

EVANGELIZATION – OLD AND NEW

As we approach the beginning of Lent on February 14 (yes, Valentine's Day!), and move through this vital season of the Church Year, there's something you may notice: no Catechumens – people preparing to be initiated into the Church at the Easter Vigil. No one responded to the invitation published for several weeks last summer, so there has been no Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults on Wednesday evenings, there will be no "scrutinies" at Lenten weekend Masses, and no one will be initiated at the Easter Vigil.

There's certainly no way to know why a parish might have one, two or more people participating in the RCIA in any given year – or none in this case. Is everyone who has a church home happy where they are? Are folks who are unchurched not searching for a church to call home? Is the invitation we publish not reaching those who might need or want to see it? Actually, that last one is probably the reason – and **you** can be the solution.

Evangelization is about spreading the Good News and it is definitely not just the province of priests, deacons or other parish staff members. It is, in fact, one of the primary responsibilities of every Catholic: not arm-twisting or trying to "convert" people, but rather *inviting* people to "come and see" – precisely what Jesus says to his first disciples when they encounter him for the first time and ask "where do you stay?"

So this is an invitation – and a challenge – to you. Do you have a friend or neighbor who doesn't have a church home or who seems disconnected or discontented with the one they have? Invite them to come here to Mass with you; assure them that it's OK and that they will be welcomed with open arms – though you'd have to gently explain that they wouldn't be able to share in Communion just yet. And when the invitation goes out in the bulletin and on the church website this coming summer to begin the RCIA, share that with them and encourage them to consider responding; better yet, offer to come with them! They might decline those invitations, but at least you've tried.

That is what might be called the "old" or traditional *evangelization*, because there's also a movement begun a number of years ago called the "*new*" *evangelization* which is all about reaching out to baptized Catholics who have drifted away from the Church for one reason or another; they've become disconnected and may find it hard to reconnect on their own. And that, too, is where **you** come in. Next weekend you'll find another invitation – and challenge – with the title *Are You Plugged In?* It comes via our Parish Pastoral Council with the hope that, sometime during the weeks of Lent, you will invite an "unplugged" Catholic friend or neighbor to accompany you to Mass. Sure, they may not accept the invitation – but again, at least you've tried. That's all anyone can do and it might take a bit of courage. But someone still has to say "come and see."

Fr. Bob

