

Sent Forth in Mission to Spread Christ's Love

Kathy Kuczka

Not long ago, I awoke one morning, looked at my phone, and saw the message from Facebook: Pope Francis has accepted your friend request.

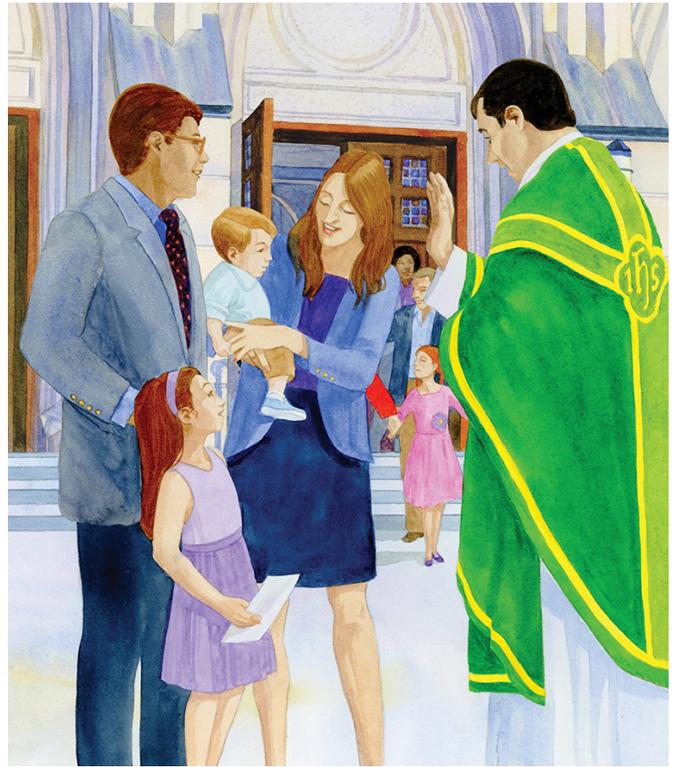
To be a “friend” of the Holy Father was inconceivable until the past several years. Certainly no one thought of such communication between the pontiff and others forty-three years ago when Pope Paul VI stated that the Church “exists in order to evangelize.” The pope wrote these words in the first paragraphs of a document called *Evangelization in the Modern World*. That document responded to a synod of bishops on evangelization a year earlier. At that meeting, the bishops sought to answer the question, “What do we mean by the word *evangelization*?” From that question came others, such as “How do we evangelize?” and “To whom do we evangelize?” Catholics continue to ask these questions today.

Books and programs have tried to offer guidance for evangelization in a contemporary world, with many of these programs and strategies designed to help the Church reignite herself. They affirm the statement in *Evangelization in the Modern World*: “The church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself” (15). Still other programs are aimed at moving parishes from only maintaining themselves to mission.

Pope Francis envisions a Church whose evangelization is directed outward. In his *The Joy of the Gospel*, he says, “I dream of a missionary option, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (27).

The Pope often speaks of a “culture of encounter” to encourage the baptized to move beyond their usual circles to bring the mercy of Jesus to the world, especially to the poor and to those society often neglects. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, he states, “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples” (120).

Whenever we celebrate the liturgy, we are reminded of the call to be missionary disciples because each liturgy is an encounter with Christ. We encounter Christ in the hospitality, the sorrows, and the joys of the People of God. We encounter Christ in the Word proclaimed and in the prayers. We encounter Christ in the sacred meal, the bread broken and the wine poured out. We encounter Christ in ritual and symbol and gesture. These encounters are meant to season us to be the



Christians leave the liturgy with a mission to help others encounter Christ.

salt of the earth, to tenderize us to be the mercy of God. The liturgy strengthens us to build up the kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven.” We are sent forth to our workplaces, our homes, our schools, our communities strengthened to encounter people in a different way, whether we are on social media or in a social gathering.

As Pope Francis says in *The Joy of the Gospel*, “Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.”

Our world has changed a lot in the past forty years, but our mission hasn’t. We still exist to evangelize. It has been said that the Church doesn’t have a mission; the mission has a Church. As Pope Francis asks in *The Joy of the Gospel*, “What are we waiting for?”

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