

Saints *Alive!*

A Periodic Newsletter of Emmaus Journey

Issue
26

Personal Response Warrants Personal Attention

By Rich Cleveland

“This is crucial: we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted! We must let the Holy Spirit change our lives! We must respond to Jesus Christ.”

From Go and Make Disciples

Recently, I had a life-long Catholic, who is very active in his parish comment “I am often puzzled as to why having a personal relationship with Jesus isn’t explained more explicitly.” It is an interesting observation and a really good question for Catholic leaders to address as the Church moves forward in its mission of evangelization. Some leaders of course have recently addressed this issue in books, blogs, and at various occasions involving evangelization, but as an active reader of Catholic communications it seems that it is often only obliquely mentioned, and like the person mentioned above it is often still puzzling why it is not emphasized more.

When Pope Francis spoke of the need for an encounter with Christ in paragraph 4 of *The Light of Faith* it created somewhat of a stir among Catholics, as though it was a new thing, but it wasn’t, and gratefully the concept of a personal encounter has become more prevalent. But I remember in the Spring of 1993 reading *Go and Make Disciples*, published by the USCCB, when it first appeared, and three years before my wife and I joined the Catholic Church. I was blown away by the significance of this document, its evangelical tenor, and the clarity with which it spoke of the need for a personal response; “This is crucial: we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted! We must let the Holy Spirit change our lives! **We must respond to Jesus Christ.**” (Emphasis added.)

St. Pope John Paul II expressed it many times, perhaps none more strongly than paragraph 46 of *Mission of the Redeemer*; “Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision the saving sovereignty of Christ and

becoming his disciple.” So, the Church has always proclaimed, again and again, in many different ways that a person must **personally respond** to the reality and offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. Although in an initial adult conversion, the personal response may be more obvious, yet even when baptized as an infant and raised as a Catholic, the Church teaches (CCC paragraphs 1229–1231) that baptismal grace must flower into “acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion.” So perhaps the problem is not that personal relationship/personal response isn’t taught, but that the emphasis is on the wrong syllab-el, as we often jokingly misspeak.

Sometimes I think that we do not put more emphasis on the importance of a personal response/relationship due to a popular misconception. Even though we can often help people make a personal response to Christ through a larger event, we have often mistakenly concluded that the best way to disciple people is also primarily in large groups (which tends to be pretty impersonal), and in classroom settings, (perhaps like a seminary or college class environment) where doctrinal facts are taught, and we conclude that having people regurgitate religious facts is sufficient. We often do not realize the necessity of enabling people to personally experience truth, and of actively building disciplines and habits into their lives, rather than just *telling facts*. In what other areas of life do we do that?

Would we think of giving someone a driver’s license simply because they read the drivers manual, though they have never driven? We don’t think about waiting until our kids can read about tooth decay and its prevention before buying them a toothbrush

continued on final page

Inside this Issue

- From the Heart
- Emmaus Journey 2019 Poland Mission Trip
- Excerpt from The Catholic Topical Memory System

“...As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.”

—Col. 2:6–15

Emmaus Journey

MISSION:

Emmaus Journey is a lay Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry which partners with parishes, small groups and individuals to facilitate a personal encounter with and conversion to Christ, thereby forming missionary disciples actively living for Jesus.

VISION:

By encountering Christ through scripture, discipleship and community—individuals experience: 1) conversion to Christ; 2) transformation in Christ; and 3) mobilization for Christ, where they are actively involved in sharing their faith with others and living out their faith in the greater community. Thus achieving Goal One of the USCCB's initiative on evangelization, “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.”



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From the Heart

By Henry Abeyta

In this issue we explore our personal response to God's grace and I can say that this action has proven to be a fundamental revelation in my own life. We have Jesus saying of himself, “I am the way the truth and the life” (John 14:6), in his call to his disciples, and ultimately in his call to us. How do we respond?

In my young years, my response was filled with awe but few active steps. As I was finishing the latter years of high school, I was motivated to figure out what was next but didn't have clear direction other than what was derived from my own driving interests. I had a profound curiosity about rocketry and aircraft, the history of warfare, and an appreciation of how technological developments through history were utilized to bring advantage to one side or the other. Through advice provided by respected teachers, engineering was the route to learn more and to feed this curiosity. Consequently, I set out on a journey to understand what could be understood.

Having grown up in my early years with Catholic school and catechism, I also had a sense of wonder and curiosity about God. I learned a profound sense of worship in the mass and began what would become a life-long journey to learn more about the God that had created me and had an on-going interest in me. Although there was a degree of devotion in my life, the pattern was more characterized by interest in God at specific times of my own convenience or need.

Living in the dorms in college, I went through a time of isolation and questioning. It was during this time that many groups were going through the dorms knocking on doors talking about the person of Jesus. At first, I let them in and listened to what they had to say about his role in bringing human-kind to God. I began reading the scriptures to go deeper than what was my superficial understanding of Jesus and to learn how he was crucial to my understanding of God. I came to an understanding through God's grace, that Jesus was the way he had provided, that I could set out on the path to know him, but that it did need my response to Jesus call in my life to set out with him on this way to truth and meaning in life.

Through the years and continuing in this spiritual journey, I was brought to the great depth of Catholic teaching on faith, spirituality, the role of the Holy Spirit, and an explanation of what this personal response entailed in how I live my life. This spiritual journey to understand myself, to learn that life's meaning comes through living with and serving others, and that a continual pursuit of “truth” and understanding is not a state but an on-going revelation. Saint John Paul II brings insight into this process: “Man's intimate relationship with God in the Holy Spirit also enables him to understand himself, his own humanity, in a new way. Thus that image and likeness of God which man is from his very beginning is fully realized. This intimate truth of the human being has to be continually rediscovered in the light of Christ who is the prototype of the relationship with God. ... Man learns this truth from Jesus Christ and puts it into practice in his own life by the power of the Spirit, whom Jesus himself has given to us.” (*Dominum et Vivificantem* [59])

All of this began, as the Church teaches, with my Baptism and “acceptance” through faith that Jesus is the “way, the truth, and the life.” By taking active steps, not only when it is convenient, to learn about him and to begin orienting my life to live for him. The Church refers to this as my ongoing need for “conversion.” And so now in my 60s, I feel that I have so much to learn, yet confident based on what has come before. That responding to Jesus, the turning point in my teens was key in my life journey.

Over the past eight years, Darlene and I have been privileged to lead Emmaus Journey. Please pray with us as we seek God's direction for new leadership for Emmaus Journey, and as we continue this journey intent on discovering God's plan and our part in it. Encouraged that there is more before us, not yet clear, not yet fully understood, not yet visible, yet, it is there as I place my hope in Jesus. May God richly bless you through your relationship with Jesus!



Henry Abeyta

Henry Abeyta became Director of Emmaus Journey in January 2012. With its establishment as a tax exempt 501c(3) organization in 2014, Henry has served as its President. He and Darlene are the proud parents of two married sons and proud grandparents of four grandsons. Henry retired from Sandia National Laboratories where he worked for 30 years. He and Darlene are long-time members of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Albuquerque.

Sharing the Joy

Emmaus Journey 2019 Poland Mission Trip

It is with tremendous gratitude and appreciation that we share the summary of Emmaus Journey's 2019 Poland Mission Trip. As you read the feedback from the mission team, we invite you to partake in the joy expressed by each missionary because it is also yours!

The team returned to the U.S. July 20th and this is what they said:

Adriana T: *"I am still in shock of how incredible this trip was. I came on this trip second guessing if I was worthy enough to take on such a spiritually demanding role. Through the entire trip I experienced so many amazing moments that just came to show that God called me by name with a specific purpose in mind."*

Megan K: *"I am pretty positive that this trip was the best thing that I have ever done. It was so rewarding to be able to immerse myself in a large group of people that appreciate their faith. There was so many experiences and stories wrapped up in the last 18 days that will never leave me."*

Isaiah M: *"I didn't expect how much the kids were going to touch my heart the way that they did. We went to teach them, and I really think we got a lot through to them, but in turn they have taught me so much about my faith and the church and about God and that is what I got the most out of! I feel like my faith was even further transformed by the relationships I have made with those kids and that's something I will be able to hold on to forever...It was truly one of the absolute best experiences of my life."*

Marissa P: *"This morning a piece of my heart stayed behind in Poland as we said our goodbyes and got on our plane. I'm thankful for the warm welcomes that we received and for the immense blessings that God poured into our lives."*

Marisa T: *"This trip has been such a wonderful experience. Getting to experience this wonderful spiritual journey. For such a long time I have struggled to find my faith and have been wanting to continue to grow in faith and over the last three weeks I have never felt stronger in my own faith and what I believe. Working with all the kids and seeing how they are and helping them to hopefully grow closer to Jesus Christ was such a wonderful experience."*

Julissa M: *"This mission trip was truly a blessing in my life. It was something that I now realize I desperately needed. It allowed me to fall back in line with my faith and remind me why I love being Catholic. My eyes were opened in so many ways over the past three weeks. I was able to learn so many valuable life lessons. I learned that I need to surrender myself to God and allow myself to be his instrument."*

Vanessa H: *"While I'm exhausted and ready to sleep for 14 hours straight, this trip has been one I've been wanting to go on for years...It was only within the last year that I had a career direction change that just so happened to be a focus on teaching elementary English in foreign countries. I hope that it is in His plan that I may attend this mission trip again. I pray that it continues for many years to come and touches many more as it has done up through now."*



In God's great providence, "goodness and transformation" were facilitated by Deacon Louis and Deana H ..., the mentor couple for the mission. Missioners, OAZA Camp leaders and camp children radiated gratitude and commendation for their vital role in mentoring, formation and completion of this significant spiritual enterprise.

Many hands joined to make this life-changing mission-possible ... we thank all who contributed to making this mission trip a success.

Topic: Personal Response

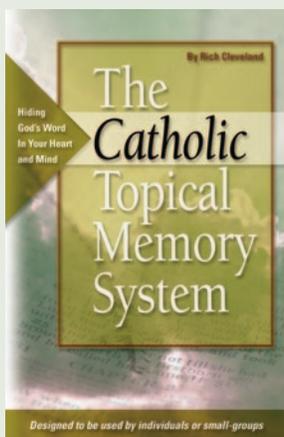
Verses: **John 1:12** and **Romans 10:9,10**

Reflection on the Wisdom of the Church

Rightly does the Church talk about the mystery of salvation, for many would, if they had their way, take all the mystery out of salvation, analyze it, codify it, and market it as the only formula that will get anyone to heaven. Our focus should not be so much on the how of one's personal response to God but on the necessity of it.

Additionally, the Church refers to the gift of salvation as a gift freely given and which needs to be freely received.

"Salvation consists in believing and accepting the mystery of the Father and of his love, made manifest and freely given in Jesus through the Spirit."¹



Though it can be received on our behalf while we are yet infants, the Church teaches that upon maturing, we must confirm acceptance of the gift of salvation by a personal response. Pope Paul VI refers to this personal decision as "a radical conversion, a profound change of mind and heart."² Pope John Paul II further explains that "Conversion means accepting, by personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple."³

How we express that personal response of belief in the saving work of Christ varies greatly and is dependent on many factors: our age, the amount of instruction we have received, our temperament, the environment in which we heard the Good News, etc. But however our faith is expressed, it always involves the heart and the willful confession before others that Jesus is both Savior and Lord and includes our intent to become his disciple.

Questions for Meditation

John 1:12 (For context read John 1:8–13)

- To whom does God give the right to become his children?
- How are the words "received" and "believe" similar or different?
- There are many ways a person can express their personal response of faith. Describe your experience of personal response.

Romans 10:9,10 (For context read Romans 10:6–13)

- How does this verse point out that faith is more than mere intellectual assent?
- Why are both belief and confession necessary for salvation?
- Explain whether this passage describes a one-time initial response, an on-going process, or both.

1. Mission of the Redeemer by Pope John Paul II, paragraph 12

2. On Evangelization in the Modern World by Pope Paul VI, paragraph 9–10

3. Mission of the Redeemer by Pope John Paul II, paragraph 46

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continued from front page

“One who believes [personally responds] may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all..”

From The Light of Faith

and toothpaste, no, we begin brushing their little teeth when they first come in and eventually teach them how to do so on their own, long before they can read. Experience is a wonderful, and sometimes necessary teacher. Why do we think people will come to faith and experience its security and motivation, without someone personally parenting them in the faith? Why do we think people will read their Bibles, as they are admonished to do in order to grow their personal relationship with Jesus,—unfortunately many give up in frustration because they conclude the Bible is too boring, too difficult, or too something? Yet, many do not have someone who will take the time to personally teach them where and how to begin, or initially walk with them until the benefits sink in and the process becomes enjoyable, exciting, and habitual? This is true for many areas of Catholic spirituality and ministry. Catholic disciples, just like people in any other healthy family unit, need to be trained to embrace their responsibilities as spiritually healthy adults, by being offered help on a more personal individual and small group basis.

Consequently, we see that challenging people to encounter Christ, and to make a personal response to him regarding the offer of salvation, is clearly Catholic, and is of major importance in establishing a solid foundation for ongoing discipleship. Referring back to Pope Francis’ *The Light of Faith*, paragraph 34, we find that he also considers this encounter and response to be essential; “One who believes [personally responds] may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all.” (Emphasis added.)

However, as Catholics we also know that the initiating event and public expression that ushers us into the faith is not intended to be an end-all of our faith experience, but the beginning of a living relationship with Jesus. Primarily that ongoing relationship consists of listening to, and talking with our Lord Jesus, and then manifesting that relationship to others in our world. This is where the individual attention and practical

training often is missing. This is where many Catholics are frustrated because they have heard the challenges but there has not been someone there to **show them how, get them started, and keep them going.** This is where the responsibility for personal evangelization and discipleship moves from the pulpit to the pew. Helping others encounter and respond to Christ, and walking with them to develop spiritual habits that will enhance their relationship with Christ, should rest on the laity. “Each one, teach one” is not a concept that is outdated, nor does it call for only temporary participation.

We need to awaken or reawaken ourselves to the role of the laity, and take steps to insure that these truths become a reality in parish after parish. Pope John Paul II makes it so clear in *The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, paragraph 10; “Pius XII once stated: “The faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the front lines of the Church’s life; for them the Church is the animating principle for human society. Therefore, they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness *not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church*, that is to say the community of the faithful on earth’ ... It is no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God.” These words should give us pause! Each parish does not have to try and re-invent the wheel again. There are Catholic ministries available to help, like Emmaus Journey, for whom discipleship training does not simply consist of one more videotaped message, but rather can help clarify vision (tell them why), provide practical tools and resources (get them started), and provide training and support (keep them going), on a personal basis for disciple-makers, so that they in turn can personally help disciple others.

After thirty-five years as evangelicals, Rich Cleveland and his wife Gail became Catholic. Rich is the founder of Emmaus Journey, and he and his wife continue to serve Emmaus Journey, and live in Colorado Springs, Colorado.