

Homily
2AdventC
December 9, 2018
St. Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

A JOB DESCRIPTION FOR CATHOLICS

For most employment situations today, there's a written job description. This is to help the employee know his or her responsibilities. And it also helps the employer, by giving the employer an objective standard to evaluate an employee's performance.

So here's the question for your reflection this morning. If I asked you to write out a job description for being a Catholic, what would you write?

What are the essential responsibilities for being a Catholic?

Going to church on Sunday.
Praying, on a regular basis.
Being a good person.
Okay.

I'm going to suggest this morning that there is something very important, very big, that I'll bet very few of us would list on our Catholic job description.

There are some clues in today's readings.

In the First Reading, the prophet Baruch, who was an assistant to Jeremiah, refers to all the Jews who were exiled to Babylon. The prophets reported that the exile was a punishment for the faithlessness of the Jewish people. Baruch indicates that God will be merciful and bring them back to Israel.

The Gospel passage from Luke tells us about John the Baptist, who roamed the desert, shouting to all who would listen to prepare the way of the Lord so that all humanity would see and experience the salvation of God.

And how did God accomplish the salvation of humanity? By sending His Son, Jesus, to the Jews and to the world.

And, just before Jesus ascended into heaven, in His final words to the apostles, Jesus gave them and all of His followers until the end of time the essential elements of their job description.

He said, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

He told them, “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Now it’s obvious that the original 12 apostles would not be able by themselves to make disciples of all nations, to be witnesses of faith in Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

That mission is for all followers of Jesus, the mission for me and for every one of you in this church today. Our vocation, our job description, is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

This is the missing element in the Catholic Church. We do not think of ourselves as disciples, when in fact that is one of our most important responsibilities.

What is a disciple? The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that a disciple of Jesus keeps the faith and lives it, but also professes it, confidently bears witness to it, and spreads it. CCC 1816

Pope St. Paul VI wrote in his document on evangelization that “The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.” He said that the command of Jesus to the apostles to make disciples applies to all followers of Jesus.

Paul VI identified two methods for all Catholics to use in evangelization. Both are required.

The first is evangelizing by our example. We can live a good life and hope that other people will somehow be inspired by that.

But in addition to setting a good example, Paul VI wrote that “...this always remains insufficient, because even the finest witness will prove ineffective ...if it is not explained...and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation...of the life and the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.”

That doesn’t mean that we are supposed to go to a foreign country to promote the Catholic faith. It means that we are to actively share our Catholic faith with our family, our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends, everyone who is part of our life.

Priests and people in religious life can't do this alone. It's up to the laity to promote the Catholic faith in places where priests and religious don't go. We're all supposed to be like little John the Baptists.

In 1999, after meeting with all the bishops in North and South America, Pope Saint John Paul II wrote that "The burning desire to invite others to encounter Jesus is the beginning of the evangelizing mission to which the whole Church is called."

He added, in a statement at a World Youth day: "There are places and circumstances where you alone can bring the seed of God's word."

When we promote our Catholic faith with a non-Catholic, we do it without arrogance. We don't act superior. We should be guided by love for the other person. We want them to be able to live the Christian life to the fullest, to have the fullness of grace that is available to us in the Catholic Church.

To be a disciple, to be an effective evangelist, we are going to have to get on a learning curve. We'll need to know more about our faith. We'll need to know how to share our faith with others. Of course, we can't share what we don't have, so we may have to deepen our own faith in Jesus.

I hope we can talk more about being a disciple in 2019. For now, I only want to plant the seed that being a disciple is not just an option for us. Whether anyone has ever told us this before, we are all called to be disciples. That's why we were born. That's why we're Catholic.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, it's in our relationship with You that we find our true identity.

Help us to accept that our deepest identity as Catholics is to be disciples of Jesus. Help us to embrace the challenge of being missionaries for Jesus in the places and situations that are part of our lives.

Holy Spirit, stir in us the urgency of genuine love and concern for the salvation of others. Give us the courage and the words to speak to others about Jesus and the riches of our Catholic faith.

Lord, we ask you to continue the work of purifying us, of deepening our faith in Jesus, that we may better know your grace and power in our lives.

Amen.