

If Only St. Paul Had a Twitter Account...

EVANGELIZING WITH MODERN SOCIAL MEDIA

Let's begin with a brief—and not entirely accurate—history of communications in the Church... We start with God touching the finger of Adam, we move on to a talking burning bush, then there's Charlton Heston receiving the Ten Commandments (I told you, not entirely accurate), fast forward to an angel visiting Mary, then a star over the manger, the Sermon on the Mount, then we have a crudely formed fish drawn to identify one as a Christian, there's the monks and their illuminated manuscripts, Papal bulls and encyclicals, the St. Louis Review, "Radio Replies" with Blessed Fulton Sheen, EWTN and Mother Angelica, and Pope Benedict XVI sending his first Tweet from an iPad.

Amazing what we've accomplished in several thousand years...

At the center and the heart of it all has been man's need to communicate *with* God and *about* God. Unfortunately for us, we live in a postlapsarian world (that is, a world with sin after the fall of Adam and Eve), and because of that fall, everything is tainted by sin. Because of sin, nothing in the world is perfect—including language. So, we who are broken have attempted for millennia to communicate about that which is perfect—God—using language, intellect, and methods that are all tainted because of our fall into original sin... A less resilient creature might throw up its hands and give up such a Sisyphean (look it up) task—but not man.

In 2010, at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council of Culture, Pope Benedict XVI talked about what is offered to us in the new forms of communications and technology. In his address, the Holy Father stated, "The problems seem sometimes to grow when the Church addresses men and women who are distant from or indifferent to an experience of faith, whom the evangelical message reaches in a way that has little effectiveness or attractiveness." So, in this age of unbridled secularism, what does that mean for those of us—and as Christians, that means each of us—who attempt to share the message of God's love? Are we just wasting our time?

Think of the early fathers of the Church, the first evangelists, and consider what they were able to accomplish with the tools they had at their disposal—they had their sandals, their voice, and the Gospel.

Now consider what is available to us, the new evangelists, and how or if we are using these tools to the best of their, and our, ability. We have Twitter, Facebook, e-mail, and blogs; we can communicate in real time with someone on the other side of the planet and what do we see these miraculous and amazing tools being used for—sending photos of cats with helmets made of limes and videos of dogs with voiceovers by their owners. It often makes me wonder if God looks at us and says aloud, "Really?"

Though the tools we have available to us are something the likes of which St. Paul couldn't have imagined, we share with him two things: that undying need to share the love of God and the Gospel. The Holy Father reminded us in 2010 that, "In the technological culture of today, the Gospel is the guide and the permanent paradigm of enculturation (the way we teach and/or learn something), purifying, healing and elevating the better elements of the new languages and new forms of communication." We simply must rely on the Word of God to be our guide.

Remember, the first evangelists were successful in spreading the Word of God because of their faith, their courage, and their perseverance. We have available to us all we need to be successful evangelists—but we need to act on the hackneyed adage we've all heard and "walk the walk as well as talking the talk." Again the Holy Father tells us, "We need men and women who speak with their lives, who know how to communicate the Gospel, with clarity and courage, with the transparency of their actions, with the passionate joy of charity." So, in this, our current age of evangelization, I say to you, "Become as St. Paul! Take your tweets, status updates, and posts, root them in the truth of the Gospel, strap on your sandals, go bravely out into the world, and spread the Good News!"

Q. How can you use what you have to spread the Word of God and the teachings of the Catholic Church?

Q. What do you need to know before you can spread the Word of God and the teachings of the Catholic Church?

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