

Immersed in Christ

Becky Eldredge



In a previous issue of *Catechetical Leader*, Kristina DeNeve wrote about how we are called to evangelize with the support of our larger Christian community. Whether we are seeking to evangelize within our Catholic communities or with our larger communities, we still must pause on occasion to reflect on our own prayer life and our relationship with Jesus. Conversion and evangelization, after all, begins with ourselves.

IMMERSED IN FAITH

In her book, *Companions of Christ*, Margaret Silf shares a powerful image of an oil lamp that illustrates our prayer lives.¹ The oil wick has two ends; one end is fully immersed in the pool of oil at the bottom of the lamp, and one end is out of the oil and fully immersed in the world. Whether or not the wick will ignite is determined completely by the amount of oil absorbed by the rest of the wick that is immersed.

Our prayer lives and our relationships with Jesus are like these oil lamps. We need to have one end of our wick always immersed and rooted in Christ. As we spend time with Jesus, absorbing all that he offers us, we become filled with Christ's love. As our understanding of who we are in God grows, it begins to seep up and saturate the rest of our lives. It is then that our wick has enough fuel to be ignited and enough fuel to share the light of Christ with others in the world.

Silf's image invites us, as catechetical leaders, to pause and examine our own prayer lives:

1. Do we have one end of our wick immersed in the oil of Christ, or is our wick currently out of the oil?
2. What prayer method helps us keep our wick rooted in the right place?

3. Is the light we are sharing with others fueled by the oil of Christ, or is it light fueled by something else?

BRING THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT INTO THE WORLD

When our lives are rooted in Christ and we are committed to a life of prayer, what we bring into the world are the fruits of this prayer. The fruits of our prayer, which so often echo the fruits of the Spirit, are powerful evangelization tools. Evangelization, at times, involves intentional action and outreach. From my experience, evangelization most often occurs when we live with one end of our wick fully immersed in the oil, rooted in prayer, and rooted in our relationship with Jesus. Then, we can bring the fruits of the Spirit into the world and into the daily interactions at home, at work, at school, and at social events.

Our witness of living and sharing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, goodness, and faithfulness draws people to Christ. Evangelization should be a gentle pointing towards the person in whom we root our lives. Isn't this what John the Baptist did as he prepared the way for the Messiah's coming? He rooted his life in God and pointed towards Jesus. Isn't this what Jesus did? He rooted his life in

his Father and pointed us toward God. What about us? Who or what do our daily lives point toward?

I cannot think of a better example than a young adult man, now a dear friend, whom I met four years ago at our parish. My friend lost his job, and a few months later his wife lost hers. Both remained unemployed for almost a year, and the two of them struggled to support their family, including their two children. While this rocked my friend to the core, I watched a man who turned to prayer and turned fully toward Christ; his wick was fully immersed in the oil of Christ. As he prayed, ideas emerged, his faith deepened, he began to understand the depth of love that God has for him.

I can tell you, he is a changed man. His way of being with Jesus and rooting his life in Jesus affected his "doing." It changed his relationship with his wife, his son, and his daughter. They speak of the change they witnessed, as he

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¹ Silf, M. *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.

grew into a gentler, kinder, man who is easier to be around. The light he brought into his family, the light he shone to his friends, and the light he radiated to our entire church community was the light of Christ. My friend evangelized his family and gently pointed them toward who was causing the change in his life. The transformation that took place drew his family back to church. Now, each member of his family is embarking on their own, unique faith journey with Christ. My friend began living the fruits of his prayer — especially patience, joy, kindness, and peace. The fruit of his prayer drew all of us who witnessed his transformation towards the same source where his light was coming from, namely Christ.

This is the type of evangelization our world needs the most! Our world needs people who have one end of the wick fully immersed in the oil of Christ so that what we bring into our daily lives radiates the light of Christ. ■

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SUGGESTIONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN ECUMENICAL GATHERINGS

Kristina DeNeve

1. Show up. Any ecumenical event will have Catholics of all stripes and flavors in attendance. If we are not formally and officially present, we risk continued loss of our less active brothers and sisters
2. Develop procedures for responding and reaching out to Catholic youth identified from these events. Parish youth ministers and other teens are well-suited for following up, but they will need special training and specific directives.
3. Use these events to form and evangelize active Catholics in your parish. Many Catholic adults at these events are already active in some way with a parish. They simply don't know how Catholics commit themselves to Christ every day.

Excerpted from "Billy Graham Crusades and Catholic Evangelization," Catechetical Leader, May 2013, 24. ■

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