



SESSION 16

Discipleship and Mission



Detail from *The Apostles Peter and John Blessing the People of Samaria*, Giorgio Vasari

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- To understand why discipleship and mission belong to the Christian life and why the Church plays a central role in both
- To examine how missionary activity plays out in different spheres of life, from the Church, to educational institutions, to our personal lives
- To appreciate the ordinary ways that the Gospel is proclaimed through words and living witness, as exemplified in the life of Servant of God Michelle Duppong
- To grow in the conviction that as a result of a loving encounter with our Savior, each of us is called to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those around us

STEP 1: Begin

OPENING PRAYER

Dearest Lord,
teach me to be generous;
teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give, and not to count the cost,
to fight, and not to heed the wounds,
to toil, and not to seek for rest,
to labor, and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I am doing your will. Amen.

— *Prayer of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*

INTRODUCTION

It is from God's love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigor of her missionary dynamism, "for the love of Christ urges us on." . . . God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. . . . Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth. Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary. (CCC 851, citing 2 Cor 5:14)

In the previous session, we reflected on the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 and marveled alongside her at the gift of God, which is prayer. If we remain at her side as the story continues, we witness something remarkable. After being introduced to the "gift of God," she comes to realize who Jesus is; and because of this, she goes into town and tells the people about Jesus. And the result? "They went out of the town and were coming to him. . . . Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:30, 39). Because of her encounter with Christ, the Samaritan woman is moved to share the good news of who Jesus is with others, who in turn, come to believe in him. Urged on by the love of Christ, she goes on mission and leads others to Jesus.

Sharing the good news with others begins with encountering Jesus and falling in love with him. It is only because of this love that the *Catechism* can describe the Church receiving "both the *obligation* and the *vigor* of her missionary dynamism" (CCC 851, emphases added). We don't usually think of "obligation" and "vigor" belonging together; but in the Church's missionary work and in our own lives of evangelization, they do. We are required by Christ's command to proclaim him to the ends of the earth—but even more than that, we are required, by a love that transforms us, to share this greatest of goods with others. Love makes proclaiming the Gospel an obligation that we discharge with vigor and joy.

In this session, we walk alongside the Samaritan woman once more and try to understand how our response to Jesus involves sharing him with others. What does this proclamation or evangelization look like concretely in our lives of discipleship? What role does the Church play in evangelizing today, and how does missionary activity lie at the heart of what the Church is and does?

It's our final session! And all that we've seen and learned about the Creed, the sacraments, and the Christian life culminates in discipleship and mission. Believing the faith of the Church, receiving her saving sacraments, and living and praying in communion with her—all of these shape our lives as disciples of Christ and prepare us to invite and welcome others into the remarkable adventure of being a Christian.

STEP 2: Learn

SETTING THE STAGE

Set on the wide-open plains of North Dakota, the University of Mary is a Catholic institution, born out of the heart of the Church, to serve the academic, spiritual, and cultural needs of both its students and the greater United States. The ongoing work of the university is one of mission: to share the truth of the

Gospel with others, to remind us of our daily mission to be the Church's missionaries, and to instill in us our missionary nature, because it is through our discipleship that we can spread God's good news.

The Church, and each of her members, is called to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world—in all times, in every place. This challenge is one that the saints have taken up with enthusiasm, even though the cost was often high. What motivates the Church and her members to share the Gospel with others? What does this sharing look like? Must it involve spoken words, or is a living witness enough? And why is missionary activity so central to the life and mission of the Church and her members? In this session, we will look to the early Church, as presented in the Scripture, to discover the nature and mission of those first disciples and apostles of Christ who together formed the Church. With the early Church as our model, we will explore what living out that same mission looks like today, as we are moved by the encounter with Christ to bring others to him as well.

I. Mission work continues today, and we do it in the larger community of the Church

II. Salvation History: The Church fulfills the mission of Christ

- A. Jesus is the foundation and founder of the Church
 - 1. Like Christ, the Church is a mystery involving the earthly and visible as well as the spiritual and heavenly
 - 2. The Church is Christ's, but he has entrusted its governance to Peter and the apostles, as well as their successors
- B. The Church extends through time Christ's Incarnation, teaching, and work of redemption
- C. The four marks of the Church are one, holy, catholic, and apostolic
- D. God's plan for the world finds fulfillment in the Church—the Church's mission is to invite everyone into communion with her, and we share in that mission

III. Pilgrimage: The University of Mary and Servant of God Michelle Duppong

- A. The university is a missionary endeavor born from the heart of the Church and called to make Jesus' saving truth and love known to its students
- B. Our encounter with God calls forth a response: When we are touched by God's love, we want to make sure others know the good news of God's saving love
- C. Michelle Christine Duppong exemplified this truth.
 - 1. The life and faith of the Church came alive in her, and she became a FOCUS missionary to share this gift with others
- D. Each of us in our own humble way is called to do all we can to see that God is known and loved by others

IV. Catechesis: The Sacrament of Salvation

- A. The number one thing the Church offers the world is Jesus Christ, through evangelization
- B. Every Catholic is called to share in this mission of helping people come to know Christ
- C. We are "missionary disciples"—truly encountering Christ means we can't help but want to share him with others
- D. The woman in John 4 exemplifies this spirit: She shares with others her remarkable encounter with Jesus' merciful love, and she gives to others what she herself received
- E. We evangelize in two ways: through the witness of our lives and through our words

V. *Lectio divina*: Matthew 28:16–20

- A. Jesus entrusts the great task of evangelization to a group of imperfect apostles
- B. Our shortcomings and imperfections should not stop us from bringing Christ to the world
- C. His words to the apostles console and encourage us, too: *I am with you!*

WORD MEANING:

Evangelization

Sharing with others the good news of Jesus Christ, through living witness and spoken word; from initial proclamation, to its sacramental reception, to then being shared further, evangelization is at the heart of the Church's mission and the Christian's life.

I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God's counsels, in God's world, which no one else has; whether I be rich or poor, despised or esteemed by man, God knows me and calls me by my name.

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission—I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes . . . I shall do good, I shall do His work.

— From Saint John Henry Newman, *"Meditations on Christian Doctrine"*

STEP 3: Engage

- 1) Take a look at the portrayal of the early Church in Acts 2:42–47. The key description reads, "They held steadfastly to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Then it goes on to describe miracles, works of service, praise, and the sharing of the Gospel with others. In what ways does this sound like the Catholic Church today? In what ways does it sound different? How might we explain these differences?

The main lines of what the New Testament teaches about the early Church are still quite evident in the Church today. The Church's teaching is the apostles' teaching. The fellowship, or communion, of the Church is founded on Christ and his apostles (thus, the Church is apostolic). The breaking of the bread and the prayers continues in the Church's liturgical prayer, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice. And the Church

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today serves innumerable people across the globe, especially in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Of course, each of these dimensions has also changed and expanded and seeing in these changes God's providence through history is a fruitful exercise. As for differences, many have to do with size, scope, and a kind of institutional maturity. This shouldn't surprise us since the Church has both temporal and spiritual elements to it. But a key point to consider is that these differences usually rest upon some fundamental similarity or continuity. Not only that, much of what has changed is really in the service of the Church's mission, which is the same now as then. For example, the codification of the Church's law and liturgical norms may seem much more institutional than what we find in the early Church, but it really is meant to preserve the Church's unity along with her universal missionary mandate. Or again, the Church's responsibility for large amounts of real estate is in the service of her prayer, the Eucharistic sacrifice, and her own independence from earthly authorities and powers. So, although there have been changes over the centuries, the underlying characteristics and principles remain the same, while being expressed and lived out in new or different ways, all in the service of the Church's ongoing mission to make Christ known and loved.

- 2) Discipleship and mission are the work of every Christian. What do these terms mean to you? What does discipleship look like on a daily basis? How about mission or evangelization? What challenges and fruits can you identify for yourself in each of these tasks of the Christian life?

There are various words that describe what it means to be a Christian and to live the Christian life. "Discipleship" is one of them and it calls to mind the first disciples, their Master, and how we too are called to learn from and to imitate the Master. For some, it might be helpful to see that the term "discipleship" is not the only or even always the best term to describe the Christian life. We can also speak of following Christ, imitating him, living out the Gospel, being faithful, following the teachings of the Church, which is Christ's body, and so forth. The main point is to think through how being a Christian affects every part of our lives, even when this reality will be an interior and hidden one much of the time. As for mission or evangelization, the main idea is that when we encounter Christ and begin to follow him as his disciples, we realize the tremendous gift it is to be a friend of Jesus Christ—and how could we not want to share this gift with others? It isn't a matter of simply convincing others that we're right, that Jesus is the Son of God, that other doctrines are true. These teachings are important and they give the Christian life its proper shape. But the main motive and inspiration of evangelization is sharing the good news that has transformed us, enriched our lives, and brought us a fulfillment and joy we otherwise could never have enjoyed. This truth doesn't preclude suffering; indeed, it actually requires suffering, since the way of the Christian is the way of the Cross. But Christian suffering is borne with love and even a kind of joy that is deeper than the superficial discomfort we often associate with suffering. The challenges and fruits in both of these areas are too numerous to mention, but the goal is to identify and overcome potential obstacles and to celebrate and give thanks for the little victories we have in and through Christ.

- 3) In this final session of *Symbolon*, you might find it worthwhile to reflect on the journey you've experienced over the course of these sixteen sessions. What has been especially moving or insightful? What has challenged you or provoked questions? How can these same points contribute to your life of discipleship and your efforts to share what you've learned with others?

At the end of this program, this question is both reflective and broad. Almost any answer is fair game. Beyond simply identifying and appreciating, one overarching goal is to help participants see that those key insights or touching moments provide reasons for sharing the faith or explaining it. At the same time, those challenges or questions that remain need not hinder our efforts to share the Gospel with others. It's important to realize that we will never have all the answers to all the questions; we will never plumb the depths of the mysteries of the faith. What is more important than having all the answers is having faith. Faith is not the same as having answers, though it involves having some. Instead, faith is a disposition that believes what God has said because he has said it—not because I agree with it, not because I understand it, not because it confirms something I've already long held or recently come to hold. Faith is trusting in God because of who he is, the Truth itself. And in this way, evangelization is entirely compatible with questions, concerns, and uncertainties. We can share the good news of Jesus Christ even when we have questions, because part of the good news is that we don't need all the answers when our Master is entirely truthful and completely trustworthy. Naturally, faith still needs to be nourished and strengthened through learning, prayer, and sacrament. And of course our efforts at sharing and defending the faith can be strengthened by deepening our understanding of the mysteries of faith. But the fundamental disposition of the disciple and missionary is one of loving trust rather than a completed system of knowledge.

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STEP 4: Conclude

The townspeople have the last word in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well: "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). In coming to know and love Jesus, the woman becomes his disciple and, in this way, becomes like him, her Master. But she becomes even more like him by leading others to know and love Jesus, just as he led her. Like the Samaritan woman, we also must witness to the gift of God that Christ brings into our lives. Through our words and actions, we are called to bring the living water of Christ into a world where so many are thirsting for this water and longing to know the God who loves each of us, calls us to be his disciples, and then calls these disciples to make known the saving truth of his love.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance
everywhere I go.

Flood my soul with your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly,
that my life may only be a radiance of yours.

Shine through me, and be so in me
that every soul I come in contact with
may feel your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me, but
only Jesus!

Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as
you shine,

so to shine as to be a light to others;

The light, O Jesus will be all from you; none of it
will be mine;

it will be you, shining on others through me . . .

Amen.

— Saint John Henry Newman, "Radiating Christ"

Commit

CALL TO CONVERSION

We are all called to spread the good news through the witness of our lives and through our words, sharing or explaining the faith we hold dear. Both are necessary, but most of us will incline toward one means or the other. The challenge is to hold both in balance. We must not lack the courage to speak the truth, relying only on the silent and sometimes subtle witness of our lives. But we must also resist feeling obliged to speak at every opportunity, instead having the humility and trust in God to know that he is the one who changes hearts, that his timeline is not ours, and that he can work through the quiet witness of a life lived for Christ.

For nearly everyone, finding this balance is part of growing in holiness.

We might find ourselves shying away from talking directly or forthrightly about our faith. Fear often stands behind this hesitating, overly calculating disposition. We fear losing friendship or reputation; we fear conflict or pressure on a point we're unable to explain. We mislead ourselves into thinking that we're being loving, and we rely overly on the testimony of our lives. But the hard truth is that if love withholds the truth from another, it is not really love; and if fear dominates us in these moments, we can be sure our lived witness is compromised by this same fear in other areas of life. The antidote is developing and praying for a confident trust in the Lord and in his providence.

Alternatively, we might enjoy speaking about our faith and defending its claims. In fact, we might enjoy it too much, for two reasons. The first is pride: We like to feel like we're right. But even if we are right, we should rejoice not in "being right" but in the truth itself. The second reason is that it's easier to understand things, to talk about things, and to explain things than it is to live a holy life. So we tend to substitute saying the right things for doing the right things, which are often much harder and much more costly. The antidote here is humility and perseverance.

With confidence in the Lord, humility, and perseverance in living the Gospel generously, we can fulfill our mission to share Christ with the world, through both our lives and our words.

DIGGING DEEPER

We can speak about the Church as the sign and instrument of salvation (see Pope Saint John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, no. 9). In her faith, life, worship, and sacraments, the Church is a sign of God's saving action in the world and of the heavenly Jerusalem above. And through these same things, the Church brings about salvation in the world—as the Body of Christ, she mediates God's grace into the hearts of believers and, through them, into the world. To be the sign and instrument of salvation is the very nature, life, and task of the Church.

To accomplish this task, the Church needs something else: structure. Sometimes we think of the hierarchy or structure of the Church as complicated and confusing at best, and perhaps misleading or unnecessary at worst. But the reality is that the Church's structure and constitution supports her mission: to bring souls to Christ, and Christ to souls.

Structure and mission go hand in hand. Saint Paul uses the image of the body to describe the Church: the Church is the Body of Christ, with Christ as the head and the members of the Church serving as the other parts of the body. Each part is necessary, and each plays a specific role that contributes to the overall function and life of the body. In the case of the Church, what is that overall life and function? It is to make Christ's saving work present in the world, through preaching, teaching, sacraments, and worship.

To live this life and carry out this mission, the Church is one. Her unity testifies to her being the one Body of Christ, the one way of salvation, and to her proclaiming, celebrating, and communicating the one mystery of God to all. The Church is *holy*, and Christ is the source of her holiness, for without this holiness how could she lead others to holiness? The Church is *catholic*, universal in her scope and in her invitation to all. Her mission is not bounded by geography or time. It is meant to reach to the ends of the earth, and the bishops, priests, and lay faithful through time and around the world are charged with carrying out this mission. The Church is *apostolic*, founded by Christ on the fellowship and teaching authority of the apostles, with Saint Peter as their earthly head. To carry out his mission, Christ established an inner circle and invited its members into his ministry to mediate to others his teaching, his miracles, his sacraments. Over time, this structure has grown, as the Church's mission, membership, and reach has grown. Today, the college of bishops gathered around the pope manifest this apostolic dimension and continue the work of the apostles, which also guides and sustains us in our personal work of discipleship and mission.

FOR FURTHER READING

Matthew 25 and 28, John 4, and Acts 2–5 and 17

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 770–865 and 2030–2046

Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*

Scott Hahn, *Evangelizing Catholics: A Mission Manual for the New Evangelization*

Pope Saint John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*

Marcel LeJeune, *The Contagious Catholic: The Art of Practical Evangelization*

Pope Saint Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*