

Conversion to Jesus Christ

Jerry Johnson

It has been three years since we began publishing the Formation Monthly. I felt this would be a good time to repeat the very first article, since it covers a topic that deserves our attention on a regular basis. Hopefully, our articles over the past three years have aided in your continuing conversion. If you would like to revisit any of our past issues, they are now archived on the parish web site. Go to stlambertparish.org and click on the Formation Monthly link at the top right. Here now is the very first issue from January of 2007.

“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.”

These are the words of our United States Bishops. But what exactly are they telling us? What is conversion? The *General Directory of Catechesis* states in paragraph 53 that “Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ” and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1989, explains that “The first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit is conversion”. Maybe it’s time that we take a closer look at conversion and in particular, the state of conversion in our own lives.

The *National Directory of Catechesis*, written and published by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, gives us a fairly good idea of what conversion is and what it looks like in the lives of

believers. To begin with, they tell us that “It is the fruit of God’s grace and the free response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.” In other words, it’s really God’s work in us, but he gives us the choice to respond to his promptings or not to respond. They go on to say that “It arises from the depths of the human person and involves such a profound transformation of heart and mind that it causes the believer to change radically both internally and externally.” Has this been your experience? Can you identify this transformation in your life? The Bishops continue: “For the Christian, this *metanoia* reorients all aspects of the person’s life to Christ. This conversion is the acceptance of a personal relationship with Christ, a sincere adherence to him, and a willingness to conform one’s life to his. Conversion to Christ involves making a genuine commitment to him and a personal decision to follow him as his disciple.” Now we get an idea of what our response to God should look like: reorient, accept, conform, commit, follow. Again we need to ask ourselves, is this our response? Finally, the Bishops explain the process more deeply and how it develops in our lives:

“The process of conversion involves understanding who Christ is in order to change and follow him more closely. Conversion begins with an

openness to the initial proclamation of the Gospel and a sincere desire to listen for its resonance within. This search arouses in those coming to Christ a desire to know him more personally and to know more about him. This knowledge of the person, message, and mission of Christ enables the believer to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith. This profession of faith forms the foundation for the continuing journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is nourished by the sacraments, prayer, and the practice of charity until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God...to the extent of the full stature of Christ.” Do you have the desire for a deepening conversion to Jesus? That desire to come to know him more personally and follow him more faithfully? This desire is a real sign of conversion and will lead us to press on in this journey of faith. The Bishops have certainly given us much to think about as we examine the conversion in our own lives. May God give us the strength to respond to his grace with a total commitment to Jesus and to sharing this wonderful faith he has blessed us with!

Jerry is a charter member of St. Lambert’s and a Master Catechist for the diocese.

From Pope John Paul II

“Again, many pre-adolescents and adolescents who have been baptized and been given a systematic catechesis and the sacraments still remain hesitant for a long time about committing their whole lives to Jesus Christ - if, moreover, they do not attempt to avoid religious education in the name of their freedom.

Finally even adults are not safe from temptations to doubt or to abandon their faith, especially as a result of their unbelieving sur-

roundings. This means that "catechesis" must often concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith but also with arousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith.”

-Pope John Paul II, *Catechesis in Our Time*, par. 19)

Recommended Reading

For the Beginner...

The Seven Storey Mountain
by Thomas Merton

Surprised by the Truth 1, 2, and 3
Edited by Patrick Madrid
These three books are a collection of stories of Conversion to the Catholic Church.

Rome Sweet Home
by Scott and Kimberly Hahn
Digging Deeper...

The Confessions of St. Augustine

Some further points to ponder...

At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a person, the person of Jesus ...

“The object of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Christ, to encounter him and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him. At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a person, the person of Jesus of Nazareth, ‘the only Son from the

Father ... full of grace and truth,’ (1John1:3) who suffered and died for us and who now after rising, is living with us forever.” (Pope John Paul II, CT 5)

“God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life.

For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* par. 1)

Thoughtful Questions

Am I experiencing an ongoing and deepening conversion to Jesus in my life?

Is my faith being nourished by prayer, sacrament, and acts of charity?

As an adult, have I made a total commitment to Christ or am I still on the “threshold of faith”?

