

Evangelizing in a Pope Francis World

Kristina M. DeNeve



As I write this, Pope Francis is still the world's media darling. While that is likely to change (and the winds may have already shifted by the time of this publication), everything the pope currently says and does is being publicized positively around the globe. In addition to becoming *Time Magazine's* Person of the Year, Pope Francis' 140 character Twitter messages were "retweeted" so frequently that he was considered the Internet's most influential world leader.¹ Following are three unique opportunities Catholic Christians have during this moment in history.

1. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPEN DOORS

As Catholic documents (and popes!) point out, we share our faith and spread the Good News first and foremost through our actions, in the way we live our lives, every breath of every day. That said, there IS a time to use words! And there is no more perfect time than when someone approaches us and says, "Hey, aren't you Catholic? What do you think of the pope?" or "What do you think of Pope Francis saying X, Y, or Z?"

Here are three easy suggestions about what to do/say when these holy moments come:

- 1. Be real and be honest.** The inquirer is asking you what you think. Tell them what you think. The key to sharing our faith is not that we can quote the fifth chapter of Luke's Gospel, nor is it in reciting the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Sharing the Good News, sharing our faith, is about sharing what Jesus means to us, why we celebrate Mass on Sundays, why we are Catholic.
- 2. Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know."** We cannot expect ourselves to know everything. Not only can we admit to not knowing, but in this Internet age, it is also easy to have you and the inquirer both "google" the question. Make sure to come back to talk again.
- 3. Don't worry about what to say.** I know this is easier said than done. But, Jesus tells us many times and in many ways to not worry. "Do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mk 13:11). Trust God. Don't worry about your words.

2. PREPARE FOR THE CHANGING WINDS

Pope Francis is enjoying the world's accolades now. But, that is not likely to always be so. Indeed, if he is living out his vocation, there will likely come a time when the "world" will reject

the pope, much as they did Jesus and two millennia worth of disciples. The gospel has a way of not letting us embrace or be embraced by the same standards as the world.

I will not be surprised, shocked, or disheartened when and if the media "turn" against Pope Francis. I pray that when and if this happens, that I will not simply defend the faith. Nor do I intend to ignore the world's criticisms. We are called to absorb the world's hatred and transform it into love. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" (Lk 6: 32-33, 35).

Because I follow Jesus, I am preparing for the day I might be kind and loving towards those who will condemn the church, the pope, the Catholic faith, etc.

3. NOTE ABOUT EVANGELIZING "CONSERVATIVE" AND "LIBERAL" CATHOLICS

For longer than I care to remember, the Catholic Church has suffered an internal conflict between those we might label as "conservative" and those who would be called "liberal." This internal strife is not healthy. "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mk 3:23).

My prayer for those of you reading today's column is that you will take a moment to look at ways you might be beaming or suffering over Pope Francis' papacy. If you are beaming, I pray that you use the joy and peace that you have to reach out to those you know are suffering in your parish. Do not "gloat" or "turn the tables" on others. Be an instrument for unity within your parish.

And, if you are suffering? Then I ask you to take your pain to Jesus. Let Jesus transform your suffering. Be a healing force in your family, in your parish, in our church.

Welcome to Pope Francis' world. Time for us to do more than just live in it! ■

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REFERENCES

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