

FOREWORD

While there is widespread support among Catholics today for the idea of the New Evangelization, many wonder: What can I do? Where should I start? In this clarion call to renewal, Father Robert Reed challenges all of us—laity, religious, deacons, priests, and bishops—to start by looking within and making an honest assessment of our gifts and the ways we can better put them to use to revitalize the Church.

Father Reed rightly highlights one of the greatest resources available to us: the example and intercession of the saints. Rather than simply selecting a single saint to imitate, he instead proposes pairs of saints who at first glance seem like unlikely companions, like Augustine and Joan of Arc or Athanasius and Mother Teresa. By juxtaposing two saints he finds new perspectives. From Aquinas and Therese we learn that we need both the mind and the heart. From Paul and John Vianney we come to appreciate that the Gospel is best proclaimed through relationships. From Isidore and Fulton Sheen we see the courage at work to use new technologies. Like Catholics today, these saints lived in times of crises, but through God's grace and their creative energy, they found a way forward. With their help, we can too!

Father Reed's down-to-earth and encouraging lessons are both persuasive and practical. He suggests ten steps we can all take, and he provides prayers, scripture readings, application steps, and reflection questions that are just right for any parish group and for personal reflection. Father Reed is already well known for his parish ministry and his work on The CatholicTV Network,

an apostolate of the Archdiocese of Boston and America's Catholic Television Network. This book is yet another helpful contribution toward enlivening the Church and will, I hope, reach an even greater audience throughout the Church.

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PREFACE

It was the fall of 1965, just before the close of the Second Vatican Council. I was sitting at my desk in classroom 1A at St. John the Evangelist School in Swampscott, Massachusetts. It took Sister Lydia, C.S.J., probably ninety seconds to tell us the story of Saint Tarcisus. She was doing her job; she was fulfilling her vocation. It was a moment in time. But I have never forgotten that moment, that story, and the nun who told it.

During the third century, she recounted, Christians had to meet secretly in the catacombs to avoid persecution. A boy named Tarcisus (I imagined him to be my age) volunteered to take the Holy Eucharist to Christians in prison. On his way there, he encountered a group of friends who invited him to play with them. Knowing that he was a Christian and curious about what it was that he was carrying in the fold of his garment, the gang of boys tried to pry it out of his grasp. Eventually the group of boys evolved into an angry mob that overcame Tarcisus, mortally injuring him. He died as he was being carried back to the catacombs, the Eucharist still held to his chest.

In listening with rapt attention to that simple story, this little boy sitting near the back of a first-grade classroom learned that belief in Jesus' true presence in the Eucharist goes back to the earliest and most challenging days of Christianity and that the very Body and Blood of the Lord has always been worth defending. I also discovered that God does not reserve heroism for adults. Children, too, are capable of loving Jesus so much that they would be willing to die for him. In that moment, my

understanding of myself as a Christian was confirmed and the seed of a vocation to the ordained priesthood was planted.

Thank you, Sr. Lydia, and thanks to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston. Since I first learned of the witness of Tarcisius, I have prayed for the courage to willingly give my life for Christ, even though I am the world's biggest chicken. But I knew that God would give me what I needed. What I needed most were companions on the journey. All along the way, God has provided them for me. I have observed, studied, and known many inspiring people. We never walk alone when we allow God to use us for his glory. I am grateful for all of them.

In the cathedral church of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels, an originally unplanned display of tapestries demonstrates the need for companions with visual conviction. The work represents great disciples, some young and some old, interspersed with people like you and me, all streaming toward the sanctuary and the Holy Sacrifice. To stand in that center aisle and look around provides a profound catechesis on the giftedness of the Church now and through the centuries.

This book is intended for anyone who asks: "What can we do; where do we go from here; how do we find the courage?" Certainly the Church, built upon the rock of Peter's confession of faith, will prevail. The Church is Christ, and Christ has been raised. But since we are all members of his Body, there must be a constant reckoning. We can recount the crises that the Church has faced in the past until we are blue in the face. But, unless we face the present crisis with a personal praxis and corporate strategy that is up to the challenge, we are full of hot air.

The insights of this book are not fully my own, but represent lessons learned by observation and collaboration. With great excitement Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we have been redeemed and God has been immeasurably generous toward us (Eph 1:3–10). If God has indeed given us the wisdom to understand fully the mysteries, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ, then we need to reach deeply within ourselves, joining our minds and hands together with humility and courage. God has made possible the fitness of the Catholic faith for every age.

For the sake of the world, the challenge is to rediscover and renew our gifts. This project cannot wait.

INTRODUCTION

Renewing the face of the earth began long ago. Some see the renewal as beginning at the nativity of Jesus of Nazareth. Some count its days from the call of Abraham by a God his forebears did not know. And some say it began at the very beginning, not east of Eden but within that primordial garden where the Hebrew scriptures place the origins of humanity.

Wherever and whenever you might believe it began, God initiated the project of renewing the earth to be in relationship with the human family, to call people into community with the Divine and with one another, and to save humanity by that love without limits made incarnate in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Since the decades following Jesus' death on the Cross and the proclamation of his resurrection, this project has generally been called "the Church." Rooted in the Hebrew *qahal yhw* and the Greek *ekklesia*, the Church is the gathering of God's people, the assembly of God. In the Church God calls us together in his sight and in his saving love.

But though the initiative is divine, the response is human. Each of us must respond to God's call into his saving community. God calls us to accept and carry on the mission Jesus has handed on to us. Every generation has borne this responsibility. And, in our generation, we too are responsible for the Church's health and vitality, for her ability to respond to the opportunities presented by these times, and for her capacity to overcome the obstacles of new circumstances. The Gospel remains and endures in its original form, but the eyes and ears

and minds of those who are to receive the good news must do it within the culture of this time, perhaps despite the culture of this time. To be heard, the Gospel must be authentic and spoken in the language of those who might listen. To minister effectively and to celebrate in a way that others will experience as celebration, we must respond anew in our age to God's unchanging love.

This response, this renewal, this adaptation, this faithful passing on of the Gospel by whatever means necessary: this is the Holy Spirit's project to renew the face of the earth.

To be successful in its execution, any idea, program, or project requires innovation to survive and prosper. Innovation becomes part of the labor of any working concept, even if the idea has already taken the form of an institution. In fact, innovation becomes perhaps even more important within the institution so that the idea maintains its liveliness and appeal. Throughout time, this has been the story of the institution we know as the Catholic Church. Its members, ordinary people who have received the Gospel into their hearts, have, by the grace of God, responded with imagination to the responsibility to live and teach the good news to their own generation. In every generation to lesser or greater extent, the Church has had to renew itself to be effective in the new era in which it finds itself.

On occasion, however, a generation is called to undertake this creative innovation in a period of greater-than-usual tumult. The period following the invention of the printing press was such a time, as communication to the masses became exponentially easier and fundamental questions were raised as to what this spread of knowledge, including the wide availability of the Bible, would portend. Such revolutionary times, as opposed to the

more ordinary evolutionary periods of gradual change, ask more of the Church and of her clergy and laity. Much more. There have been times of crisis in the development of the Church, times in which momentous decisions must be made.

It has become trite to speak of a *crisis* as both a moment of danger and of opportunity. But some truisms, however trite, are still true. This moment in the development of the Church is one of dangerous opportunity. There is a venerable Chinese curse, "May you live in an interesting time." We certainly do. You and I live in a time of danger, opportunity, and interest: ours is a moment that invites us to transmute curse into blessing.

Derived from the verb *krino*, meaning to separate, distinguish, or judge, the Greek term κρίσις (*krisis*) means "decision" or "judgment". Its likely first meaning denotes divine judgment, a decision coming down from God. But its secondary meaning calls for judgment on our part, on the human side. A time of crisis, then, is a time to judge what may be done, to make a decision to do something, and then to do it.

Our own time is a point of crisis for both the Church and the society within which she lives, breathes, preaches, and celebrates. What does this crisis require of us? Our answer to this serious question will determine nothing less than the credibility of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for this generation and the next. What we do will determine nothing less than the vitality of the Church in the first century of the third Christian millennium.

More than a decade into his twenty-seven-year pontificate, Pope John Paul II issued a call for a "new evangelization." By this he indicated a renewed and newly effective announcement of the message of Jesus Christ to persons and populations who had already

historically both heard and received that message. It was a call to renewal. Response to this call has been broad and various, including new institutes, collaborations, media, books, and blogs. I recently googled “new evangelization” and 914,000 results appeared in 0.23 seconds (surely there will be more results by the time you read these words). We have a million newspaper, magazine, and encyclopedia articles on the subject. There are organizations and offices dedicated to the New Evangelization, including those privately founded, those run by dioceses, and those established by the Holy See in Rome. There are many reports from synods on the topic, with commentary on those reports which are followed by reports on the commentaries.

Within the pontificate of Benedict XVI the effort for a new evangelization continued. Pope Benedict established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization and devoted a meeting of the synod of bishops to the “New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” For more than two decades now, *new evangelization* has been the byword for the revitalization of the mission of the Church.

But this revitalization must begin with and in you. It can only flow from the deep interior joy of discipleship. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis calls us to create a culture of encounter by first revisiting and revitalizing our own friendship with Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. If our interior life is caught up in itself (and how tempting this is) and not in the quiet, deep joy that comes in drawing close to the heart of the risen Christ, the impetus for a new evangelization will be wanting in us.

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onward!

The book in your hands can be read within that context of the New Evangelization, for it comes at this crucial point in Church history. But, in another sense, the project this book sets forth is prior to the New Evangelization. This book is a primer, a precursor to the great work of the New Evangelization. My aim is to provide a starting point for renewing the giftedness of the Church, to spur the innovation of a dynamic of ecclesial life consistent with a twenty-first-century mindset and predisposed for an evangelization that works.

Or, to put it another way, I want to raise this question: how would a Church look, sound, and act if it is to be effective in renewing Christian faith in the world? What does the Church need to do to reach the young urban professional on the east side of Manhattan, the dispirited grandmother in suburban Birmingham, England, and the mother trying to keep herself and her children alive in sub-Saharan Africa? What does the Church need to do to earn a new hearing from gay people, atheists, and the many men and women of all ages who, for many different reasons, have given up hope in the words and person of Jesus Christ? Can you picture what the Church needs to become? Can you hear what it needs to say? That attempt to picture and to hear is what we are about here.

Each chapter in this book provides a distinct call to which we must respond if we are to be collaborators with the Holy Spirit in the renewal of the Church that

is needed today. These are steps that we can all take, regardless of our place in the Church. Whether we are ordained, religious, or laity, we all have an essential part to play. To help us respond with imagination, there are a number of practical aids at the end of each chapter. Most importantly, there is a call to prayer and reflection on scripture. A biblical passage is provided for *lectio divina*, or sacred reading. In his Angelus address on November 6, 2005, Pope Benedict described *lectio divina* this way:

It consists in pouring over a biblical text for some time, reading it and rereading it, as it were, “ruminating” on it as the Fathers say and squeezing from it, so to speak, all its “juice,” so that it may nourish meditation and contemplation and, like water, succeed in irrigating life itself.

The chapters also contain suggestions for application. Because change begins individually, they ask us first to look within and make personal changes so that we can then be more effective agents of renewal in our local situations. The chapters also contain questions for reflection and sharing, perhaps in a small group. When we gather together, we discover the Spirit of Christ at work within each of us and among us.

To be the Church is to be in community. It is blessedly true, as the Letter to the Hebrews proclaims at the opening of its twelfth chapter, that we are surrounded by a “great a cloud of witnesses,” those who have gone before us in the faith. This work reflects on the lives of some heroes of Christian discipleship through the centuries. These saints are examples to us of men and women who, living in their own times, whether times of ordinary or extraordinary change, made incarnate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their own choices and in so doing built

the Church. They allowed God's call to assemble as his people to be heard with clarity, simplicity, and joy. This was their project in the sight of God. They did it. And so will we, if we choose to incarnate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our own time.

1.

DISCOVER AND RECEIVE YOUR GIFTS

Thomas Aquinas and
Thérèse of Lisieux

In our times the Church is under attack from within and from without. It is buffeted by scandal, hindered by lack of clergy, and stressed by a long period of change we cannot control or sometimes even follow. We look around and say, “What has happened to the Church? Where are the strength, vision, and purpose I used to enjoy? Does the Church have a future?”

In light of our daily experience and the headlines, these questions seem reasonable. We have been living all our lives in a time of social revolution. The changes challenge us to adapt as individuals. The Church must do the same—find a way to adapt to this rapidly evolving culture of materialism, secularism, pleasure-seeking, and technology. As individuals and as a Christian community, we need to keep our balance and find a way to glorify God in serving others. The world may not know it, but we know that it is starving to experience the love

of God. That is our perennial mission in every generation, to reveal Jesus, Lord and Savior.

There are very legitimate reasons for discouragement all around us. Consider these:

- Most of our parish churches see many fewer families on Sundays to celebrate the Eucharist.
- National studies show that our young people cannot articulate the faith they profess to hold, and many of their elders cannot either.
- The Church is diminishing in the northern hemisphere, though thankfully growing in the southern. What does this shift mean now and in the future for the identity of the Church?
- We seem divided between those who listen attentively to the voices of Church leadership in the nation and from Rome, and those who find little sustenance in those voices for their faith.

Yet ours is not the first generation to face massive challenges in the life of the Catholic Church. The story of the Church is a dark tapestry of obstacles, heresies, excesses, deprivations, persecutions, plagues, and bloodshed. We have gazed into the gates of hell, but they could not prevail against us. The Church marches on just as Jesus promised, and we have his word that it will endure for all time and eternity—for it is his Church, not ours.

WHERE DO WE START?

If as Christians we want to bear fruit in our service to others, we need grace. There are many needs inside and outside the Church. Where do we start? There is, in fact, only one starting point: the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul often spoke about grace in his letters to the first Christian communities. He urged people to be aware of the gifts that God was pouring out into their midst. These gifts included believing, understanding, preaching, healing, and loving. In his first letter to the Corinthians, we read:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. (1 Cor 12:7–11)

For Saint Paul, it's all about the Holy Spirit. In three sentences he refers to the Holy Spirit seven times. The Holy Spirit is the origin of all the gifts, talents, and abilities we need to be of service to others. We have natural abilities too, of course, which are also gifts from God, but even those natural abilities need to be transformed by the Spirit, or grace, if we want to bear fruit, if we want to serve others as Jesus did.

Paul points us to another essential gift as well: the gift of freedom in Jesus Christ. Through Christ we now have freedom from sin and death, and freedom to live for others. So the apostle urges believers in Galatia to grasp and retain that gift: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1). Paul was urging those to whom he

carried the Gospel to recognize that they were immersed in a world of grace, in an unending sea of divine gifts.

Early Christians were equipped for service by grace. But like us they must have found it difficult at times to recognize their gifts. In many pastoral letters, Saint Paul had to exhort them strongly to stir up the grace of God within them. Too often they complained about problems, found faults in one another, formed factions, and even resisted the apostle who taught them. Saint Paul's most important correction to these first believers was to remind them that God in Jesus Christ was indeed with them, loving them, and daily giving them all that they needed to grow and serve. "All things are yours," he wrote, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (1 Cor 3:21–23).

Remember when God fed the Israelites manna in the wilderness?

When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat." (Ex 16:13–15)

The gift of bread was constantly given from above, until the people were able to raise their own food in that land which was itself a gift.

Like the Israelites, we may not recognize God's gifts to us. Or we might think they are inadequate to the needs at hand. But notice that the manna given to the Israelites each day was sufficient to feed them that day. They

received enough for one day only, and they had to learn that they would receive it each morning without fail. It was God's wise way of teaching them to trust him, to rely on God's daily bread even in the dire circumstances of wandering for years in the desert.

To live open to God is to live receiving God's gifts, be it desert bread, wisdom to teach, or freedom to live the faith. But so often we do not recognize God's gifts to us, or we fear that those gifts are inadequate to the need, or we wonder and worry that those gifts will cease. That's how it was with the communities Saint Paul knew. That's how it was with the nation Moses was leading in God's sight. And that's how it is with us.

We humans are funny. We are more likely to fuss and fret about what we don't have (or seem to have) than to thank God for what we do have. Human nature is the same, but, thankfully, so is God. In the beginning he set a garden on the surface of the earth as the perfect place for man and woman to live. God is still providing what we need, both in times of plenty and in times of want. God knows what we need, even if it isn't always what we desire. The lesson of scripture is that what we need is what is given to us. God is trustworthy to give without ceasing as long as the need is there. God's faithfulness is based squarely upon the truth of the shortest definition of God offered in the Christian scriptures—perhaps anywhere: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). And love's nature is to give of itself to others. God gives to us continuously, generously. We need only to receive the gifts and begin to enjoy them to use them.

We are grateful that those who met the tests of their own times serve as examples and encouragement in ours. They help us know that we too belong to a gifted