

THE *Why* FOR OUR EVERYTHING



BECAUSE VIBRANT
CHURCHES MATTER



THE “WHY” FOR OUR EVERYTHING

There once was a conference in a big city, in a big conference center, and with a big budget. There were speakers from all over the globe with promises of expertise and enlightenment. A hall was filled with exhibitors that had flashy displays and eye-catching brochures. People traveled from all around to attend this event in hopes of receiving wisdom and being filled with inspiration.

One man had heard of the event and decided to attend. The topics were of key interest to him, and he wanted to hear what was being talked about. He slipped into one room and sat in the back. The speaker began his talk. He shared facts and figures. He told the crowd about how to succeed in their chosen ventures. The crowd wanted to hear more because they all felt the topic was very important to their lives going forward. When the workshop was over, everyone walked out the back door, passing the man who had sat in the back. He felt bewildered because he thought for sure the topic of the workshop had something more to do with him. He even expected to hear his name mentioned. Instead, it was like the topic had nothing to do with him at all.

A conference aide saw the man sitting in the back of the room alone. He approached him to see if he needed any help. He looked at the man's name tag. He asked, “Excuse me, Jesus, can I help you?”

— Phil Cooke, “Branding Faith: Why Some Churches and Nonprofits Impact Culture and Others Don’t”

I worked in a parish for 22 years. I know how it is. There are so many phone calls, e-mails, and meetings. There is so much to be done and so few hands to get it accomplished. It is so easy to get caught up in it all that you forget why you are there in the first place: Jesus.

The larger Church can easily suffer from the same dilemma. Bureaucracy takes over, and we worry more about logistics and deadlines than we do the messaging. We sacrifice the truth and compromise on our ideals because of fear of loss of funding or declining membership. We make our events more important than the reason for having them in the first place: Jesus.

There are certainly layers of junk that can accumulate on our faith and ministry as time goes by. We adhere to the law as opposed to focusing on the spirit of the law, or we forget about the enthusiasm and love of God that brought us to work in the Church in the beginning. When our ministry begins to falter, we seek processes of rebuilding or re-creation. We start to think what is needed is something new, fresh, and relevant.

However, what we have missed is that JESUS IS AND ALWAYS WILL BE RELEVANT. After 2,000 years, his Gospel is still new and fresh because it presents a reality that remains unknown to many and is contrary to the everyday experiences of our secular society. We proclaim to know Jesus and witness to him as the reason for all we do. Sometimes the problem is that those who minister in the Church do not truly know him. They have been drawn to institution and the comfort of community. But this may not be the real problem. There are many who do know Jesus and have entered this life for the right reason. The issue is not that we have forgotten Jesus. It is instead that we have forgotten who he has called us to be.

3 STEPS TO GETTING BACK TO JESUS

1 Pause

Just stop. Stop what you are doing and think. Analyze what it is you have been doing, and reflect on the reasons why these actions are important at all. I firmly believe that we do too many things in our parishes and dioceses without any real reflection on how these actions fit into our mission: proclaiming the Gospel and bringing people to Jesus Christ. We are talking more in the Church about moving from maintenance to mission, but too often we haven't paused long enough to understand what that means for our ministries, our parishes, and our Church. If a person wanted to get out of debt, he or she would need to start making payments. But there wouldn't be much progress unless the person stopped spending the money they didn't have, which was still adding to the debt.

We believe that we can't cancel the conference, the fall festival, the VBS, or the class! It must happen. Why? Because that is what we do, and people expect it. But if Jesus was present at your event, would he have a sense that this was all in his name or would he be disappointed? Sometimes, something must die for it to be born again, for it to make a difference. Don't be afraid. What really matters in the end? We must sometimes pause in life before we go too far down the wrong road. The farther we have gone off course, the harder it can be to find our way back.

2 Pray

It seems almost silly to simply list prayer as a key step. Of course, who wouldn't say prayer is important in getting closer to Jesus? However, the problem is that we toss around the word prayer so much that it has lost meaning. Prayer has become the thing we say we will do when we have no idea what else to do. If we truly believe in the power of prayer — and with all the praying that people say they are doing — the world should be fundamentally different. I suspect there are many times we say we will pray for someone or something and we don't. I know too many of us working in the Church who do not spend enough quality time with Jesus.



People who are a part of our lives as family and friends enter our thoughts less and less if we can't find time to spend with them. It doesn't mean we don't love them. Most of us genuinely love Jesus. It's just that the less time we spend with him, the less frequently we will mention him or consider him in our daily actions. He needs to lead us, and that is impossible if we are all wrapped up in ourselves and our programs.

It's not so much about recreating or re-building a ministry; it's more about cutting away the junk so the real ministry that's inside can be released.

Find time for silence and just rest in Jesus. Look for opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration so that Jesus can penetrate more of your senses. Keep an active prayer list on your smartphone so you don't forget to bring the concerns of others to Jesus. Consider praying the Liturgy of the Hours so you can strengthen a sense of belonging to something greater than yourself. Order your day around time spent with God so that when everything seems overwhelming, you won't forget why you are doing any of these things in the first place.

3 Return

You might think that change is the word needed here. We talk so much in the Church about the need for change, and sometimes change is good. However, we don't always need to become different or change who we are and what we do as much as we need to simply return to who we were in the first place. By Baptism, we are already new creations in Christ. As a Church, we have a lineage and tradition that is filled with God's gifts. People are always skeptical of the latest trend or movement in the Church. Instead of just jumping on a new bandwagon, we need to show that Jesus remains unchanging and his Gospel is for all times. Humans have done all we could to screw up the Body of Christ here on earth with our sin, but it has survived because of the strength of its roots planted firmly by Jesus himself.



We need to return to the sacraments and be fed for our journey. We need to return to the basics of the Gospel message before we can make sense of more complex doctrines. We need to return to a missionary spirit and evangelistic zeal. We need to study the saints and those who have gone before us in faith. We live in a time where fewer people would be willing to die for a belief or a person and that stands for the Church as well. When we forget or lose site of the why for our everything, we lose sight of who we were called to be in the beginning. We lose the strength needed to be bold with the Gospel and proclaim it loudly.

Why do we do the things we do as Church? Why are we Church? If we only make decisions based on human desires and the drive for greater success, then we will find that we make ourselves irrelevant. If we fail to pause, pray, and return to Jesus, we will continue to walk a path toward obsolescence. When it seems almost too late, we will do all sorts of things to become more meaningful and relevant to the culture. We will make concessions to the culture in the attempt to speak to and into the culture.

Jesus has spoken. He has spoken to all cultures and all times. He remains the same — the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. Our own relevance lies in him. He has never left us. He will never leave us orphaned. He is the why for our everything, even if we carry on like he isn't even there.

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