

Drop Your Nets and Follow Jesus

How to Form Disciples
for the New Evangelization

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for the New Evangelization

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Chapter 1

Dying and Rising with Christ

Epiphany of Mystery

Adrian van Kaam¹

Epiphany of mystery
Silently embracing
Emergence of creation,
Transforming humanity
By gracious pervasion.
Mystery of gentle grace,
Illumine our ways,
Disclose the eternal exit
From the cage of time,
The empty, trying days,
A caravan of tired camels.
Eternal spark within
Pierce the dreary winter
Of forgetfulness of the Divine.

Clean the clouded window,
Weave threads of light
Through our nights.
Make us risk
The mysterious voyage
Of light and love.
Lighthouse, guide
Our little ships

Tossing on the churning
Waters of history.
Keep afloat the battered barques
Of fleeting lives.
Make us celebrate
Your presence in the depths
Of our being.

Discipleship is meant by God to be the fullest expression of the dying and rising of Jesus. There is no other road to lasting peace and freedom than that which stretches from the suffering on Golgotha to the unspeakable splendor of Easter morning.

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is not simply a historical event but a here-and-now reality revealing that Christ is with us always.

From the moment of baptism, our existence becomes a participation in the life of the Trinity. And yet, we confess in humility that there is in our fallen condition a fundamental egoism impossible to overcome without the grace granted to us by our Redeemer. There is a narcissistic bent in our personality that threatens to dismantle our call to selfless love as disciples of and evangelizers for the Lord.

Even at privileged moments of deep listening to what our Master teaches, our inclination to self-centeredness does not disappear; it lies in wait like a snake seeking to poison our spiritual perceptions and motivations. Original Sin has caused a woundedness in our soul whose healing takes a lifetime. We may catch a glimpse

of the glory Jesus promises to give us here on earth, but only in the life to come will we behold its full brilliance.

Stillness, recollection, and a serenity not disturbed by useless worry sustain our hope. Anxiety is a sign of the invasion of another kind of spirit, that of self-centered preoccupation. Serene self-possession in daily life is the gift the risen Christ wants to give us.

In his appearances to the apostles and disciples after the resurrection, Jesus shared with them the peace that is his farewell legacy to each of us. The more we are able to still the noise of our selfish needs and surrender to his loving plan for our lives, the more we will be able to model the peace of his presence in every situation.

The awareness that we are on the way to transformation liberates us from prideful attempts to reach perfection in this life. The fullness after which we strive is not ours to attain. Seeking perfection means that we try to share in the perfect love of the risen Lord by being present to self, others, and God in a less egocentric fashion.

The sacramental character of our Christian existence, especially our participation in the Eucharist, grows stronger throughout our life of discipleship. The transformation that took place in our being at the moment of baptism begins to bear fruit in an outpouring of agapic love. What is most characteristic of the form of Christ in us is that it affects our awareness of all that we are and do, enabling us to respond to him with the commitment characteristic of true discipleship.

The sacrificial life of the Lord means that we, too, must be ready to let go of our innate narcissism and be

more present to the demands of our task. Our resistance to letting go of lingering remnants of unconscious egoism appears when Christ challenges us to depart from the safety zone of routine religiosity. It may feel at first as if we are losing our moorings and, to a degree, that is true. As our Lord's presence begins to permeate our daily existence, we grow less sure of our own self-sufficiency and more in need of intimacy with him.

In liturgy, Word, and sacrament, we encounter Jesus in the ecstasy of his risen glory and in the everydayness of bearing our cross courageously. The result is never a turning away from the world in which we are involved but a turning toward it in obedience to the will of the Father.

When we rediscover the core of our Christian personhood—and who we are meant by God to be—we grow in the conviction that we are not alone. Christ is with us from the inception of life to its natural end. His Spirit graces us with renewed gratitude for the past, restored vitality in the present, and unmitigated hope for the future.

It is not enough to be called; we must put our call into practice. Here are five suggestions for doing so:

1. Participate faithfully in the common ways of spiritual deepening offered to us daily by the Church: liturgy, Word, and sacrament.
2. Gain through prayer and study a deeper understanding of our baptismal heritage through pre-evangelization (if we have been away from the Church); through re-evangelization (if we have gone through

an awakening experience and hunger for more teaching); through a new evangelization (to learn how to become “other Christs” through joyful witness and worship).

3. Connect what we believe (our faith tradition) to everyday life (our formation tradition).
4. Be willing to accept the demands our call to follow Christ makes upon us: to parenting, to a profession, to any other obligation this promise entails and duty dictates.
5. Enter into the deepest meaning of knowing who Christ is and why he must remain the center of our field of presence and action.

Saying yes to our calling in Christ is likely to continue for a lifetime if we face day by day these hindrances and counter them with these helps:

Hindrances

1. Inflating “control-center me” and my functional performance.
2. Impatient pushing against the pace of grace as if I am in charge of everything.
3. Focusing on my limits with feelings of hopelessness.
4. Veering from willfulness to will-lessness.
5. Being driven by time-urgency and over-scheduling.

Helps

1. Trusting selflessly in God's providential plan.
2. Patient presence to what *is* and making the best of it in response to God's grace.
3. Seeing my limits as blessings in disguise that reveal my unique call.
4. Practicing authentic willing oriented to God and to implementing God's will.
5. Taking time for reflection in the light of the peace and joy of Jesus.

Let Us Pray

Thrice Holy God, overshadowing us, your people, called to be holy and to live holistically, gifted to form, reform, and transform the community of faith, sent to serve our sisters and brothers eagerly, tirelessly, faithfully.

Renew our hearts by your grace.

Grant us hitherto unknown depths of prayer and presence, as we offer the witness of love and healing in and through Christ to a world wounded by violence, hatred, and ill will, sick in soul and body because of sin.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, gather us together as husbands and wives, as fathers and mothers, as children and elders, as friends and relatives, into the embracing, caring arms of Christ crucified.

Through him, help us to shoulder the responsibilities we must carry with and for the Church, into the world.

There we can be found reading God's Word, ministering to youth and adults, holding decision-making positions, and responding wherever you place us to souls hungering for spiritual deepening— offering our trials daily in appreciative abandonment to your providential purpose and design for our lives.

Spirit of fire and light, help us as we strive to build a better world for our children, a world revitalized and renewed by a deepening of faith, hope, and love, a Church recreated in the image and likeness of Christ, now and for all ages to come.

In fidelity to the treasures of our faith and formation tradition, give us a spirit of deep prayer.

Let the cry of our heart be a constant reminder to us of your resurrected presence, giving us the courage to carry on, and the compassion to be messengers of hope and healing in a time of transition like our own.

Teach us, Holy Spirit, to speak with a disciple's tongue!

May the Word we cherish become flesh in us, as we strive to foster the ongoing spiritual formation of all we hold dear.

In Jesus' name, we, though many, say in one voice,
Amen! Alleluia! Amen!

For Reflection

- In what ways are you becoming more aware of God's presence in everything, even when, humanly speaking, you are "at your worst"?
- Can you recall a moment when you grasped the deeper meaning of your ministerial call to grow in your relationships with God and others for the sake of the Church?