

EVANGELISATION CATHOLIC MOMENT.

Keynote speech given by Msgr Pat Lynch
at the Irish Leaders Conference Athlone 28–01 –05.



Introduction

On Wednesday 22nd December I was driving home to my mother's for Christmas. I was fiddling around with the radio in the car when I hit on "One of the local Radio Stations". The presenter was interviewing a lady about her experiences of the winter Solstice. This lady was giving a very vivid description of the significance of 21st December in old Celtic Mythology. It was to say the least Pantheistic, New Age and mildly Pagan. I am sure that the lady had at least 10 minutes of air time 3 days before Christmas.

There I was driving the car thinking to myself "why are we as Catholics not occupying these very important slots at these important times?" Many of you listening will have your own ideas as to why we are not shouting the Incarnation from the rooftops. As I tried to answer the question for myself I found myself saying, "maybe our Presenters and Media personnel think that our Irish populace already know the Christ story". Oh how wrong we can be. I think that our nation needs to hear again the Message of the Gospel and that is why we are here this weekend to explore, connect and be encouraged as we embark upon the New Evangelisation called for by our Holy Father Pope John Paul 11.

I was ordained in June 1975. Later that year a Document was produced from Rome called "Evangelii Nuntiandi" or in English "The Evangelisation of Peoples". As I look back over the last 30 years I can see very clearly, as I am sure you will agree, the world and the Church that I was ordained into was a very different world to that in which we are living today. The emphasis within the Church in 1975 was that of Maintenance yet, here we are today, knowing that our priority is Mission. This document therefore, is a very prophetic document in that 30 years ago it was asking us to prepare ourselves here in the West for a new mind shift regarding Outreach. We are here at this Conference to explore, albeit 30 years on, the relevance of the Church's teaching on Evangelisation. I realise of course that us Irish have always been evangelistic and Mission minded. I remember, as you probably do, taking pennies to national school to help the "black babies". I am aware that we stand on hallowed ground here in Athlone the site of one of our great Monasteries. It was from places like this that our forebears went abroad to evangelise. Now the tables have turned

and we are experiencing the need for the re-evangelisation of our own people here in Ireland.

Up to this moment I have been using this word Evangelisation in the knowledge that we are all familiar with it. I hope we are but for the sake us all, let us revisit some of the key elements in its make up. I am basing this session on the scripture quote from Mark's Gospel {Mk 16:16}

“GO OUT TO THE WHOLE WORLD AND PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS”

I would like to explore this Catholic moment in evangelisation for us by analysing it under these headings

- What is it?
- Why be involved in it?
- Who is it for?
- What difference could it make?

What is it?

One of the big problems that exists in our Catholic Church today is a lack of understanding of what “evangelisation” is in the first place. If I were to ask you to list your understanding of evangelisation, then I am sure that it would include at least some of these things.

- Living the Christian life
- Doing good works
- Preaching the Good News
- Asking people to make a choice for God

The list could go on. We would more than likely operate out of an emotional understanding of evangelisation. Yet, our positive and correct awareness of “evangelisation” gives it the most important position it commands in the Catholic Church.

“For the Church Evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new”{ EN # 18}

Evangelisation is the basic mission entrusted to the Church by Christ. It is out of the evangelising activity of Jesus and the

Apostles that the Church came into being. Evangelisation is an Ecclesial activity.

“We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelising all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church” {EN #14}.

Nevertheless, it is always so difficult to define things like evangelisation, because when we define them we limit them. Part of our western learning approach is to neatly package definitions so that we can control the content. When it comes to things of faith we can then also attempt to control the Mystery, which accompanies the Holy Spirit. However, an attempt needs to be made at a definition.

Let me put up on Power Point some definitions?

Could someone read this first one?

“To evangelise is so to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that {people} come to put their faith in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour and to serve Him as their King in the Fellowship of His Church”

Now just let me ask who do you think wrote that definition?

Michael Green from “Evangelism Then and Now”

Could someone read this one?

“To evangelise is to proclaim {kerygma} with the power of the Holy Spirit {Acts.1: 8} the Incarnate, crucified, resurrected and living Jesus Christ {Acts. 2:32} as the only Saviour {Acts. 4:12} and Divine Lord {Phil. 2:9-11} of all humankind {1Tim. 2:4} and of the whole person {Eph. 1:22-23} in a joyful, loving and effective way that contributes to building the Church {Col. 1:18-23} by making Jesus known, loved honoured, followed and obeyed to the ends of the earth {Matt. 28:19}

Who do you think wrote that definition?

Fr Tom Forrest “New Evangelisation 2000 N0 1.

Could someone read this last definition?

“...evangelisation involves a change of heart, an acceptance of Jesus into all aspects of our lives, a sharing of the Good News and

an invitation to others to share with a community of believers. This then will have ramifications, in all aspects of our day-to-day living by the power of the Holy Spirit”

Who do you think would write this?

Pat Lynch “Awakening the Giant”

When we put all of this onto a flow chart it will look something like this.

STAGES IN THE EVANGELISATION PROCESS



WHY BE INVOLVED IN IT.

Human nature as such will almost always react to a crisis. All we need do is look at the wonderful response to the Tsunami Disaster. This is also true of evangelisation. When the numbers in Church are decreasing, when we are experiencing problems with our young, when there is an increase in substance abuse, when

immorality is spiralling out of control, we will start saying, “we need to do something – we need God back in our culture?”

Lets look for a moment at some sample headlines, which illustrate this very point;

“God is being sidelined..... {Irish Independent.....20th November 2004}

“We have changed. We’re no longer the Christian Isle of Saints and Scholars. Dublin beats at a pace as vibrant as London. There is so much business, so much work, and so much money changing hands. There are pressures, obligations and demands that must be met. But does this prosperity makes us a nation of soulless, selfish people”[Sunday Independent “Life Magazine” 31st October 2004.]

“It now seems that as far as the European Parliament is concerned, Catholics need not apply – at least for important EU posts. And it looks like the editor of the Irish Times supports the new anti – Catholic bigotry”

{“Alive” Newspaper November 2004}

While this reactionary attitude is an admirable approach it will always come off second best. Why? Because evangelisation is the primary function of the Church and as such it must always be proactive. This makes it the perennial Catholic moment. The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation and so by her very nature she has the obligation to proclaim the message of salvation to all people {AG1, LG 48}

The documents of the Church are unanimous about the basic mission of the Church. The three recent big documents of the Church, which deal with evangelisation, are;

- A “AD GENTES”{Vatican 11}
- B “EVANGELISATION OF PEOPLES”{1975}
- C “REDEMPTORIS MISSIO”{1990}.

All of these documents and others say that our Church is Missionary by nature. Here are some samples.

“The whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelisation is the basic duty of the people of God” {EN #59}.

“This is why the Church keeps her missionary spirit alive and even wishes to intensify it in the moment of history in which we are living” {RM: # 8}

“The dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values”

{Apostolic letter on the Eucharist “Mane Nobiscum Domine #24}.

These examples and many more illustrate the point that our basic duty is to give evangelisation its primal focused priority.

Yet there are also imminent reasons why we need to evangelise.

Just sit back for a few moments and watch these statistics on the

POWER POINT PRESENTATION.

If you and I are reticent about evangelising for the PRIMARY reason then the statistics we have just watched will make it imperative.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Evangelii Nuntiandi says citing the word of the Vatican 11 Fathers

“We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelising all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church” {EN # 14}.

This means in reality that

- The institutional Church is at the service of evangelisation
- The charismatic side of the Church is at the service of evangelisation
- Individual ministries within the Church are at the service of evangelisation
- Every Christian is meant to be an evangeliser

Putting it another way the three ministries which the Church are at the disposal of evangelisation

- Ministry of the Word {Proclamation}
- Ministry of Worship {Celebration}
- Ministry of Service

Here is what the Church has to say to some of these groupings

BISHOPS [THE CATHOLIC MOMENT]

“Let Bishops, therefore, make every effort to have the faithful actively support.....evangelisation” {Doc on Bishops #6}

PRIESTS [THE CATHOLIC MOMENT]

“Priests..... have as their primary duty the proclamation of the gospel of God to all” {Doc on Priests #4}

RELIGIOUS [THE CATHOLIC MOMENT]

“Religious for their part, find in their consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelisation” {EN #69}

Lay Apostolate [THE CATHOLIC MOMENT]

“ {This apostolate}.... Does not consist only in the witness of one’s way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non – believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to believers with a view to instructing and strengthening them, and motivating them towards a more fervent life.”

{Doc on Laity #6}.

LEADERS [THE CATHOLIC MOMENT]

“Leaders..... should sense their unity within the communion which characterises the Mystical Body.....The fruitfulness of missionary activity is to be found in this communion.” {RM #75}

CATECHISTS [THE CATHOLIC MOMENT]

“Catechists are specialists, direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelisers.....”

{RM #73}

WHAT DIFFERENCE COULD IT MAKE?

Here is just an attempt at brainstorming the significant difference it could have, to our Church and Country.

- A New personal relationship with the Trinity
- A Renewed “strata of society”
- B Our lifestyle would change
- B Morality would have its centre in Christ
- B New positiveness to the Church.
- B The fire of faith would be rekindled
- C The lamp of prayer would be lit
- D Prophecy would rouse us to action.
- E The sacraments would not merely be empty rituals
- F The Mass would come alive
- G A new experience of Community – individualism.

Conclusion

To draw all of this together let me recap some of the things I have been saying;

It is the duty of all God's people to evangelise

This is done by knowing:

- What it is about?
- Why we need to be involved?
- Who needs to be involved?
- The tremendous difference it could make to our nation.

However I cannot finish without saying two very important things. One is the necessity for prayer and the Holy Spirit in the task of evangelisation and the second is to have as our model Mary our mother as the Star of Evangelisation.

Maybe now I could bring it all together by pointing to a modern model of evangelisation. I think that our Pope is a true model and example of evangelisation. He has spent himself travelling the world preaching the Good News. I am convinced that his greatest example of his evangelising power is his ability to endure his illness with such patience that it must impact a narcissistic with a power beyond belief.

Thank you for listening to me over the past hour and for giving me your undivided attention after a very hard day.