

**“On the New Evangelization”**  
**A talk by Bishop Felipe J. Estevez of St. Augustine**  
**for the Conference of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate Priests**  
**of the United States, Canada and the Caribbean**  
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Often, as I look at any family of our parishes, I notice that some of them are happy for being Catholic. Some do not fully identify with their faith. For some their faith is affirmed during holy week, Christmas, at weddings and funerals. I notice their excitement at sporting events but faith is perceived as an obligation. For them, the image of God is that of a “grandfather,” as it is in secularist Western households. He is there; He is good, but without having great influence or significance in the now. It is as if God while not denied, in reality He does not matter significantly.

There is a need to “offer again,” the Good News of the Gospel in the manner of Jesus since, as we read in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, “Jesus is the great evangelizer.” Let us read slowly Jn 4 about the encounter of Jesus with the woman of Samaria. The theme of the story is that the encounter with Jesus is transformative.

- 1) Notice the richness of each line with insinuations of grace:
  - a. The teacher is a master at awakening desire: “give me that water.” A good preacher knows how to stimulate good and holy desires in the audience for the Gospel is “good news,” even when presenting harsh truths to listeners.
  - b. Then there comes the moment of truth. She recognizes it by saying: you are a prophet. Today there is such a fear of the truth, avoidance of the truth because, let us face it, truth is challenging. There is a number of teachings which are very difficult to teach publicly because of our fear of rejection, such as capital punishment, contraceptives, divorce, just to mention a few.
  - c. Take a look at Jesus’s patience, “walking with” (accompaniment), respecting where the other is at and at the same time calling to a greater openness.
  - d. At the opportune time, Jesus states what is essential: “I am speaking the truth to you” (I am the truth).
  - e. This wonderful story culminates in an amazing success: Jesus enables the woman to become an evangelizer. It is the dynamism of growth, the word of God is unstoppable. A question to the audience on verse 4:28 – the image of the jar, which is left aside...what is its symbolic meaning? v. 30: “they went out of the town and came to him.” The Samaritan woman reminds us of the ministry of St. John the Baptist who is moved aside so that his disciples join Jesus or, in the same

manner, of the Mother of the Lord, who says at the wedding of Cana: “Do whatever he tells you.”

v. 40 “they begged Jesus to stay with them” and He did for two days for in fact they recognized Jesus as “the savior of the world.”

Jesus is a model evangelizer for he shows great flexibility in the execution of his mission as he enabled one alienated woman to become his follower and a missionary who transforms an entire town.

- 2) The new evangelization is an opportune time to “offer again” an alternative version of justice in society. Let us take a few examples on the hot topic of immigration and see how the language of the faith community reflects the Kingdom of peace and justice, truth and life, inviting people to a social conversion:

-illegal: implies a crime of disrespect for order (the laws), whereas “undocumented” shows the immense difficulty of obtaining a visa.

-problem: implies immigrants are a burden to hospitals and schools, whereas gift shows their intrinsic dignity as workers and families.

-immigrants are seen as causing economic disruptions and creating unemployment, whereas the alternative vision sees that they are part of the solution because they pay taxes and improve the rural and construction economy. As an example, they built the new city of New Orleans after Katrina.

-what needs to take place is sending them back home, never amnesty for them! They have transgressed the law, whereas the church advocates for a comprehensive solution “as humanly possible” such as the reunification of the entire family.

-immigrants are a factor for political gains for some political leaders, i.e. passage of the “Dream Act” at the last minute a few months before the general presidential election, whereas cordial hospitality to them is motivated by welcoming them as brothers and sisters in the faith.

- 3) The new evangelization is committed to reflect the Gospel of the Beatitudes. Being a church of the beatitudes is rooted in the model of a church as a sacrament of salvation in the world: where there is primacy to the merciful, openness to all (poor in spirit), peacemaking, being light of the world and salt to the earth.

It is worth remembering what the International Synod of Bishops stated in 1971: “Actions on behalf of justice as participation in the transformation of the world appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.” (#6)

It is also worth remembering the biblical verse that God hears the cry of the poor.

As you are hearing me at this moment, you can see from the windows a wonderful witness of that care here in the Diocese of St. Augustine. For many, being “handicapped” is a disgrace, a problem, a curse. This Special summer camp is the desire of the church community to help the family by caring for their sons and daughters providing a respite for them. This camp engages the youth in becoming partners (buddies they are called) to each person with a disability 24/7 for an entire week of friendship, fun, solidarity and prayer. This yearly camp here in Marywood is based on the vision of the L’Arche communities founded by Jean Vanier. It is the recognition of the presence of Jesus as “vulnerable.” In fact, the Eucharistic Lord’s presence can be approached from this experience. Jean Vanier’s lecture given at the International Eucharistic Congress of the Jubilee of 2000 in Rome related the experience of the handicapped to the mystery of the kenosis of the Son of God in becoming flesh and ultimately Eucharist.

The fact is that materialistic societies despise the vulnerable and the weak, as is the tiny child in the womb, or the fragile elder at the end of his or her life, the undocumented person, the homeless, or the recent prisoners who try to re-enter as workers in society.

- 4) The new evangelization’s effectiveness is closely related to the splendor of letter to Diognetus in the second century

Let us contemplate Jesus the evangelizer as he relates to the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8, 1-11). John Paul II was convinced that the merciful love of the Father was the only power that could heal the depth of the human alienation. Jesus is the revelation of the heart of the Father who in this story liberates “the elders” from their misguided harshness done with extreme politeness while at the same time liberates the sinner from her total loneliness and shame: “Neither do I condemn you. Go and from now on do not sin any more.” In governing this diocese at times I receive recommendations to which I say: let us remember that our patron St. Augustine was guilty of worse things and yet he became one of the greatest saints of the church.

I recently saw a movie called *For Greater Glory*. This movie presents the plight of the “Cristeros,” those Catholic soldiers who took arms in Mexico around 1927 to defend religious freedom. I was very touched by the elder priest who eventually is killed for his relationship with the young teen (Manuelito). I believe this episode heals the dominant culture, as well of priests themselves who have fear of priests relating to adolescent boys. Manuelito steals a silver watch and tries to keep it for himself but he comes to his senses and gives it back to the elderly priest. At that, the priest could have punished him but in fact he reacts the opposite way by saying: Good, great, Manuelito you did the right thing! He said while showing him profound fatherly affection. This story reminded me of Don Bosco and his pedagogy on youth, leading the youth to virtue in an atmosphere of personal love and unconditional acceptance.

Pastoral conversion is the greatest challenge of the new evangelization for the apostle is always at the same time a humble disciple who is always learning from the infinite depth of the heart of

Christ. (Lk 10: 39.42), a disciple who, like Mary's docility to the word, is the best assurance of witnessing to the beatitudes. Benedict, our Pope, is convinced that the prayerful reading of the Scriptures in an atmosphere of silence will effect a deep transformation in us.

#### 5) Mary, Mother of the Church, the evangelizing woman

Let me share with you two stories. One was told by one of our seminarians. He came with a group of young people for an activity of building or renovating a home in the inner city in St. Augustine. At the end of the day the group would gather to share their experience. The seminarian felt the urge to invite them to expose the Blessed Sacrament for just 15 minutes and to allow the gaze of Jesus show them in silence his love for each of them. This was the seminarian's gift to them. The impact of this simple and brief experience was great in these young Catholics some who had never experienced adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. John Paul II liked the phrase that Mary is the first tabernacle in history. Mary's presence leads to an encounter with the Son who loves us to the extreme and loves us unconditionally (Jo. 13, 1). Even "agnostic" Jewish Philosopher Simone Weil liked going to the Eucharistic adoration because she felt "healed" by that mysterious presence. (Num. 21: 4-9; Jo 3:14).

Some weeks ago I went to join Benedict XVI in his apostolic pilgrimage to Cuba on the occasion of the 400 anniversary of the finding of Our Lady of Charity on the sea. Our Lady of Charity is the most enduring value of the culture and of the noble identity of a people who, for more than 50 years, have been affected by extreme secularism of a Marxist Leninist imposed ideology. Yet the passage of the image of Our Lady of Charity brought more than four million people to honor her in her passage. The Continental mission envisioned by the Aparecida conference for all the Americas took a Marian turn in Cuba. It was most effective to the point of even bringing the Pope to its celebration.

One could say the Mary is the door of faith. As Augustine states, before being the "Mater Dei" she is the one who believes without knowing what to expect in the adventure. For the Gospel of John, she is the new Eve who merely speaks. She intercedes, "they have no wine;" she trusts: "do whatever He tells you (Jn 2: 3, 5).