



## *Pastor's Column*

*Parochial Year for Evangelization:*

*January Tip of the Month ~ January 7, 2018 ~ Epiphany of the Lord*

Last month, we launched our Parochial Year For Evangelization, and with it, the Pastor's Column featured the first "Tip of the Month" and the first "Saint of the Month" for evangelization; the "Tip of the Month" was to know Jesus (and to know Mary). We need to know Jesus, to be in a relationship with Him, before we can really share Him with others and thus evangelize. And as for the "Saint of the Month," we featured the Blessed Virgin Mary, who better than anyone truly knows Jesus, her Son and her Lord.

January's tip of the month: know yourself and your setting. We are still preparing to go out there and be evangelists. We first need to know Jesus so as to know what (or rather *Who*) exactly we are proclaiming. But we also need to know ourselves and our setting. What are my gifts and talents, my faults and failings, my strengths and weaknesses? If you have a mortal terror of public speaking, even worse than your fear of death or taxes, then why fool yourself into thinking that you can stand on street corners and proclaim that Jesus is Lord? If you break a computer as soon as touch one or even look at one, then why would you think that you can manage our parish website and make it an excellent tool for evangelization? Like the Oracle of Delphi told Socrates: "Know thyself." We do well, in prayer and discernment, really to plumb the depths of who we are and therefore of what we are capable. We take stock of our gifts and talents. We perform something of a SWOT analysis of ourselves: our Strengths, our Weakness, our Opportunities, and our Threats. We actually take note of them, write them down, discuss them perhaps with our prayer group members, our faith-sharing groups, our family and friends – for their comment and input, for their support of us and our brave striving to be made into active and intentional disciples of Jesus Christ, so as to be better evangelists.

Part of knowing yourself is knowing where you stand, for example, with Church teaching on certain topics. After all, how can we be expected to proclaim the truth with regard to sexuality and marriage if we ourselves are not fully on board with what the Church teaches? And God help us if we try to proclaim a "truth" that is *not* the truth of Christ and His Church! Better for us if we keep silent on the subject. Such truth (albeit difficult at times, to be sure) is what Jesus commands. To know Jesus is to love Him; to love Him is to be friends with Him. And as He Himself says to us, recorded in St. John's Gospel account: "You are My friends if you do what I command you." (Jn 15:14) To that end, we do well to make a list of Church teachings that trouble us, look them up in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, researching *why* especially the Church teaches thus. And we pray with these teachings and perhaps seek to know more from a priest or another spiritual director.

Coupled with "knowing thyself" is "knowing thy setting." We need to understand our place and time. Standing on street corners proclaiming that Jesus is Lord might have worked well several centuries ago in medieval Europe, but it seems that in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century America, we would accomplish nothing more than being pegged as crazy people. We are a digital culture in a digital age; thus, our setting demands that we use the digital world to our evangelistic advantage.

Knowing our setting also means realizing that we are an increasingly agnostic society – not an outright atheistic society. People are not going around declaring that God is not real so much as living their lives as if they could not care less whether or not God is real. It is a culture of apathy, a culture of general malaise and indifference, a culture of the anthem of which is "m'eh!"

And so, knowing our setting helps us to be informed even more clearly and completely our own SWOT analysis. How can *my* Strengths apply to *this* culture? How do *my* Weaknesses hinder my efforts in *this* setting?

Our Saint of the month, to correspond with this tip of the month of "knowing thyself and thy setting," is St. Thomas Aquinas (his Memorial: January 28). He is the professor *par excellence* of the Catholic faith, and he recognized abundantly well *how* he could teach the faith in his own setting, his own time and place.

In summary then: our January tip of the month is "know yourself and your setting," and St. Thomas Aquinas is this month's patron saint for evangelization. May his holy example and constant prayers come to our aid in our own yearning to be strengthened in discipleship and evangelization.

~Fr. Lewis