

The Gift Of An Evangelist

By The Most Reverend Philip Edward Phlegar Weeks

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Prior to His Ascension Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable the Apostles to be witnesses to all they had seen and heard. It was His desire that the world should know that He had come to redeem sinners, and that He was the Savior for all people (St John 17:21). To be able to share the difference Jesus has made in a person's life was part of the "greater works" He said they would be able to perform (John 14:12).

That is the work of an evangelist! All believers are called to be evangelists!

Some are evangelists such as Charles Finney, Charles Spurgeon, Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, and others of history. Especially Billy Graham taught other men how to be evangelists in their own ministry. This was part of the work of the evangelist Jesus put in the church in what we call the "five-fold ministries" (Ephesians 4: 11). But the work of the evangelist here is not limited to raising up men to follow in the footsteps of noted men such as these and others, but preparing all believers to be able to witness to the difference Jesus has made so the Church may be strengthened and souls increased to the Body of Christ.

When I was in the pastorate at our "charismatic" service I invited people to give brief testimonies on what God had done in their life the previous week. We had the reading of the New Testament Epistle after which I said, "we have heard what God did years ago; what has He done this week?" Always there was someone who gave a testimony to answered prayer which edified the worshipers to greater faith. Their testimony often was more effective than my sermon. Father Mark Barth, who was youth minister in my last Episcopal parish, and now the Priest at Holy Comforter Charismatic Episcopal Church in Sanford, Florida, has continued the practice in what he calls "the living epistle".

I heard one person say that whenever she asked a neighbor how the day was going, if the response was negative, she invited her immediately to join in prayer for God to make things different. It was more meaningful to pray immediately than to say, "I will be praying for you."

Every believer has something that can be shared when the Lord opens the right moment. It may be an answer to prayer, a healing, or a financial blessing. Evangelism is more than inviting a person to accept Jesus as Savior, although that is major part of the ministry. Our Patriarch, Archbishop Craig Bates, gives an invitation to salvation following every sermon in the Cathedral of the Intercessor. He has the heart of an evangelist, and never allows a moment to pass when someone present in the worship service might never have invited Jesus into his or her life can avail of the opportunity to do so. I remember hearing the late Arthur Katz tell about meeting an elderly lady who told him she had been praying for him for years. Her prayer for his acceptance of Jesus as his Messiah was the work of an evangelist.

Someone asked if we were arrested for being a Christian would there be sufficient evidence by which we could be convicted. Saint Francis of Assisi invited another brother to walk with him on the street one day “so we may give witness to Christ”. They made the walk and returned to the monastery. The brother said to Francis that they had not talked to anyone about Christ; how was that a witness? “By our life!” he replied. The manner in which we treat others becomes a witness.

How do you treat the clerk at the grocery check out counter? What about your mail carrier or newspaper carrier? In our part of America people wave to each other in passing whether we know the person or not. How do you treat your neighbor, remembering Jesus taught that every man is our neighbor?

I was arriving from a mission trip and a Krishna girl at the Orlando Airport came toward me offering a plastic flower. I held out my arms as if to embrace her with a hug, and said, “have you come to me so I can tell you about Jesus?” She took off in the opposite direction, but she heard the Name! One night when living in Miami, my wife June, Deiter Elswick (our church’s youth minister), and I were around the dining table doing a Bible study when a Krishna man came to the door. He was in their traditional garb and I invited him to join us at the table. When the subject of the blood of Jesus came up, he jumped and ran out the door. He heard the Name and His redemptive measure! I sometimes have left evangelistic tracts in telephone booths, rest rooms, and under a plate in the restaurant. You never know what fruit your deeds and words will bring forth. I am blessed when someone writes or phones and tells me that something I did caused them to become a believer. I don’t have a “gospel belt” in which I put notches reflecting these people. It is God who keeps the record, and to Him we give the glory. “Non nobis, Domine! (Psalm 115:1).