

# No more half-measures

Suppose it's time to change the oil in your car. The owner's manual specifies that the engine requires five quarts of oil. But you're running low on cash, time and energy, so you only put in two-and-a-half quarts. Some days later, while on a busy thoroughfare, the engine light comes on and your car stalls. Sitting there, blocking traffic, listening to a chorus of angry horns and epithets, you start thinking to yourself: "It might have been better if I had put in the full five quarts."

Half-measures. We're tempted to use them in every sphere of life. I'm sure you can supply from your own experience other examples of well-intentioned half-measures that made things worse instead of better.

Let's shift gears to our Catholic faith. In many parts of the world, including the United States, church attendance is down. Our absent Catholics aren't merely out of town; many are gone. For a variety of distressing reasons, they are disconnected from the Lord, the church, the Mass and the sacraments. Studies document the sad fact that there are now more disaffiliated former Catholics than practicing Catholics. The more we talk about evangelization, it seems, the worse things get.

What's the answer – to stop talking about evangelization? Hardly.

Evangelization is not merely something the church does, but as St. Paul VI taught us, the mission to spread the Gospel, entrusted to the Apostles by Jesus, constitutes the very heart of the church's identity. The church exists to proclaim, spread and celebrate the Good News of redemption by word, sacrament and charity. To echo the Apostle, St. Paul, "Woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16). For the Gospel is not merely a matter of words. The Gospel is the incarnate Savior, crucified and risen, who, in his boundless mercy, has forgiven our sins and unlocked the gates of heaven.

No, the answer is not to stop talking about evangelization or preaching the Gospel. Rather, the problem is how we go about this work. Sadly, we're prone to half-measures. Not unlike the disciples prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we hesitate to "cry out full-throated and unsparingly" (Is 58:1) in bearing

witness to Jesus: in repenting and believing in his Gospel; in instilling the teaching of Christ in ourselves and in our families; in celebrating our redemption sacramentally; and in living the Gospel both in our personal lives and in the wider society. When the sound of the trumpet is faint, let us not wonder why so few hear it.

Take, for example, a parish that is stagnant and shrinking. Its leadership might be tempted to address the problem with half-measures, tweaking what's usually done by adding more friendly greeters at the door of the church or additional opportunities for socializing after Sunday Mass. Nothing is wrong with those things; in fact, they are very important. But lacking genuine missionary conversion, a parish risks remaining stagnant by blocking the Holy Spirit.

Genuine missionary conversion includes: an urgent summons to prayer and repentance, first and foremost exemplified by the parish clergy and leadership; concentrated attention on good preaching and reverent liturgy; abundant opportunities for eucharistic adoration and confession; personal outreach to absent parishioners; sound catechesis for parishioners of all ages, especially the young; loving assistance to married couples and families; devotion to the sick and the dying; generous outreach to the poor and vulnerable – all that and more.

Half-measures. Let's be done with them, especially in this season when we continue to celebrate the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon his church.