

“HANDING ON THE FAITH”

by Rev. Fr. T. White

When Our Lord told His apostles “Go teach all nations” it must have seemed a formidable assignment. “What can we twelve do?” could well have been their reaction. There they were surrounded by paganism, centred in the powerful Roman empire, and themselves belonging to a people who had largely rejected Christ and even brought about His crucifixion. Such a death added as well the stigma of a condemned criminal to their leader.

Humanly speaking, it was not only a formidable but an impossible assignment. Only the grace of God could make it possible, and only the grace of God could give the apostles the necessary strength and courage, and make their efforts fruitful. The result was that they did preach the Gospel at the cost of great suffering and adversity, knowing that their efforts were to be the instrument God would use for the conversion of others.

What they did we, as members of the same Church to which the Apostles belonged, can also do—according to our state in life, our sphere of influence, our capabilities. Those words of Christ “Go teach all nations” were also addressed to us.

Because of the Sacrament of Confirmation our souls are stamped with the character of a witness to Jesus Christ. What Pentecost was to the Apostles, Confirmation is to the individual Catholic. In ordinary life, a child’s main work is to grow and learn—it is the adult who is expected to hold responsibility, earn money to keep a family, take over the care of the home. Confirmation is the Sacrament of maturity in the supernatural life of grace—that life which was begun at Baptism is strengthened and complemented at Confirmation. At Confirmation we become adult Christians and as such we are, or should be, witnesses for Christ to others. In short, Confirmation stamps us as apostles. It gives us the grace to be apostolic. That means that in God’s plan every confirmed Catholic is supposed to be doing something about spreading the True Faith.

In Australia at present three-quarters of the people do not belong to the True Faith. More than half of them seldom or never go to any church at all. Recent extensive Gallup polls have shown that 61 % of Australians do not go to any church. Most Catholics are aware of this but comparatively few of them do anything about it. Why? Critics will say they have not enough zeal to make the effort.

I don’t think that is true. Far more often the reason is lack of “know how”.

Our Australian Catholics are outstanding in the Catholic world for their generosity towards the foreign Missions. They delight to read of the growth and development of the Missions in Africa and Asia. They are overjoyed when they see a new face at the altar-rails in their own parish church. This is a real Christian joy in the knowledge that someone else has received the priceless gift of the Faith.

I do not agree that our Catholics are wanting in zeal. But I am convinced that they need to learn the “know-how” of helping others to find the True Faith.

This little booklet gives seven practical suggestions which, if taken seriously by every sincere Catholic, will bring the priceless treasure of the True Faith every year to many thousands of those to whom religion means little or nothing today.

Ways and Means to Help a Non-Catholic Friend

1. Say a daily prayer for the Conversion of a non-Catholic Friend.

Faith is a gift of God. No one can earn or merit this gift of faith, as St. Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, 2, 8: “Yes, it was grace that saved you, with faith for its instrument; it did not come from yourselves, it was God’s gift, not from any action of yours, or there would be room for pride.” Our Lord also expressed the same thought when He said: “Nobody can come to me without being attracted towards Me by the Father Who sent me.” (John 6, 44.)

Any ordinary man is capable of learning the fundamental truths of religion, of knowing that God exists and that He has given a revelation to man. But in order to perceive the vital force and the sheer reality of the truths God has revealed, in order to believe in them in such a way that they have a profound influence on one's life, a special help from God is required.

Hence the necessity of prayer for the gift of faith. Prayer is not just "the nice thing to do" or "the nice-sounding bit of advice to give". Prayer is absolutely essential. Any priest who has had experience of convert work will tell you just how true it is. Often he has come across people who have no objection to Catholic teachings after they have been explained to them. But in their own words they "just can't bring themselves to believe".

Cardinal Newman sums it up as follows: "Faith is not a mere conviction in reason; it is a firm assent, it is a clear certainty, greater than any other certainty; and this is wrought in the mind by the grace of God, and by it alone. Here is the difference between other exercises of reason and arguments for the truth of religion. It requires no act of faith to assent to the truth that two and two make four; we cannot help assenting to it, and hence there is no merit in assenting to it. But there is merit in believing that the Church is from God; for, though there are abundant reasons to prove it to us, yet we can, without any absurdity, quarrel with the conclusion; we may complain that it is not clearer, we may suspend our assent, we may doubt about it, if we will; and grace alone can turn a bad will into a good one." (Discourses to Mixed Congregations, on Faith and Doubt, No. 11.)

There should be no need to stress further the importance of prayer. We should pray daily for the gift of faith for others. Perhaps the following prayer will be helpful:

PRAYER FOR THE CONVERSION OF MY PARISH

Sacred Heart of Jesus, burning with love for men, grant that by my prayers, words and example, I may help to bring all men to know, love and serve You.

In Your love and mercy bestow the priceless gift of Faith on all those of my own parish who still remain outside the One True Church.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, teach me to be an apostle of your Son.

Prayer and also work

St. Thomas More died for his faith during the Reformation in England. His biographies recall a motto which was the inspiration of his life. He wrote it on the walls of his prison cell while awaiting execution. It said: "The things we pray for, Lord, give us strength to work for." St. Vincent de Paul expressed the same thought when he said, "We should pray as if everything depends on our prayers, and then work as if everything depends on our work." These are simply expressions of the great truth that Our Lord works through the members of His Church, and, in His plan of Redemption, wants us to be instrumental in bringing Him into the lives of others.

2. Offer To Take a Non-Catholic Friend on a Tour of Your Church

As you enter the church show him the Holy Water and bless yourself with it. Tell him that this water has been blessed by the priest, who has prayed for God's blessing on those who use it. Water is a symbol of cleansing. Our use of it as we enter the church is an expression of our desire to be internally pure and clean in God's House. Show your friend how to bless himself with the Holy Water. It also reminds the Catholic that he was Baptized in water and the Holy Spirit.

When you enter the church the altar and tabernacle should be the first to attract your friend's attention.

Tell him that we believe Christ is really present in the tabernacle. If he asks why you believe this you will be able to say a few words about the story of the Last Supper. Try not to say too much; just a few words about each thing, leaving him time to have a good look and ask questions. When you pass in front of the altar genuflect and tell your friend that you do this as an act of worship of God Who is really present there. Ask him if he would like to genuflect and show him how. Draw his attention to the sanctuary lamp and tell him that it is kept alight always while the consecrated Host is there. If for

some reason the consecrated Host were taken away (e.g., while the church is being repaired) this lamp would be extinguished. The lamp is a token of homage to Our Lord, and when people see it alight they know that the consecrated Host is reserved in the tabernacle. The Veiling over the tabernacle indicates that Christ, our ‘Commander-in-Chief’ is truly present in his ‘tent’ (that’s what the word ‘tabernacle’ means).

Why are there candles on the altar? They originated in the Catacombs simply to give light but are now used as a symbol of Christ Who is “the light of the world”. Usually two are lighted for Mass on ordinary week-days and six on Sundays and big feast days called Solemnities. Four are used on Feast-days.

The crucifix above the altar reminds us of the identity of the Mass and the sacrifice of Calvary. The crucifix reminds us too of Christ’s sufferings for us. You can fill the story of His sufferings and death in more details while showing your friend the Stations of the Cross. Take him from station to station as you tell him the story.

Show him the Statues. Tell him something about the saints they represent. This will give you an opportunity for a few words about the true meaning of devotion to Our Lady and the saints. The saints are our brothers and sisters in Christ and are now with God in heaven. Maybe there will be flowers or shrine candles in front of a statue. Catholics put flowers or candles before statues just as your non-Catholic friend would keep and show respect for a picture or photograph of a dear friend. The saints are our friends. We as Catholics like to remember the good lives they lived and to ask them to pray for us. (A book such as “The Externals of the Catholic Church” by Mgr. Sullivan will tell you a lot more about all these things but a few words will be sufficient for the purposes of helping your friend.)

Your friend will be particularly curious about the Confession Boxes. Show him inside one and tell him just how a Catholic goes to Confession. He may ask you why you go to Confession. You will be able to tell him that you go to Confession because you want to have your sins forgiven.

Invite your friend to join you for a short silent prayer before you leave or, if he prefers, just to sit and wait for a moment while you say a short prayer. Let your prayer be (e.g. a Hail Mary) for his conversion. As you leave, you may be able to get him some little pamphlet from the pamphlet rack. Assure him that he will be welcome to drop in for a quiet prayer any time. Then the time is ripe to suggest the next step. Tell him that he would be welcome to come to Mass with you if he would like to.

3. Offer to Take Him to Mass.

Ask a non-Catholic friend if he would like to come to Mass with you some day. It will be necessary to assure him that he is quite welcome and that he will be quite free just to sit and watch and listen if he wishes. Nowadays many non-Catholics like to say that they are “going along to Mass just as observers”.

If he decides that he would like to go to Mass with you, arrange a time and place to meet him. He is going to be very shy about it and will imagine that everyone is looking at him, so stick close to him all the time. If it can be arranged, a week-day when everything is quieter would be better for a first attempt. However, this may often be impossible. Get him a copy of the A.C.T.S. booklet, “How to Follow the Mass”, in advance if you can. A Missal is a bit too complicated for a beginning. Assure him that he may just sit and watch right throughout if he wishes, but he will probably prefer to kneel and sit and stand as you do. Point out just the main parts. You will only confuse him if you try to be too detailed. Everything up to the Offertory is preparation for the real sacrifice. Then draw his attention to the Offertory, The Consecration, The Communion.

It is wise to remind him that he may not receive Holy Communion since he is not a Catholic. Assure him that he will be able to follow it a bit better each time he goes to Mass, and encourage him to read through his copy of “How to Follow the Mass” before he goes again. Later offer him some other pamphlet such as “What Is He Doing at the Altar” or “What the Mass Means”.

He may wonder why the priest wears all “those elaborate robes”. One simple explanation is that the Mass is the most solemn occasion in all the world for Catholics. Naturally then the priest, who takes the leading part, gets specially dressed

up for it. The vestments were originally robes worn by people for solemn occasions in the early centuries of Christianity. They have been retained with slight modification for the priest and his assistants at Mass.

He is almost sure to ask you why the priest says the prayers in Latin. There are some good reasons for having Latin. The main one is that it gives us a common language for the Catholic Church in the various countries of the world. Certainly it would be easier for a beginner if there were no Latin, but once we have made the effort to follow it with our Missals we will feel quite at home at Mass any place in the world.

“What is the little bell for at Mass?” Every non-Catholic wants to know this the first time he goes. It enables everyone, especially in a big crowded church, to follow the Mass with the priest more easily. In the earlier centuries of Christianity the big bells in the church were rung at the consecration. In this way the people of all that district who could not go to Mass were reminded to turn their thoughts to God at the moment of the consecration. Sometimes this is still done, but usually it is only “the little bell” that is used.

4. Offer to Introduce Your Non-Catholic Friend to a Priest.

A very good Catholic lady once said to me, “Father, I have a non-Catholic neighbour who seems a bit interested in our Faith; I’d like you to meet him.” “Certainly,” I said, “you name the time and place.”

“Well, I thought it might be an idea to invite him to dinner one night if you could come too.” We made a night and I went along. The dinner would do justice to a king. I met her non-Catholic neighbour. We had a pleasant evening talking, mainly about photography, but it led to other meetings and more serious topics. That man is an exceptionally fine Catholic today.

It is not necessary, or even practical in most cases, to go to such extraordinary trouble to introduce a non-Catholic to a priest, but an introduction of some kind is often an important milestone in a non-Catholic’s search for religious truth. The fact of knowing a priest personally and feeling that he is someone who will be willing and able to give helpful advice is a big thing.

I remember another occasion when one of the Children of Mary in my parish rang the presbytery door quite unexpectedly and said, “Father, this is so and so,” introducing one of her non-Catholic girl friends. “She has never spoken to a priest; she would like to meet you.” I had half an hour to spare so I talked to the young lady about her work and her home and her family. She had no particular questions and no intention whatever of being a Catholic, just wanted “to see what a priest was like”. I have no reason to believe that she even became a Catholic; but I happened to hear two years later that she did a great deal to stem the tide of her father’s anger when another member of the family married a Catholic girl in the Catholic Church.

All this is by way of example to show that it is a good thing to provide an opportunity for a non-Catholic to meet a priest whenever possible. A great many non-Catholics have never met a priest and would be quite frightened by the thought of doing so. Often their only contact with the Church is a lay Catholic whom they know socially or as a work partner or a neighbour. Some of them may want to see a priest for a particular reason; others, like the Child of Mary’s girl friend I mentioned, may be just curious “to see what a priest is like”. Whatever the reason, every Catholic should be ready and willing to arrange a meeting when he can.

Normally it would not be advisable to go to as much trouble as the good lady who put on a big dinner for us; every priest’s time is limited; he would not be able to attend such a meeting very often. On the other hand, it is wise whenever possible to make some sort of appointment with the priest in advance so that he will be ready and expecting you. It is not very wise just to bring your non-Catholic friend along to the presbytery at any old time. Father may be up to his eyes in half a dozen things, instructions, meetings, parish committees or such like. The non-Catholic will be disheartened if Father is not there, or is too busy to talk to him. So get it lined up in advance, and if your friend has some special query or problem that he is going to talk about let Father know so that he will be ready for it. Be sure to go along with him and introduce him. Don’t just tell him the appointment has been made because the most difficult thing for the non-Catholic will be that first meeting. He will need you right there with him.

5. Offer to Take Him to a Day of Enquiry.

In many places in Australia the members of the Legion of Mary organize what they call Days of Enquiry for non-Catholics who wish to know more about the Catholic Faith. They are usually held on a Sunday morning and afternoon at a Convent or Monastery. A priest gives some talks on Catholic teaching and allows time for questions. He takes the non-Catholic on a conducted tour of the Chapel. Sometimes there is a Mass which is explained by one priest while being celebrated by another. There are priests and nuns and many members of the Legion of Mary present to talk to the non-Catholics and make them welcome. Everyone is entertained to meals.

The purpose of these Days of Enquiry is to give non-Catholics an opportunity to meet Catholics and get to know them, to realize that Catholics are genuinely anxious to let others know about their faith, and to share it. Non-Catholics who attend one of these Days of Enquiry go away feeling that they have seen something of the charity of Christ in the Catholics who made them welcome that day. They do not necessarily learn a great deal but that does not matter at this stage. The first thing is to help them to be friendly with Catholics and to see what kind of people Catholics are. A non-Catholic is not placing himself under an obligation of any kind by going along to one of these Days of Enquiry. It will be important to assure your friend of that. There is no charge whatever. He will be made very welcome. Most non-Catholics would be too shy to go on their own, but it is a matter of experience that there are many who are delighted to go if a Catholic friend invites them and goes along with them. The Catholic who takes along a non-Catholic will be made welcome for the whole day and will share in everything that goes on. By ringing the Legion of Mary headquarters in any city in Australia you will get complete details of dates and places and times of Days of Enquiry.

If you know a few days in advance that you will be going with a non-Catholic friend it would be helpful to let the Legion of Mary know: This gives them an idea of how many to expect. However, if you have no time to let them know, you will still be just as welcome.

Untold good for souls would be done if every Catholic made an effort to bring someone to one of these gatherings. It is something that any Catholic could do if he made the effort.

6. Offer to Take Him to a Course of Talks at a Parish Enquiry Class.

There are Parish Enquiry Classes in at least a few parishes in each of the big cities in Australia. These classes are simply a series of well planned weekly talks given by the parish priest or his assistant on the teachings of the Catholic Church. The location and starting time of the talks and the subjects to be explained each week are published on printed programmes which are distributed to the Catholics in the parish. Sometimes they are advertised in the local paper. It will not require any very heroic effort to find out the location, time, etc., of the nearest Parish Enquiry Class to your home. We realize that there are at present far too few of these classes, but more about that later.

Once you know where there is a Parish Enquiry Class start looking around for some non-Catholic who would be prepared to attend the weekly talks with you. You must be prepared to go along with your non-Catholic friend. It is very little use telling him that the classes are on and that he will be welcome. He will be too shy to go on his own. You must take him along, get there a few minutes before starting time and introduce yourself and your friend to the priest who is going to give the talks.

You will have to make it very clear to any non-Catholic that these classes are not just for people who have made up their minds to become Catholics. No one is going to assume that he intends to be a Catholic just because he attends the talks. He is there because he wants to learn the truth about the Catholic Church. He is not putting himself under any obligation whatever: Whether he decides later to become a Catholic or not is a matter between himself and God. No one is going to put any pressure at all on him. That seems so obvious to you that you may wonder why there is any need even to mention it. We know from hundreds of cases that many non-Catholics believe that they will be forced into the Catholic Church whether they like it or not "if the priest once gets his hands on you". A real effort must be made to dispel this strange misunderstanding. Lay Catholics can do it even better than priests because non-Catholics will often believe a lay person whom they know as a friend when they would not trust the priest of whom they are so suspicious.

It is good to have one of the printed programmes when inviting a friend to the talks. Give it to him personally with a few words of explanation. Come with him to the class every week. He will probably ask you many questions he is too shy to ask the priest. If you don't know the answers ask his questions for him next week. You will learn a lot yourself. It is a remarkable thing that the more you try to help your friend the more you will help yourself too. As the weekly talks progress the non-Catholics will want someone to show them around the church, or take them to Mass. You will be an obvious choice as a guide and helper for the friend you have brought this far. Later, with God's grace, he may express a wish to become a Catholic. He will want you to be his god-parent.

We have said that we feel Enquiry Classes are far too few. This is very true. However, it is encouraging to see that they are on the increase. Good Catholic lay people can do more than they think to multiply them. Nearly every priest realizes the great value of such classes in his work for souls but the majority of priests are so overwhelmed with work that they never get around to the practicalities of organizing them. "Will anyone come to them?" they wonder. "Will my parishioners make an effort to bring non-Catholics along? Maybe after I have spent a lot of time preparing for it no one will turn up. What will I do with the ones who miss out on some of the talks? How do I fit in someone who wants to start half way through? How many talks will I put into the whole series? How can I best divide the whole of Catholic teachings into a series of simple talks? Should I follow the Catechism or give each one a copy of some book? What is the most suitable book? etc etc.,". With all these doubts and queries many priests never manage to get their Enquiry Class started although they would love to have a good Enquiry Class in the parish. Such a priest will welcome a practical offer of help from a good parishioner. The Australian Catholic Truth Society Inc. has a comprehensive set of pamphlets on the faith for use in the classes.

Some good Catholic parishioners should attend the talks to act as hosts and hostesses to the non-Catholics. This leaves the priest more free to concentrate on giving the talks. People who miss a talk can get a printed summary of it the next week and talk about it with one of the hosts or hostesses.

In addition to this ready-to-use programme of talks the busy priest will need your help as a good parishioner to prepare some suitable meeting room or small hall for the classes. The starting point is to fix a date for the first talk. Father will remind the parishioners about it every Sunday for the previous five or six Sundays. The handbook will give him a list to remind him of what to say each Sunday. Once all the Catholics of the parish know about the time and place of the first talk they will be given printed copies of the programme and will begin inviting their non-Catholic friends. The members of the Legion of Mary will take them on visitation and all the members of the sodalities will make a special effort to find someone who is prepared to come. Young people who have non-Catholic boy-friends or girl-friends will invite them to come and listen. It has been our experience that after the second or third series of talks the whole parish becomes much more interested in conversion work, and the annual number of converts in the parish increases very considerably.

The Class will be of very special value to the parishioners because now they will have something definite to which they can invite their non-Catholic friends without making any extra demands on Father's time. Father himself will find that he has much more time to spare for his many other duties because now he has far less private instruction to do even though he is baptizing many more converts each year. Of course each one who decides to become a Catholic will need at least a couple of private talks with him before the day for baptism is arranged, but most of the necessary instruction will have been already done in the Class.

Any good Catholic who feels that he ought to be doing more to share his faith with others should think these points over carefully and talk about them with one of the priests in his parish.

7. Tell non-Catholic friends about the Australian Catholic Truth Society's Pamphlets

There is no doubt that you will meet non-Catholics who are a bit interested in the Catholic faith but, for one reason or another are not willing to meet a priest personally, either at a presbytery or a Day of Enquiry, or in a Parish Enquiry Class. Many years ago the late Archbishop Mannix set up the Australian Catholic Truth Society to give Catholics and non-Catholics information on various aspects of the faith.

Be sure you know what Catholic information is available and be always ready to talk about it when an opportunity arises. Anywhere people congregate religious topics sooner or later come up for discussion. In a country like Australia, where three out of every four people are non-Catholics, you are sure to find yourself in one of these discussions sooner or later. Those who know that you are a Catholic will ask you questions. It is quite likely that you will not be able to give a short simple answer on the spur of the moment. By all means know as much as you can about your religion and answer questions whenever you can. But there are a lot of questions to which no one can give a short simple answer. Often the answer depends on a complexity of basic principles which the questioner does not understand and which cannot possibly be explained in a few minutes.

This, however, is no reason for trying to side-step the whole issue. Every Catholic can at least say “Would you like me to take you to someone who will go into it for you?” or “I know where you can write for pamphlets which will answer that quite fully for you”.

Remember first of all what not to do. Don't refuse to discuss religion. Dozens of sincere non-Catholics have written to us to ask what is the reason why Catholics so often refuse to talk about their religion. I remember one good man who put it this way: “Are Catholics forbidden to talk about their religion, I worked with Catholics for five years” he said, “and often tried to ask them the questions you have answered for me, but they always changed the subject and talked about football”. I am not suggesting that all Catholics do that but it is a pity that any Catholic does it.

It is equally important not to try to bluff your way out of a question you cannot answer. People do that because they are too proud to admit that they do not know the answer. The average person can easily see through the evasion and bluff and is not at all impressed. It is far better to be truly humble about it and admit the limits of your knowledge. Then show a genuine readiness to do what you can to find an answer for the questioner. If he is not willing to meet a priest he may welcome some information from ACTS pamphlets.

You will be surer of your ground if you have one of the pamphlets explaining the Catholic Faith to offer him. You may get copies of the pamphlets from The Australian Catholic Truth Society. (The address is on the inside front cover of this pamphlet)

General Suggestions for Approaching Non-Catholics

The only way to learn to do a job is to start doing it. That is true of the task of the apostle. Too often we hear the cry “Why doesn't someone give us a lead” or “Tell me what I can do to convert Australia and I am ready to do it”. The only real way to become an apostle is to start being an apostle in one's own immediate circle. Gather all the hints, the suggestions and the advice of others that you can, by all means, but find your own method. Fit yourself into the task and discover for yourselves what is the best approach you can make, taking into consideration your own temperament and that of your friends.

Suppose you were told by an unquestioned authority that you must convert five people within the next twelve months. How would you go about it? A wise man once said that, when faced with a problem, we should first divide it into its component parts. Let us try it out on this one:

WHO?

Your field for possible converts are the non-Catholics you know.

Ask yourself how many of them are likely to be interested. Many of them are clearly indifferent. A few, a very few, may even be hostile. Very well, your apostolate to those two groups will be that of example and prayer. You have narrowed the field down now to those whom you judge likely to be interested. Take as a principle that you will give everyone a chance to be interested and that you will give everyone who is interested a chance to know more.

Recently a good Catholic said: “In all the years I have been a Catholic I never fully realized my duty to spread the Faith. I work with four non-Catholics. I decided to tell them all about our Parish Enquiry Class. One of them, I thought, was completely indifferent. But when I talked to them, it was this one who came.”

HOW?

How can you interest people in the Faith? Here again you must learn to do the job in your own way. Ask the converts whom you know personally what first interested them in the Faith. Ask them what especially attracted them. Ask what were their main difficulties in accepting the Faith. It may help you to read what converts have written, for example, the three books of the series “The Road to Damascus”, in which a number of well-known converts have told the story of their conversion. “This City of Peace” gives a number of conversion stories by Australian converts.

Now, consider the non-Catholics you know. Ask yourself where they are most likely to feel the need of the help which the Catholic Faith can give. They do feel the need even if they do not realize it. For example, we find non-Catholics listen with the closest attention to the Catholic teaching on marriage and the Family. True, they find many difficulties here. But they also find a powerful attraction in the Catholic teaching on the grace of the Sacrament—the idea of God as a continuing partner of the marriage. The point is that every married couple without exception, feels the need of something more than a mere civil contract to help them to make a success of their married life. The Catholic Church is alone, now, in giving definite and unwavering teaching on this matter, and the Catholic Church is alone in assuring them, incessantly, of the help of God.

Think over your conversations with non-Catholic friends. Where have they shown themselves to feel a need? For one it is Marriage, another Charity, another the Social question, another the problem of sickness or death. Now gather together your conclusions. You have decided on the people you are going to approach. You have formed some idea of the points which are most likely to interest them. So we come to Part Three.

WHEN?

The difficulty most people feel is this. How can I mention the Catholic Faith without seeming to be “dragging it in” or “thrusting it down people’s throats?” Now, there is a real danger here which must not be overlooked. G. K. Chesterton said that when he was approaching the Faith, every setback was caused by some over-enthusiastic Catholic who tried to push him forward. So, don’t push. But this does not mean do nothing. It means speak when it is tactful to speak.

Let us have an obvious example. Somebody is in trouble. There is sickness in the family or someone has died. Tell them you will say a prayer for them. Tell them that you will say a prayer for the person who has died. This will never be resented. On the contrary it is just at such moments that people are most appreciative of sympathy. Prayer for the dead especially is something which only the Church has. Here again a need is given fulfilment by the Faith. Do not be afraid of using the name of God in your conversation.

Speak as a Catholic, simply, in a quite matter of fact manner and with good humour. Sometimes people say: “You know, Father, I was working with him for ten years and he never knew I was a Catholic until one day . . .” Surely there is something missing here. Surely, in ten years, a conversation must have touched on some subject on which a Catholic could speak as a Catholic.

There are two indispensable conditions in every apostolate. You must show what the Faith means in your life and you must pray. Most people will judge the Catholic Faith by what they see of it in your life. It may be unfair, but it is natural and, after all, Our Lord says: “By their fruits you shall know them”. So, first of all, be a good Catholic.

Secondly pray. Pray every day for the conversion of your parish. Pray for the conversion of individuals known to you. Say the Family Rosary. Get up and go to morning Mass. Pray for opportunities to be an apostle and God will provide them in abundance.

Nihil Obstat :
BERNARD O’CONNOR,
Diocesan Censor.

Imprimatur:
✱ JUSTIN D. SIMONDS,
Archiepiscopus Melburnensis
31st December, 1963
