

# The Seven Enemies of Evangelization

by [Tim Drake](#)

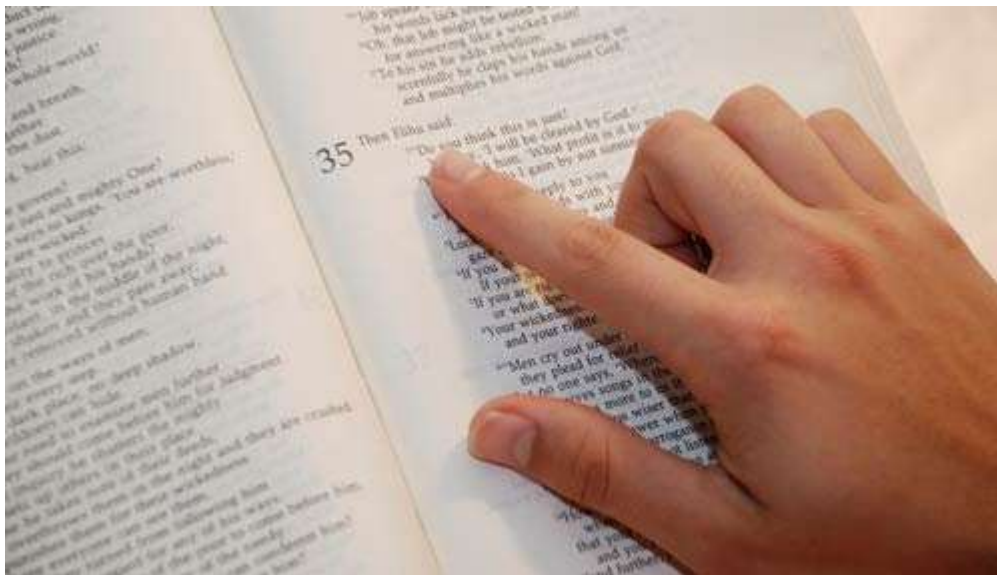
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Tim is the New Evangelization coordinator for a cluster of parishes in central Minnesota. He has discovered "there are some common foes that prevent us from sharing our faith with others". He calls them the seven enemies of evangelization which often prevent us from sharing our faith with others.

**Fear**  
**Busyness**  
**Secularism**  
**Poor relationships**  
**Lack of prayer**  
**Pride**  
**Selfishness**

The New Evangelization has been a primary focus of the last three pontiffs. It's attracting more attention from the lay faithful. There are a number of new books on the topic, and it is the topic of Pope Francis' recent apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel").

Still, it's not something that many Catholics do well, if they do it at all. Evangelist Terry Barber, founder of the Catholic educational apostolate St. Joseph Communications, Inc., asks, "Why don't more Catholics evangelize?" There's a hesitancy among Catholics to share their faith. We're not as well-known as our evangelical Christian brothers and sisters for talking about our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Why is that? Do we have a personal relationship with him? If we do, why aren't we motivated to share that with others?



Over the past several months, in my work as the New Evangelization coordinator for a cluster of parishes in central Minnesota, I've discovered many things about evangelization by actually carrying out the work in the field. The description that many, including Christ, have used — that it is like scattering seed — is an apt analogy. We do not know what kind of ground the seed falls on, but it is God who cares for the seed.

What I've also discovered during that time is that there are some common foes that prevent us from sharing our faith with others. Here are seven of the most common enemies of evangelization.

# The Seven Enemies of Evangelization

## Fear

Many of us do not evangelize because we are afraid. We're afraid that we don't know how. We're afraid we might fail. We're afraid that we don't have all the answers, and we're afraid of rejection. Pope John Paul II began his pontificate with the words, "Be not afraid." These are the same words the angels use whenever they appear in Scripture. By virtue of our baptism and confirmation we have been given all the tools and gifts necessary for evangelization. We've been equipped. All we need to do is call upon the Holy Spirit and seek his guidance in the work of evangelizing. It is ultimately his work, not ours. We should not be afraid.

In his new book, *How to Share Your Faith with Anyone: A Practical Manual for Catholic Evangelization* (Ignatius Press, 2013), Barber says that only three things are necessary to overcome our fear of evangelization —

1. Devotion to our Lord, especially in the Blessed Sacrament
2. Devotion to His Most Blessed Mother;
3. Unfailing loyalty to His Vicar on Earth, our Holy Father, the Pope.

## Busyness

It is truly incredible how full we fill our lives, with work and activities from the moment we rise until the moment we fall exhausted into our beds at night. Not only do we need to slow down, and take moments, and Sundays, for rest, but we also need to be open to providence and the movement of grace in our lives. This means being open to the moments, and the people, and the experiences that God sets before us. In rushing to our next appointment, we may very well pass by the person who most needs us.

While eating at a restaurant not that long ago, a stranger at a nearby table struck up a conversation with me. In the course of the conversation, he asked me about my work. That naturally led to a conversation about Christ, and during that conversation he ended up sharing some personal information about a tragedy that had hit their family. Through that conversation, I was able to identify some spiritual needs the family had and was able to relate that to the family's parish priest. Had I rushed through my meal and on to the other business of the day, that conversation would not have happened.

Evangelizing means being in the present moment and paying attention to the circumstances and people around you.

## Secularism

**secu·larism** - 'sɛk y ə l ə , r ɪ z ə m Show Spelled [sɛk-yuh-luh-riz-uh m] Show IPA

*noun*

1. Secular spirit or tendency, especially a system of political or social philosophy that rejects all forms of religious faith and worship.
2. The view that public education and other matters of civil policy should be conducted without the introduction of a religious element.

We human beings have the tendency to have an inordinate attachment to created things, whether its technology, entertainment, food or drink, or many other things. We would rather think, and talk, and do most anything aside from spending time with God.

"Modern families... tread uncharted paths, influenced by television, digital communications, movies, music, books, and advertising... secular pressures are great," says Father Robert Hater in his book, *The Parish Guide to the New Evangelization: An Action Plan for Sharing the Faith* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013)

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The increasing secularization of culture and the loss of the sacred make evangelization more difficult, but not impossible. We must place God first and put all other things in their proper place. Then we can evangelize.

When possible, use the very themes you find in modern films or music as a basis for talking about spiritual themes. There are often myriad ways to do this. After recently watching *Man of Steel* with our children, I pointed out the many Christ-like themes present in the film — from a Transfiguration-like scene when Superman presents himself to the military, to a Gethsemane-like scene in a Catholic Church when Clark Kent is wondering what to do, to a cruciform-scene when Superman is ejected from an alien spaceship and sent back to earth.

There were many opportunities to use something secular to draw forth and talk about Christian parallels. I've often said that the story of Christ is the greatest story ever told, and all other stories hearken back to that story. Find ways to use media and the new technologies to share the faith.

## Poor relationships

Evangelization happens relationally — usually one-on-one. To be able to share your faith with another person, you need to be in relationship with them, so that your words or actions or example will have meaning. Get to know the person. Spend time with them. Share your life with them. Life, after all, is about relationship — with the primary relationship being your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Several weeks ago, I had a conversation with an elderly woman. She revealed some struggles she was facing and some bitter feelings she had. I suggested that she might consider taking that to a priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. She wondered how a priest could help her. I told her that it's not the priest, but Christ, and that the sacrament exists for working through things just such as that. The seed was planted. Three weeks later, she sought out the sacrament.

Evangelization means getting to know the spiritual needs of those whom you're spending time with.

## Lack of prayer

Speaking of relationships, to properly evangelize we must be spending time with the Lord. We must begin with prayer. How can we share Christ if we do not know him, or if we aren't spending time with him ourselves? Evangelization begins with our own conversion through prayer and the sacraments. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

As part of my work, I am required to spend an hour a week in Eucharistic adoration. This has long been a part of my prayer regimen, so it was difficult at first to realize that I was being paid to spend time with the Lord. A friend suggested that we are “always supposed to be praying, and so I should get over it.”

I've come to long for that time spent praying for the people of our parishes and the specific needs that are made known to me during the week. I've also come, in my daily work, to take the time to utter a quick prayer for those who call into the office, even if it's for a simple request.

To be evangelizing, we must first be people of prayer, for it is through prayer that we come to know Christ intimately, and are then able to bring him to those we meet.

“We cannot engage culture unless we let Him first engage us; we cannot dialogue with others unless we first dialogue with Him; we cannot challenge unless we first let Him challenge us,” Cardinal Timothy Dolan told the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in a 2012 address.

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## Pride

Believe it or not, evangelizing doesn't necessarily mean having all the answers. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." It demonstrates humility. The person you evangelize will respect you more if you say, "I'm not sure, but I'll find out for you," than if you make something up.

In teaching RCIA classes, the students sometimes have questions that I do not know the answer to. They're perceptive questions, and as a convert myself who wasn't raised Catholic, I am sometimes surprised by their questions and the fact that I don't have an answer.

"I don't know the answer to that," I tell them, "but I'll ask Father, or look it up, and give you an answer next week."

"God doesn't take the qualified and make them worthy. He takes the unworthy and makes them qualified," writes Greg Willits in *The New Evangelization and You: Be Not Afraid* (Servant, 2013).

Sincerity and honesty demonstrate to the inquirer that while you may not have everything about the faith figured out, you still believe. You have faith. And, for some questions, there are no pat answers. There are many elements of our faith – the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist – that are mysteries. It doesn't matter what answer you provide, they will all fall somewhat short. Admitting this is an important part of evangelizing.

## Selfishness

Finally, another important aspect of evangelization is setting aside your own selfishness and needs and by practicing careful listening. Through attentive listening, and giving of yourself and your time, you'll come to recognize the spiritual needs of the person you're spending time with.

While Father and I were visiting the home of a couple, I asked a simple-but-precise question of them. The spouse went on to share some very personal information about the very real struggles they were facing. As Father and I left their place, he said that he never knew of those struggles, and we immediately set about praying together for the couple and their specific needs. It was only through careful questioning and taking the time to listen that their needs became apparent. This would not be possible if we didn't ask the right questions, or if we had interrupted them, or if we had spent the time together talking ourselves.

In her very helpful book *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), author Sherry Weddell says: "There is no way of knowing what a particular person's journey has truly been and where the person is now until we earn the right to hear his or her story and then listen carefully and prayerfully."

Certainly, there are other things that may keep us from doing the work of evangelizing, but through my encounters over the past few months these seem to be the most apparent reasons why Catholics aren't evangelizing.

Foremost, we must keep in mind that Christ came to earth, suffered, and died for our sins, and three days later was raised from the dead. Only Jesus saves. He founded a Church to continue his saving mission, and in doing so, he instructed everyone who follows Him to share the gift they've been given with others.

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you," Christ says in the Gospel of Matthew. This is our mission. Are we up for the task?