

Saints *Alive!*

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The Quarterly Newsletter of Emmaus Journey

Evangelization is simply living a life of doing such a high quality of good to those we encounter everyday, that they become captivated by the source of our goodness, the Father's love.

It All Depends On You

By Rich Cleveland

Brother Ramon, author of the book *Forty Days and Forty Nights*, tells the story of two boys endeavoring to play a joke on a holy hermit.

They intended to hold a bird in their hands behind their back and ask the hermit if the bird was dead or alive. If the hermit said it was dead, the boy planned to open his hand and let the bird fly up to the sky. If the hermit said it was alive, the boy planned to crush the bird in his hand to prove that the wise old man was wrong.

“Father,” said one of the lads, “I have a small bird in my hand. Is it alive or dead?” There was a silence. The old man fixed him with his gaze. Eventually he chuckled and said, “Well, boys—it all depends on you!”¹

Though it may sound scary, and perhaps a little overwhelming, the advancement of the Gospel also “all depends on you.” Jesus has no back-up plan. His only plan was to place the world’s knowledge of him, the Good News of salvation and victory over eternal death, into the hands of a small band of disciples. He left the salvation of the world in their hands. True, these disciples represented the Church—but the Church is you, and me, and other ordinary people. When the Gospel fails to advance we cannot lay it at the feet of the Pope, Cardinals, Bishops, and priests but must ourselves accept the responsibility, for ours is the task of evangelization—“more precisely the lay faithful find themselves on the front lines of the Church’s life.”²

As people mandated to participate in evangelization, the advancement of Jesus and the Kingdom of God, we should look to Jesus to understand what this evangelization should consist of and encompass. By his life we understand that evangelization consists of deed and word. His life was permeated with works of mercy and goodness, healing and deliverance, reaching out to ordinary

sinners with friendship and meals. Through everyday illustrations and divine explanations, his words offered a new understanding of the Old Testament Scripture and of God. Consequently, when he shared complex explanations of spirituality, like the Beatitudes, they were made clear against the backdrop of a life of mercy and goodness toward others. This is evangelization—proclaiming Jesus and his Kingdom by deed and word.

It is interesting to note in the Beatitudes that the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, and the persecuted are those who warrant Jesus’ compassion and his blessing. The wealthy, the full, the happy, and the popular also warrant Jesus’ compassion but it appears in the form of a woeful warning. What are we to conclude from this focus? Surely it does not suggest that it is preferable for people to be poor, hungry, sorrowful and persecuted, does it? Or that being wealthy, having a full stomach, being happy, or popular is inherently evil and to be avoided? Perhaps he is pointing out that God is acutely aware and consciously concerned about the physical, emotional, social and economic inequities humans heap upon their fellow man.

We would be remiss if we did not also pay attention to what Jesus did not say. His remedy did not speak of the economic redistribution of wealth, nor of social or political revolution and revenge. His remedy was to bless the unfortunate; “he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, ‘Blessed . . .’” Jesus undoubtedly knew that over time the nature of man would make moot any attempts at the leveling of society by economic redistribution, and humanity would simply supplant it with another system of equal or greater evils. **Jesus’ remedy was to create a society of the compassionate within the society of the indifferent.** He is looking to his disciples to bless the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, and

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Emmaus Journey Mission Statement

Emmaus Journey is a Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry that is conducted primarily in and through Catholic parishes. Emmaus Journey has embraced Goal 1 of *Go and Make Disciples: A Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*, produced by The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others."

Emmaus Journey's Goals are:

- To help enable non-practicing Catholics, occasional Catholics, and nominal Catholics experience conversion to Christ, transformation in Christ, and mobilization for Christ as Catholic disciples.
- To encourage Catholics to embrace Jesus' call to advance the Gospel and his Kingdom by becoming laborers who live and disciple others from among the nonreligious.
- To help mature and gifted Catholics discover a particular call to participate more fully in the task of evangelization.
- To indirectly serve Catholic parishes' evangelization efforts through small-group materials, evangelization and discipleship resources, seminars, ministry events, and messages that move them forward in their efforts to make Christ known, and to nurture mature Catholic disciples who can help others experience conversion, transformation, and mobilization for Christ.



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Multiple copies of *Saints Alive!* are available upon request.

From the Heart

By Rich Cleveland

What is the Place of Good Works?

In June, *My Daily Catholic Bible* readings included the book of Titus. My attention was drawn to the oft repeated term "deeds" which appeared 8 times in 46 verses.

"They profess to know God, but they deny them by their *deeds*; they are unfit . . . for any *good deed*. . . Show yourself in all respects a model of *good deeds*, . . . so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior, . . . who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for *good deeds*. . . insist on these things, that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to *good deeds*, . . . let our people learn to apply themselves to *good deeds*" (Titus 1:16; 2:7, 10, 13; 3:8, 14).

In three short chapters St. Paul delivers a profound message regarding the place of good works in our lives as Christians. He teaches that:

- The presence or absence of good deeds either validates or invalidates our profession of faith. This is also consistent with James 2:13–17.
- The presence or absence of good works in our lives either decorates the beliefs we profess or it undermines the reality of them.
- The presence or absence of good works either thwarts Jesus' intention in saving us or it fulfills it.
- The presence or absence of good deeds should not be a haphazard affair but rather intentionally planned and practiced.
- The presence and practice of doing good deeds does not come naturally; it is a learned lifestyle and must be an important aspect of Christian formation and discipleship.

As my son would ask, "What if Jesus, through Paul, really meant it? What if good deeds were really as important as Paul indicates they are?"

Good deeds are the things that express to the world what God is like.

Why is Jesus so concerned that we be *zealous* to do good deeds? Perhaps the verse I didn't quote from Titus may contain a hint of the reason why good deeds are so important to Christ. Titus 3:5 says, "He saved us not because of *deeds done* by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit." Though the good deeds performed by us do not contribute to our salvation, they can contribute to the salvation of others. Good deeds are the things that express to the world what God is like. They "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior," and act as a light that catches people's attention and illuminates their darkness with hope. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "One is so closely connected to the other [love of God and love of neighbor] that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbor or hate him altogether. Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean that love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God."¹

Jesus weighed in on the topic early in his ministry; "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your moral excellence *and* your praiseworthy, noble *and* good deeds, *and* recognize *and* honor *and* praise *and* glorify your Father Who is in heaven."² Like a moth drawn to the flame so the people we encounter will be drawn to Christ when they experience the illuminating light of our works of mercy, service, and kindness.

What if Jesus, really meant it? **He does!** What if good deeds are really as important as Jesus said? **They are!**



¹ *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*, by Pope Benedict XVI, (16)

² Matthew 5:16 *Amplified New Testament*

Saints: The Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People

Saint Casimir: A Prince Among Men

St. Casimir, (1458–1484) born in the royal palace of his father King Casimir IV, of Austria seems an unlikely candidate to illustrate the virtue of doing good to others in Jesus' name. Fortunately he took to heart the special education he was assured as a prince, and fortunately it included religious instruction on living a holy life.

Though pressured into fulfilling his royal duties, including ruling as head of state of Poland during a three year absence of his grandfather King Wladislaus, Casimir exchanged a life of luxury for a life of devotion, living an austere life and spending entire nights in prayer.

One of his contemporaries wrote of him, "By the power of the Holy Spirit, Casimir burned with a sincere and unpretentious love for the almighty God that was almost unbelievable in its strength. So rich was his love and so abundantly did it fill his heart, that it flowed out from his inner spirit toward his fellow men. As a result nothing was more pleasant, nothing more desirable for him, than to share his belongings, and even to dedicate and give his entire self to Christ's poor, to strangers, to the sick, to those in captivity and to all who suffer. To widows, orphans and afflicted, he was not only a guardian and patron but a father, son and brother. One would have to compose a long account to record here all his works of love and dedication for God and for mankind."¹

St. Casimir exemplifies what it means to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). His good deeds consisted of both giving of his belongings and giving of himself to others. Sometimes it is easier to give our money or our things than to give ourselves to those of a different or seemingly lower social status, or to strangers and those afflicted. But St. Casimir, choosing not to marry, became the "father, son and brother" to the common people he met.

Some in his royal family discounted and even became annoyed that he chose a life of devotion, austerity, and giving, over a life of ruling and royal comfort. But St. Casimir had his heart fixed on knowing and pleasing another King—the Lord Jesus. St. Casimir's life of good works still shines as a light before men, an example worth following.

The Medinas: Making Time for Others

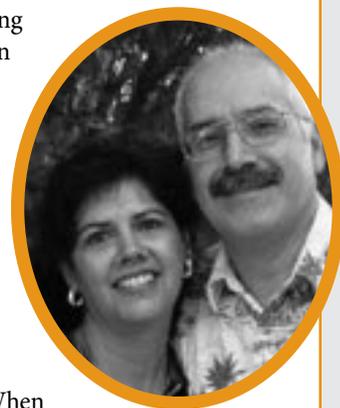
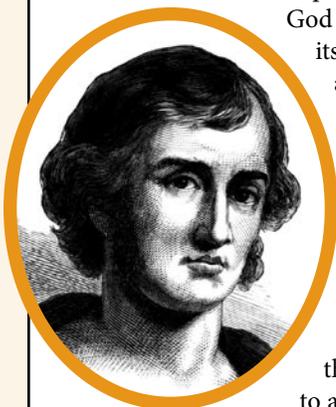
You would think their lives would be full with a family of six children, aged 2–17, home schooling, and working a full-time job, but Gustavo and Cecelia Medina have made time to minister to the immigrant community in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for the full 19 years of their marriage. Though Gustavo spoke the language, Cecelia had to learn both Spanish and the Mexican culture from scratch, for which she is loved and esteemed by the immigrant community.

Though the Medinas have been involved in the leadership of various parish programs such as Marriage Enrichment and the School of the Cross, their real forte is pouring their lives into individuals and small groups. In the words of Gustavo and Cecelia, "We wanted to help people focus on Scripture, prayer, and spending time with people." They explained that meeting with people one-to-one enabled them to provide personalized help. "Many have grown up as Catholics and still need help knowing what their faith stands for, rather than just experiencing cultural Catholicism. One way of appreciating the richness of our heritage is by teaching them the Bible."

Of course this focus is exactly what Pope John Paul II was speaking of when in 1988 he spoke of the need for re-evangelization. Noting the growth of atheism, secularization, and religious traditions void of meaningful content, he explained that, "Only a re-evangelization can assure the growth of a clear and deep faith, and serve to make these traditions a force for authentic freedom."

Today, many of the men heading up the School of the Cross are men Gustavo met with on Sunday mornings to study Scripture and pray together. They have become parish leaders. In addition their faith is being concretely expressed by their actions. For instance, when Gustavo was unable to attend a meeting connected with the School of the Cross these men called to find out where he was. When he explained that he had to spread gravel in his driveway that evening so that the asphalt that was scheduled could be poured the next day, they all came over to his house and helped spread gravel. They had learned their lessons well: "faith without works is dead" (James 2:17).

The Medinas are extraordinary inasmuch as they make time in an already packed schedule to be with immigrants, to build relationships, to serve them, and to teach them to know Christ and their Catholic faith more fully.



¹ Liturgy of the Hours Vol. III, page 1,399

Tools You Can Use

Emmaus Journey—Catholic Small-Group Resources



The vision of *Emmaus Journey* is to help Catholics mature in Christ, to grow in their understanding and commitment to sacred Scripture and Church teachings, and to fan into flame people's commitment to prayer and evangelization.

Emmaus Journey contributes to this goal by helping parish leaders inaugurate small-groups and small Christian communities within their parishes; assisting in the training of small-group facilitators; and providing practical small-group resources.

Emmaus Journey small-group materials integrate Scripture study with meaningful support materials from Church teachings and Catholic leaders, using a practical topical approach. These studies provide an effective addition to existing adult formation resources and are available at a reasonable cost. Most

studies provide a free online facilitator's guide.

In addition, *Emmaus Journey* provides effective formation materials and training resources in various multi-media formats. Decades of ministry experience in evangelization and disciple-making are reflected in these practical training tools. These and other resources will impact your life and enhance your ministry, and can be found on the *Emmaus Journey* web page.

Visit www.emmausjourney.org for our latest materials.

An excerpt from *Hiding God's Word in Your Heart and Mind: The Catholic Topical Memory System*.

The Bible is foundational to our life and health in Jesus Christ. The Psalmist says that the Scripture revives the soul, makes wise the simple, causes joy in our heart and enlightens our understanding (Psalm 19:7–10). The individual who is serious about following God will become a student of sacred Scripture, finding that as he meditates on it and aligns his life with it that the benefits will far outweigh the effort expended.

We do not primarily read sacred Scripture to increase our intellect but because “the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them,”¹ through the pages of Scripture. As we commune with the Father through the Scripture we find “strength for their [our] faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life.”²

The person who is wise will develop the life-long habit of hearing, reading, studying, meditating and praying the Scripture.

1 *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (VI, 21), Vatican II.

2 *Ibid.*

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the persecuted by sharing their wealth, their material possessions, their happiness, their friendship and their Savior.

Consequently, evangelization takes on a more reasonable definition than that which we often assign to it. In the words of Jesus: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14–16). Evangelization is simply living a life of doing such a high quality of good to those we encounter everyday, that they become captivated by the source of our goodness, the Father's love.

Pope John Paul II captures the concept better than I because he states more clearly that it is the “spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation.” He said, “The images taken from the gospel of salt, light and leaven, although indiscriminately applicable to all Jesus' disciples, are specifically applied to the lay faithful. They are particularly meaningful images because they speak not only of the deep involvement and the full participation of the lay faithful in the affairs of the earth,

the world and the human community, but also and above all, they tell of the radical newness and unique character of an involvement and participation which has as its purpose the spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation.”³

Though this is a task that the Church corporately should and does embrace, in our neighborhood, workplace, and social environment it is one that we cannot relegate to the corporate body. The Church that the people around us encounter is us. We are Christ's body and ours is the responsibility to show those we encounter mercy and goodness, and to invite them to friendship and a meal, and to put into language they understand Christ's love and invitation to follow him. This is something each of can do. This is something we should do.

1 *Forty Days and Forty Nights* by Brother Ramon, SSF, page 2

2 *Christifideles Laici (The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People)* by Pope John Paul II (9)

3 *Christifideles Laici (The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People)* by Pope John Paul II (15)