

Unleash the Gospel Homily #2: Unleash the Gospel in Me (by Fr. Charles Fox)  
[Readings: 1 Kings 17:10-16; Psalm 146; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44]

This week, Fr. Charles Fox, a member of the faculty at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, shares his reflection on how to “Unleash the Gospel in Me.”

Evangelization gets personal. I don’t know about you, but for me the most frightening thing about evangelization is that *I* am called to do it. It all sounds great when we talk about the mission Jesus entrusted to His apostles, how they were empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and how the Church down through the ages has preached the Gospel and led people to Christ. All of that sounds great. I *want* people to love Jesus and the Church. I *want* people to go to Heaven. I *want* them to find fulfillment and joy and peace.

I *want* all of that for people, and I’m *glad* the Church does evangelization. But do I want to be *The One* who takes-up the mission of the apostles? Do I have what it takes to share the Gospel with my family members, my friends, my co-workers, my neighbors?

To be honest, there have been times in my life when I’ve said “no” to those questions. We live in a society that tells us not to talk to other people about religion. Even today, when people post their opinions on social media all the time, it can still seem taboo to talk about religion when we’re face-to-face with someone. And I’m not a confrontational person by nature.

So sometimes it has been easier for me to lean on the old idea that we only need to preach by our *example*. Now, our example *is* essential. But in my heart, I think I always knew that words were *also* necessary. As I consider my own Catholic faith, I know that I owe it not just to the *good example* of my family, friends, parish priests, and teachers, but also to their *words*.

Remembering my upbringing in the faith makes me profoundly grateful for all of the good people God has placed in my life. But it also reassures me that I can do evangelization. Even now that I am a priest, sometimes I need that reassurance. And I’d like to make three points that help to reassure me about the “do-ability” of evangelization. These points are connected to today’s Readings

and I hope they help all of us to see more clearly the answers to the questions, “Why should we evangelize?” and “How should we evangelize?”

First, all evangelization is motivated by *love*. We read in John’s Gospel (3:16), “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” When I think about the people who have shared the Catholic faith with me, I know that they did it because they loved *God* and they loved *me* and wanted me not to *perish*, but to have eternal *life*.

And we see in today’s Gospel something else about the kind of love we need to have. It needs to be *self-sacrificing* love. The love that puts God first. Love that puts the needs of others ahead of my own needs, my own comfort. The widow in today’s Gospel, as Jesus says, “contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.” You and I may find evangelization difficult, inconvenient, or intimidating at times. But should any of that stop us? Can’t we love like God loves? Don’t we want to make sure that other people “might not perish but might have eternal life”? Can’t we give of ourselves, sacrificing for the sake of others?

Each of us needs to recognize the *stakes* involved in evangelization, that it really is a life-and-death matter. And we need to think about how much we love and want the best for our families, friends, fellow parishioners, and even strangers. Then it becomes clear that the *benefit* of sharing the Gospel *far outweighs* the cost.

Here we’re already coming to the second point, which is that *evangelization is rooted in one radiant, penetrating truth*: Jesus Christ has died for us; He has saved us from sin and death; He has conquered our enemy the Devil; He is Risen and is in Heaven right now interceding for us with his Father.

That is the message of today’s Second Reading. Jesus is alive right now. He wants us to live. Not just to exist, but to live. Forever. And the gift He offers us demands our response. We have to say “yes” if we want the life he’s offering. And that “yes” has to change and shape our lives. One day, He will come again and we will be judged on our response to the gift Christ offers us.

None of this is a matter of opinion. It is the truth. For everyone. Whether it is accepted or rejected, it is true. And the truth needs to be told, just as I would share the truth if I knew there was a medicine that could cure cancer. I would never let some awkward feeling stop me from sharing *that* truth. And the truth of Christ is infinitely more important for me to speak and for people to hear.

The third and last point is that what we're about in the Catholic Church is a whole *way of life*, passed down to us from our parents and grandparents, from our pastors and teachers going all the way back to the Apostles and to Jesus Christ himself. The earliest name for Christianity was simply, "The Way."

Our Catholic faith is about Jesus, who is "The Way." It's also about a way of seeing things, a way of relating to other people, a way of spending our time, a way of worshipping God. When I was a boy, I loved Jesus and the Blessed Mother, but I also loved being part of a family and a neighborhood. I loved going to our parish church for Sunday Mass.

I loved my friends and my Catholic school. I loved reading the *Lives of the Saints*. I loved May Crownings and the Stations of the Cross and saying grace before meals and seeing crucifixes and images of Mary and the saints in my own home and in the homes of family members and friends. All of these things were evangelizing me, and I'm sure the same is true for many of you.

We have a treasure that is actually *easy* to share with others, if we just appreciate how *great* it is in the first place. What we're called to do is not rocket science. We just need to have faith, hope, and love enough to pass on the gift that has been given to us. We have to pray, as individuals and as families. We need to think about what has made a difference in helping us grow in faith. And we need to look for opportunities to share the gift of faith and then to go ahead and *do it*, without worrying about whether we're doing it perfectly or not.

When we look around at the world, and see how broken it is, and how broken so many people are, *how can we not want* to share something so good with them? Something that would give them real healing? That would give their lives real meaning? That would give them hope because they would know the destiny to which God is calling them?

On this Veteran's Day weekend, think of our country's military men and women currently in service and giving all that THEY have. Think of our veterans who gave all that they had, their very livelihood, in the service our country. My thoughts and heart go out especially to those who return from battle with suffering in mind, body or spirit -- casualties not easily seen by you and me. God bless them and be with them all. How can we bring Good News to them?

In the Eucharist we're celebrating today, all of these threads are woven together. Jesus Christ is truly present to us. Real love, self-sacrificing love is given to us as Heavenly Food and Drink. The promise of Heaven is given to us. And we are equipped, empowered to share this promise with those we love, and with those we are called to love.

The truth is that the only thing we should fear is *failing* to share Jesus Christ with others. We have *nothing* to fear when we do our best to "Unleash the Gospel." In Jesus Christ, we have everything to give, and everything to gain!  
AMEN!