of Christ's life, death, and resurrection for the sake of our salvation. This message is sometimes called

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the *kerygma*, which itself means "proclamation." It is the essential message of salvation through Jesus Christ.[5]

Though there are numerous ways to summarize the Gospel — and though there have been entire books written on examining its depths — it is important that we share the Gospel with others in a way that is simple, compelling, and easy to understand.

You may have previously discussed the Gospel discipleship article, or perhaps someone invited you to welcome Jesus as the Lord of your life through a conversation or using Scripture. In whatever way you have heard it, the Gospel message generally consists of a few points that contain the basic message of our salvation. While there are many ways to express the saving message of Jesus Christ, the points in this article on the Gospel are based on an image from St. Catherine of Siena in her *Dialogue*, in which she describes Christ as a bridge between God and sinful humanity.[6] These points are developed more in depth on pg. 40. But here is a brief summary:

- **Relationship: What We're Made For —** We are made for a relationship with God.
- **Rebellion: The Chasm —** Our relationship with God was broken by sin. An infinite chasm separated us from God. We have a desire for a lasting happiness that only comes from a relationship with God, but we are unable to amend our relationship with him by ourselves. We are finite, and only an infinite love can bridge the infinite gap caused by sin.
- **Reconciliation: The God-Man Solution —** As fully human, Jesus can represent us and offer an act of love on behalf of the entire human family. But because he is also fully divine, Jesus' act of love far surpasses anything a mere human could ever offer. It is an infinite gift of love that he offered for us to the Father on the cross. Jesus, therefore, is the bridge between sinful humanity and the all-holy God.

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- **Re-Creation: Transformation in Christ —** Jesus has not only died to offer us forgiveness; he has also risen to fill us with his life so that we can be transformed in him. He wants to make us a "new creation"[7] (2 Cor 5:17). This process of sanctification happens in and through the Church. All that Jesus won for us in his death and resurrection comes to us through the Church — through its teachings, its sacraments, and the fellowship of believers in the communion of saints.

- **Response: "Follow Me" —** Jesus invites each of us to respond to the Gospel and follow him as his disciples.

For a deeper exposition of these points, please be sure to read and pray through the Gospel article on pg. 40, which explains each of these points in greater depth. A deep foundational understanding of the Gospel message is critical to share it well!

As you grow in understanding of the Gospel message, you can also turn to various Scripture verses that help express the kerygma. The *Directory for Catechesis*, for example, identifies several Scripture verses that express the saving message of Jesus Christ. Here are a few of its recommended verses:[8]

- Mark 1:15: "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

- John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

- John 10:10: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Pope Francis also once summarized the Gospel this way: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you."[9]

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These passages proclaim to us in simple form the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is this basic Christian message that we should ponder over and over again throughout our lives and share with others, often and explicitly.

DISCUSS

What is the Gospel? How would you summarize it? How have you heard this message powerfully shared?

MAKING THE INVITATION

We should always be ready share the Gospel — in a conversation with a friend, with our family at home, or even to a stranger who needs to hear the hope of Christ. Often, however, we want to share the Gospel with specific people: those in our small groups and our faith formation programs, for example, or those we are mentoring in the Faith. In these situations, it's probably best to share the Gospel at a specific time and place, letting the other person know that you'd like to talk to them about the Faith.

You'll want to **prepare** ahead of time how you'll present the Gospel message to them and how you'll make the invitation for them to make Jesus the center of their life. We'd encourage you to use the Gospel discipleship article (see pg. 40), which lays out each of the points of the Gospel message in a conversational but powerful way. You may also decide to build your presentation around some passages of Scripture or incorporate your testimony.

Once you decide how you will share the Gospel, it's important that you **practice** a few times so that you feel confident sharing the message clearly and boldly. It even helps to practice with someone and have them give you feedback. The more you practice sharing the Gospel, the more confident you will be making this powerful invitation.

Many, many people fail to become Christians, simply for the lack of a teacher of the Christian faith.

— St. Francis Xavier

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When you sit down with someone to share the Gospel, you can start the conversation casually. Take some time to catch up and thank them for taking some time with you. After that, it's time to **share** the message you prepared. Try to make this conversational as well, such as asking the other person questions to give them an opportunity to enter the conversation and share their thoughts.

Finally, don't forget the most powerful part of sharing the Gospel: **Invite** the other person to say "Yes" to Jesus as Lord of their entire life. If they say yes, take some time to pray together and invite them to take a step in their faith — by coming to Mass, joining a Bible study, praying daily, or going to confession. If they say no or are uncertain, thank them for having the conversation with you and ask them what questions they still have or if there is anything they want to learn more about. This is a great chance for you to continue to walk with them and introduce them to Jesus and the Faith in new ways.

DISCUSS

How do you think the people in your life would best receive the message of the Gospel? How could you prepare for these conversations?

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

At this point in the article, you might be really excited, but you also might be a little uncertain. You might be thinking, *Am I ready for this? Is this really what I'm supposed to be doing? Is this Catholic?* Let's address some common objections to sharing the Gospel:

- ***Is this Catholic?*** Some might wonder if forming others in catechesis and leading them to the sacraments is more important than sharing the Gospel. But many practicing Catholics have not yet been evangelized. They may be going

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through the motions, even believing the right things, but they have not truly encountered Christ and surrendered their lives to him. They do not have a "living sense of the faith"[10] — or, in the words of Pope Francis, they "lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith."[11] While saying yes to Christ isn't the only step in one's faith life, it is the most foundational.

- ***Presenting the Gospel seems forced or impersonal.*** Let's be honest: Sharing the Faith can be awkward sometimes. But so can asking someone out on a first date or interviewing for an important job. Sometimes great things require us to step out of our comfort zones. By building strong relationships and sharing the Gospel honestly from the heart, you can make it more natural. But don't let a little awkwardness prevent someone from knowing Jesus.

- ***I don't know if I'm ready; I don't feel equipped.*** That may be so. But God doesn't call the equipped; he equips the called. The real question is, are you willing? Do you want someone to come to know Jesus? Then pray, practice with a good friend or mentor (maybe even multiple times), and share. Imagine what could happen if they say yes!

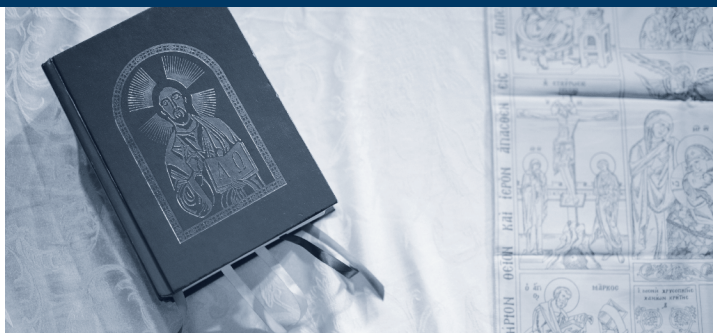
DISCUSS

Do you have any hesitations about sharing the Gospel? How can you overcome these?

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For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith.

— Romans 1:16



TAKE ACTION

It's time to start practicing how to share the Gospel. Take some time to read the Gospel article on pg. 40, and then practice sharing the points of the Gospel in an engaging and authentic way with another faithful person. Ask them to give you feedback on how you can improve. Adjust your presentation if something doesn't go over well or doesn't feel natural. Once you have your presentation prepared, you will be ready to share the Gospel more effectively whenever you need to, whether it be in the context of a small group study or discipleship or a conversation with a friend.

KEY CONCEPTS

The Message of the Gospel: Based on St. Catherine of Siena's image of the bridge, the Gospel can be summarized in these simple steps:

- Relationship: What We're Made For
- Rebellion: The Chasm
- Reconciliation: The God-Man Solution
- Re-Creation: Transformation in Christ
- Response: "Follow Me"

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Notes

Directory for Catechesis, in particular paragraphs 57 – 60.

Notes

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

[2] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* accessed September 3, 2020, Vatican.va, 41.

[3] Ibid, 22.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See also: Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. *Directory for Catechesis* (USCCB: Washington, 2020), 57 – 60.

[6] See *St. Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*.

[7] Pontifical Council for Culture, "Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly: The *Via Pulcritudinous*, Priviliged Pathway for Evangelization and Dialogue (2006), accessed November 17, 2020, Vatican.va, III.1.

[8] See also *Directory for Catechesis* par. 58, footnote 5.

[9] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, accessed September 3, 2020, Vatican.va, 164.

[10] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, accessed September 7, 2020, Vatican.va, 33.

[11] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, accessed October 2, 2020, Vatican.va, 14.