



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

April 22, 2018 ~ Fourth Sunday of Easter

The Seventh Stage of Discipleship Formation

We continue working through the stages of discipleship formation. We reflected upon the sixth stage last Sunday: being devoted to the Cross of Christ. The Altar of the Sacrifice, the Key to the Kingdom, the Throne of the Lord: thus is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Embracing, then, a strong devotion to the Cross is very *crucial* ("crucial" from the Latin *crux*, meaning "cross") for any would-be disciple of Jesus Christ who dares to claim the name of Christian.

And now, the seventh of the nine stages of discipleship formation: we who are the students must eventually become the teachers; the disciples must become the apostles, sent forth by the Lord to evangelize and proclaim the Gospel. The previous six stages all form a solid foundation for us as preparation for the mission that is now before us. The seventh stage is start of the transition – from students to teachers, from disciples to apostles.

Students go to school to learn something; it is the task of the teachers to make new students who themselves become teachers to the next generation of students. Passing on the faith, just like a family passing on family traditions from one generation to the next, is the heart of the matter in this transitional stage of discipleship formation. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you..." He *received* from the Lord (that is, he was a student of the Teacher), so that he might then *give* to others (having himself gone through the transition from student to teacher).

The Teacher, Jesus, astonished His students, "for He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." (Mt 7:28-29) In the Acts of the Apostles, we find that His star students, the Apostles, likewise appeared in public and taught with great power and authority: "all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus." (Acts 5:42)

By the grace of Baptism, we are made a child of God and a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church; by the grace of Confirmation, we are commissioned for service and strengthened with what gifts and virtues we need to accept and receive that commission; and by the grace of God in the Eucharist, we are nourished and sustained weekly, even daily, with spiritual food to keep going and to never give up; and when we fallen and wounded because of sin and our own brokenness, our commission leads us to the field hospital, the confessional, where the grace of Reconciliation fills us with what healing we need and restores us to full health, that we may then continue with the mission entrusted to us at Baptism.

The students must eventually become teachers; the disciples must become apostles, the "sent ones" who are sent forth to make disciples of others just as we ourselves had been made disciples by those who had gone before us.

And residing at the very heart of all of the formation, preparation, and construction of that firm, solid foundation of evangelization is this: an encounter with Jesus Christ, the risen and living Lord. For such an encounter makes us even *more* than teachers; it makes us *witnesses*. And teachers should not only teach but also be witnesses. Pope Blessed Paul VI wrote that people in the modern world listen far "more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if [they do] listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. This is a great summary of the teacher-witness dynamic and the hoped-for result of our striving to endure the transition from student to teacher, from disciples to apostle.

~Fr. Lewis