

In our modern age of post enlightenment, our world finds itself in a time darker than any other. Hope is all but gone, lasting happiness is unable to come by, and a chance to encounter something genuine seems nonexistent. Instead of searching for what gives meaning to life, people turn to the internet to fill a gap they cannot fill by themselves. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the Church to evangelize, with other religions competing to attract people to their institutions. Many in this world feel as though religion itself is simply a gimmick and thus reject faceless evangelization. People do not like to be pressured into religion, especially through the current, impersonal attempts at evangelization, because people like to make choices based on personal truths. With these complications, how does the Church go about evangelizing in an age like today? The answer is: don't evangelize like everyone else, but rather be set apart from how others evangelize and offer something the world is no longer used to, namely in person events. Instead of evangelizing primarily through mainstream media, phone calls, and the internet, offer people a safe place to gather, relax and be themselves, away from societal pressures. Offer them an experience with others, unlike what they have previously experienced; offer them hope through something more, an encounter with Christ. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." (Luke 16:15). We have been commanded by Christ to evangelize; however, evangelizing does not mean only telling people about Christ, it also means bringing Christ to people.

"Since you are the people of the Lord your God... You have been set apart." (Deuteronomy 14:1-2). The Israelites were different because they followed God. The people of the land knew that the God of the Israelites guided and protected them. The same needs be with us Christian Catholics; in acting differently, people will come to find that our God is the ultimate source of life, happiness, and fulfillment. We must work on focusing evangelization on offering the world what the world cannot offer. In this virtual age of electronics and AI, some say the Church is old fashion however, what many overlook is that one of the Church's greatest strengths is her ability reclaim old trends. People are not

having substantial encounters and they need to be offered a chance to meet outside of their virtual “bubble.” An unplugged week or weekend event will give people an opportunity to be with friends, and to meet new people, while giving the human soul what it ultimately desires, communion with God¹. In an environment such as this, the seeds of hope and faith can prosper, beyond a pamphlet or a few well meaning but vague words, to an encounter with the living God, which leads to a discovery of who God actually is, which leads to a relationship with Christ. An open and welcoming space is the aim of the event, because where there is hope there is the silent but active Holy Spirit.

The importance of the retreat is the encounter of something, or rather, Someone Authentic and Pure. Talks organized and planned around a specific theme will challenge the intellectual part of the soul, while time for personal prayer will allow for self reflection and a chance to think about who they are being called to be. If a priest is present, adoration and reconciliation can be offered to repair the rift between the individual and God, and to allow them to experience Christ in His True Presence. The goal of the retreat is to allow man to come to know himself, the Creator who made him and the plans in store for him.

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:19) After a spark comes a flame. Once someone has a relationship with Christ, faith will follow. In setting up the youth of our day on the One True Way, the youth will embrace the Truth of the faith, and a ripple effect will ensue which will renew the face of the earth. We must entice the youth with experiences that will offer them everlasting Life. In providing opportunities to encounter Christ, in a deep and personal way that appeals to the youth, Catholic evangelization will be set to succeed. “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church Paragraph 27