

Mission Made Possible
(Second Edition)

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MISSION OF THE **REDEEMER**
MINISTRIES



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Chapter 1

Part A

But who do you say that I am?

“But who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15).

This is not just a question for Peter, but for *you*. Jesus is asking *you*, “But who do you say that I am?”

Take thirty seconds right now, and with closed eyes, answer His question in your heart.

If you struggled to answer, try this activity. Imagine that a busy friend knows nothing of Christianity, but they have heard of the man named Jesus and would like to know more. They have asked you to tell them who Jesus is. But they want your answer to be short, very short. What would you tell them?

Take another thirty seconds and answer their question.

Now think about the words and ideas with which you described Jesus. How were your ideas of Jesus’ identity formed? Why did you choose these words and not others? How did you come to believe this is who Jesus is? How certain are you that the answer you gave accurately describes who Jesus actually is?

Shortly after becoming Bishop of Rome, Pope Benedict XVI released the book Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration. It was a biblically-based theological reflection on who Jesus is. In a sense, this was Benedict's response to Jesus’ question, “But who do you say that I am?” He was seeking to answer this question with radical honesty and a searching study of the Scriptures.

In the foreword to the book, Benedict discusses the recent work of some biblical scholars who attempted to explore more fully who the Scriptures reveal Jesus to be. He writes about their conclusions,

[T]he reconstructions of this Jesus ... became more and more incompatible with one another; at one end of the spectrum, Jesus was the anti-Roman revolutionary working—though finally failing—to overthrow the ruling powers; at the other end, he was the meek moral teacher who approves everything and unaccountably comes to grief. If you read a number of these reconstructions one after the other, you see at once that far from uncovering an icon that has become obscured over time, they are much more like photographs of their authors and the ideals they hold. (Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, xii)

His analysis draws on complex material but arrives at a simple, startling conclusion. Even after careful study, many scholars come to an “understanding” of Jesus that is little more than a projection of themselves or their own desires. Rather than encountering and accepting the living Son of God *as He is*, they have reduced Him to a better version of themselves.

Isn't this the ultimate tragedy? A New Testament scholar's work ought to reveal Christ more fully to the world. But rather than letting His light shine forth, some create a caricature of Jesus. They reveal—not Jesus—but instead *who they want Jesus to be*. Thus they lead people to themselves rather than to Him. Furthermore, they can self-deceive by justifying their own life, ideas, choices, and priorities by falsely claiming they reflect the life, ideas, choices, and priorities of Jesus. In this, they are committing the greatest of mistakes, and in some sense, the greatest of sins: *making God in their own image*.

If someone who knows the Scriptures thoroughly is vulnerable to this insidious temptation, how much more are we, whose knowledge of Jesus in the Gospels is often minimal? Such a possibility of self-deceit requires us to face some difficult questions.

Do we believe in Jesus as the Gospels reveal Him? Or do we make Jesus in our own image? Do we imagine Jesus to be who we want Him to be? Do we justify beliefs or behaviours in our life, ideas that we hold, choices that we make, or priorities to which we cling by pointing to a self-created version of Jesus that is simply false?

Perhaps we should just pause for a minute and ask honestly, Do we really know who Jesus is?

From the Incarnation to the Ascension, Jesus revealed Himself to the world. This revelation is recorded in the four Gospels and remembered in the living tradition of the Church. In the Scriptures, we see what matters to Jesus, what His priorities are, and the

things that He loves and hates. In light of this revelation, there are two basic postures we can take. The first is one of openness and receptivity where we allow the Gospels to reveal Christ in His fullness to us. The second is one of arrogance and aggression where we impose our own desire upon the Scriptures and so create the Jesus we prefer.

To know Jesus we must adhere to *all that He has revealed*. We do not truly know Him when we give credence to some passages but ignore others, when we highlight characteristics that seem suitable to us and bypass those which challenge us, or when we quote His “easy sayings” but ignore His “hard sayings.”

We can see which of these two approaches we have taken by asking this question: Who is Jesus, fundamentally, and what did He come to do?

Is Jesus fundamentally a moral teacher whose mission is to show us a better or higher way of living?

Is Jesus fundamentally a revolutionary whose mission is to overthrow unjust social and religious structures?

Is Jesus fundamentally a peace-loving tolerant hippie whose mission is to teach us to be kind and get along?

Is Jesus fundamentally a companion whose mission is to encourage and cheer us on during the trials of life?

Too often, the Jesus we know *is the Jesus we want to know*. We borrow bits from Scripture, thoughts from worldly-minded people, and personal preferences. These are then mashed together to form a fictional Jesus who agrees with us on everything.

Essentially, we have conformed Jesus to ourselves. We have made Him into our image.

But shouldn't we instead be conforming ourselves to Him?

Shouldn't we accept Jesus, as He is presented in the Scriptures and by His Church, with a fully open mind and should we not be willing to be challenged?

Shouldn't the fact that some of what Jesus does and says makes us uncomfortable be a sign that something in us, not in Him, needs to be transformed?

Shouldn't our choices be evaluated in light of what Jesus taught rather than rationalized by taking His words out of context or ignoring what He clearly revealed?

Shouldn't we be suspicious of those who wish to approve of immorality by claiming that Jesus was nothing more than a kind, friendly, and encouraging rabbi who would never criticize anyone? Are those who seek the approval of people over the approval of God really to be trusted?

Shouldn't we consider more seriously the writing of the saints who lived lives of intimate friendship with Christ, and disregard worldly figures who have only a superficial knowledge of the faith?

Shouldn't we ask ourselves how we came to our understanding of who Jesus is? Was it random bits heard here and there? Are pieces from teachers of dubious conviction or mediocre virtue? Did we learn a little from the ignorant or deceitful or those who had only a veneer of knowledge? Has the modernist and worldly view of Jesus, as nothing more than a good teacher who disapproves of nothing and guarantees eternal life for all, influenced our faith? Or have we encountered Jesus in the Scriptures, the Sacraments, and the heart of the Church and so come to know Him, to the degree possible in this life, as He is?

Perhaps we would do well to set aside all of our poorly formed opinions and ideas, and instead listen anew to the Biblical narratives.

Perhaps we might allow the Scriptures to speak plainly to us rather than reading them haphazardly and only through the lens of our predetermined preferences and conclusions.

Perhaps we could set aside who we want Jesus to be and then seek to discover who He is.

Perhaps we should be willing to have our lives challenged, even radically challenged, by the authentic mission of Jesus.

Perhaps we could open ourselves radically to being conformed to him and not vice versa.

To follow such a path of inquiry and faith requires humility and courage. It is not easy. But it opens us up to what is true and therefore to the authentic adventure of faith, which is meant to be the joy of every Christian.

Our faulty plans and God's desire for our happiness

God's plan for your life is beautiful and good. He wants only the best for you. To live in the fullness of what He offers, you must first abandon yourself to Him. This means to trust Him with your life. This may seem frightening since you do not fully know where He will lead you. But fear can be replaced with hope and joy as you come to know Him. A child who knows that their father only wills good for them, is not fearful when that father takes them on an unknown adventure. Instead, they are excited for even in not knowing, they have abandoned themselves in trust and hope to him.

Some of you may be afraid of God. This can be fear of where He will lead you, what He may ask of you, or how He may change you. In coming to know Jesus, however, something amazing happens. You will not only know Him better, but your fear will disappear as you see the goodness of *His dream for you*.

You have plans that you hope will bring perfect happiness and fulfillment. We all have these. If you just get your life together and attain the right position in society, obtain numerous material goods, pursue certain activities, and do exciting things, then you will experience the deep happiness for which your heart longs. Right?

But it doesn't work out as planned. Your plans fail because you don't know yourself, the nature of true happiness nor how it is to be obtained. *On your own, true happiness is impossible*. If your plans are rooted in the things of this world, they will fail for one straightforward reason: You have been made for God and in Him alone is your heart's happiness found. No amount of money, no level of prestige or honour, no degree of power, or no amount of pleasure will ever fill the void within you. These things (and they usually are the building blocks of "your plan") will give you some small degree of happiness. But it won't be deep or enduring, and it will never be enough to leave you truly happy.

Ask yourself: Would a million dollars make me perfectly happy? Would \$10 million? Or \$100 million? Or a billion or even \$10 billion? Are people with \$10 billion perfectly happy?

There are many people in this world who have way more money, honour, power, and pleasure than you. Does that mean their deepest longings are satisfied? Of course not. Nor will yours be if you attain what they have attained because the ache of the human heart that longs for perfect happiness and fulfillment cannot be filled with material wealth (or any other earthly good). Why are the honours, wealth, powers, and pleasures of the world unable to satisfy our deepest longings? Because within us is an infinite void that was placed within us by God *for Himself*. Thus only He can fill it.

And this is exactly what He plans to do: *dwell within you*. In doing so, He will give you perfect joy, happiness, friendship, fulfillment, meaning, and love.

Jesus came to bring us *beatitude*. We often think of this as happiness, but it so much more than that. It is more like total, eternal, unimaginable, blow-your-mind-beyond-your-wildest-dreams, profound, pure happiness. *This is the life God has for you*. If this sounds more like heaven than earth, that's because it is. But God is so good that He doesn't make us wait until heaven. He wants us to experience it now.

You may have never heard this. Or you may wonder if it is even possible. "Earthly life can be good but it is also a valley of tears. Our hearts can never be fully satisfied here. There is death, separation, loss, betrayal, disappointment, and injustice," you may say. Yes, there are. Fair enough. You have suffered most of these, and that pain verifies any claims about the difficulty of this life. But what if suffering is not the last word? What if it is just the first word? What if suffering is not the way things should be but the way things are *because something went wrong*?

Returning to Eden

When God made Adam and Eve, they walked with Him in the garden of Eden. They were in communion with Him. In this union with God, their desires were fully satisfied. They didn't long for more *because they had the desire of their heart: God Himself*.

In illustrated children's Bibles, Adam and Eve are pictured pulling down a glistening apple from the tree. Beside them is the sneaky snake who said that God was keeping something from them. The story then describes how the snake plants doubt in their hearts by implying that God is not a generous giver. Adam and Eve listen to him and so eat the apple. Consequently, their eyes are opened, they recognize their nakedness, and they hide from God.

This basic accounting of the events in Eden is the narrative as most adult Christians understand it. Yet there is a problem. It is not so much that this recounting is wrong, but rather that it is a superficial presentation of a much more complex and troubling story.

What happened in Eden was unfathomably serious. This is not just an ancient equivalent of a child reaching into a forbidden cookie jar. Adam and Eve are usurping the prerogative of God: to name good and evil. This is indescribably serious. By doing this, they attempt to make themselves into gods. Remember what the snake tells them? This is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God, he claims, cannot be trusted to determine what is good and evil, so they must do it. It is up to them to take charge of things, to push God out of the way, and to claim His authority. In obedience to Satan, they revolt against God by seeking to overthrow Him and reign as the creators and judges of all moral and metaphysical truth.

Adam and Eve chose to become rebels and so are enemies of God. Their actions broke off the intimate friendship with God in which and for which they were created. For their rebellion, Adam and Eve rightly earn for themselves the punishment of eternal damnation. It is not that God hates them (quite the opposite), but that they have utterly rejected Him and chosen to renounce His benevolent offer of friendship.

The story had started off so well. God loved Adam and Eve into existence. He made them to love and to be loved. Within them He placed a desire for Himself and then fulfilled that very desire. The universe was magnificent and elegant, but even more so were their souls with their capacity for knowledge and love. Every good desire within the heart of every person would be fulfilled. His plan for them (and for all their descendants, including you) was eternal beatitude. There would be no tears, suffering, boredom, jealousy, rage, hatred, or pain. There would be only goodness and love and joy beyond all measure.

In creating us, God gave us the precious gift of freedom. We can choose whether or not we will accept, embrace, and respond to goodness and truth and love. In Eden, Adam and Eve took the freedom God bestowed and used it revolt against Him. *They freely chose to become rebels; they stood up as enemies of God.* They did not just eat an innocent-looking fruit; they sought to overthrow God and become gods themselves.

The freedom God gave to us meant that we could truly love Him. But it also meant that we could reject Him. This was the risk He took: allowing us to choose if we would be friends or enemies. His offer to Adam and Eve (and to us) was perfect: beatitude.

It was for their choosing. They said *no*.

And so have we.

A Fallen World

Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world, but we propagated it. Every one of our many sins is a ratification and confirmation of their ancient choice. Thus they are the guilty and we are the guilty. The most serious consequences of this sin is the separation from God which leads to eternal death (cf. Rom. 6:23). But sin also wreaks havoc on our lives and in the world.

Sin ruptures not just our communion with God but also wounds and distorts our deepest desires. We hunger for perfect and intimate communion with God, but it eludes us. Although made for the eternal and the infinite, we delude ourselves by thinking we can find our desire's satiation in the temporal and finite. But we can't, and we don't. So this unfulfilled desire necessarily leaves us with unsatisfied hearts and a state in which we see only one pitiful option: put on a brave face and pretend that everything is alright. But everything is not alright. Something has gone seriously wrong.

The evidence of sin is abundant in the world: gulags, death camps, untold piles of aborted fetuses, carnage of the sexual revolution, torture of the innocent (and the guilty), abuse of the vulnerable, starving children, genocides, and so on. To deny original sin and personal sin is either to lie or to be unconscionably ignorant of the world and of history. While we have seen wickedness, evil, and the horror of human choice in the news, we have also felt it personally in our lives. It could be the betrayal of a family member, the cowardliness of a friend, the cruelty of a colleague, the viciousness of a stranger, or an infinite number of other possible offences. Irrespective of the particulars, we have all been hurt and wounded; we have all suffered at the hands of another.

But we have not just been the victims; *we have often been the perpetrators*. Even the most virtuous among us has said things, done things, and approved of things that have hurt others. We have caused friends, family and enemies' pain, embarrassment, and humiliation. We have treated them as worthless or nearly so. We have looked at others with hatred and scorn. We have rejoiced in their suffering. We have gossiped for the sheer joy of looking down on someone. We have mocked those who (we thought) merited it. We have betrayed trust, thrust swords, withheld love. And then we have lied about it.

We easily see the evils in the world and in others, but rarely our own. Our soothed consciences deny or rationalize our sins as small mistakes or excusable imperfections. This compounds our iniquity by adding lies and false justifications. And this is just against our fellow humans. God, the perfectly loving and gracious Creator who made us for nothing less than communion and beatitude, we have abandoned. Our pride has convinced us that we are better off without Him. Thus we have rebelled against Him and His plan for our flourishing.

Surely we are not really *such great sinners, are we?* Can't we point to the good in us? There has been love given, kindness expressed, truth spoken, and forgiveness offered. We seem to merit much, don't we? But from where do these come? St. Augustine realized that in crowning our merits, God is crowning His own gifts. Yes how quick we are to take credit for what is the fruit of God's abundant grace. Our goodness is first and foremost from Him. Thus, when we rationalize sin with a claim about our good merits, we add a further layer of guilt.

And then consider this: do our virtuous actions offset the evils done? The severity of an offence depends on the value of the one offended. God, the infinite and all-Holy, all-Good, all-Merciful Creator is the one against whom we have sinned. Sin is thus an incalculable offence which cannot be erased or offset by a few (or many) works of kindness. In fact, we can never do enough good to balance out even a single sin. So our sin ruptures communion with God and we can't fix it.

Grave sin leads to separation between us and Him, not because He has rejected us, but because we have renounced Him. If we persevere in this state and fail to repent, our sins lead to eternal death. To be damned is not to be abandoned by God, but to have abandoned Him. It is not God who wishes to send us to hell, but our own choices have led us there. If we eat 10,000 calories a day and do not exercise, we will put on weight. If we lie continually to a friend, we will lose them. If we jump off a 1000-foot cliff, we will die. There are consequences to our decision/actions whether we like it or not. If we renounce God through mortal sin, then we will be without Him eternally.

But sin is not the last word.

So Great A Redeemer

Passionately in love with humanity, and desiring both our beatitude and friendship, God launched the supreme counter-assault. This was necessary because we were helpless in the face of sin and needed a divine intervention. That "divine intervention" has a name

and a face: Jesus. *And Jesus came as a warrior.* “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). He came to do battle. Why? In order to set us free from the bondage of sin and death and to save our souls from everlasting damnation. And to do battle with whom? With the devil, who is the enemy of our souls, and with sin, which holds power over us. We started as rebels chasing false freedom but soon became slaves. Slaves to our passions. Slaves to things. Slaves to the lie that happiness is found apart from God. Slaves to the world, the flesh, and the devil. And slaves to sin.

We are enslaved, and Jesus has come to rescue us.

God alone has the power to set us free, and so He comes, as a man, to do just this. Jesus assumes our flesh and thus is one of us (Emmanuel). As God-incarnate in human flesh, He goes against the gates of hell and the power of sin. His battlefield is the cross, and it is there that He offers the one, true, eternal sacrifice—Himself.

A strange battle, isn't it? It seems to be defeat, not victory. Jesus has been killed. Evil has won. Sin, not God, has conquered.

But this contest is not done. This is a fight against Death itself, and so into death, Jesus entered. And from death He emerged victorious. An ancient Christian hymn proclaims, “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death by death.” Through sin, death came into the world. On the Cross, Jesus confronted death. With the Resurrection, He destroyed it. *Christ is the Victor!*

Death has lost its sting and no longer has power over us. Jesus has made it possible for our souls to be saved from eternal death. But not just this: He has also merited for us, if we choose to accept it, entrance into the eternal banquet of heaven.

Let's revisit the question with which we started. This time, in the silence of your heart, take 5 minutes to answer: Who do *you* say that Jesus is?

Part B

Jesus Christ is our saviour. That means, simply, that He came *to save us*. But “save us” from what? In the words of Pope Francis, Jesus came to save us “from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1). To be saved from sin means ultimately being saved from hell (eternal separation from God), since that is what our sin

merits. But Jesus also saved us *for* something: *for* beatitude, *for* eternal life, and *for* Himself. Thus He saved us *from* the bondage of sin (which leads to spiritual death) and for the freedom of grace (which leads to eternal life). We were not just slaves who were ransomed; we were slaves who were returned to the Kingdom as Kings and Queens.

The old Jesuits were motivated by a desire to save souls. In the early 17th century, young French missionaries left behind comfortable lives, engaging ecclesiastical careers, full bellies, decent beds, warm nights, loving families, plentiful books, pleasant weather, familiar culture, security, peace, and numerous other earthly comforts and goods. In the new lands, they had to learn a truly foreign language, consume bland and meagre food, and endure the dreadful winters of the north. Their beds (when they had them) were hard, the spring mosquitos were awful, and medical care was almost non-existent. Both family and earthly comforts were a distant memory.

In addition to these relentless and brutal conditions, they also faced the real possibility of being captured, tortured, and killed.

Why would these men abandon a good and homely life for one of almost continual deprivation and suffering? They knew what they were getting into when they left the comforts of France because reports of the intense hardship of missionary life had come back regularly. Why would they leave a world that was familiar and pleasant for one that was so foreign and harsh?

The answer to these questions is very simple: They went because they knew that Jesus Christ *came to save all who would believe*.

Jesus was victorious over sin and death. This was His mission in which they participated. They did this because they wanted the victory and grace won on Good Friday and Easter Sunday to be made known and available to all people. With such a mission, eternity, and not earthly comforts, would be their sole concern.

The victory of Christ came at an enormous price, and so too would the work of His missionaries. The cost would be separation from family, physical hardships, illness, and perhaps torture and death. The fruit of their painful labours, however, would be the salvation of souls. The mission of Jesus has two parts. *Part One* is the conquering of sin and death. Here Jesus broke the bonds of sin, plundered the Kingdom of darkness, and opened the gate to eternal life. But then comes *Part Two*. The victory of the Victor must now be announced to all so that many may participate in it.

Setting the Captives Free

Imagine a castle in which a thousand captives are held. It is well built and securely guarded. But one day a liberating army arrives and overcomes the guards, destroys the defences, and drops down the drawbridge. Into the castle the army flows. The liberators have conquered! The victory has been won! The people are free! Well, sort of.

The captives remain in captivity until they hear the good news that *they are free*. Only then are they no longer in bondage. But they will not know this until the victory has been proclaimed. They will remain in dark and dank rooms with sullen hearts; they are weary captives who do not know that they have been ransomed. For them to be free, heralds must proclaim the victory. *Part One* is the victory. *Part Two* is announcing the victory.

As insane as it sounds (sin is always mad), some may choose to stay where they are. They like the cold hard room because it is familiar. Maybe one day, they hope, it will magically turn into a bright and clean palace. They do not trust that the paradise promised (and testified to by others) is worth pursuing. Others can't be bothered to get up off their rumps and make their way out. And so the good news falls on some deaf ears. Fortunately, many who hear it will respond and move from darkness into light, from captivity into freedom, from sorrow into joy.

Analogously, Jesus does the first part: He sets us free. But we do the second part, running through the castle to let the prisoners know that freedom is here.

This was the work of these early Jesuits. They knew that on Calvary, Jesus had won salvation for all. *Part One* was accomplished. Now it was time for Christians to engage in *Part Two* by taking the Gospel and Christ's salvation to the world. For them, there was no greater life to live. Some of these early Jesuits *pleaded* with their superiors to be sent. They desperately wanted to pour out their life for the salvation of souls. The harsh suffering that would await them did not intimidate for they were motivated by an urgent desire to lead others to salvation. Such is the attitude and work of the true missionary.

Evangelization as a proposition

Today you are called to be a missionary. The very mission that Jesus bestowed upon those French Jesuits is the same mission in which He invites each of us to participate.

Yet many Catholics do not want to evangelize. For most laity (and even some clergy), the idea of pouring their life out for the announcing of the Good News of Jesus Christ is simply foreign. Some may be opposed to evangelizing in principal while others simply don't want to do it.

Maybe evangelization/mission work is misunderstood. Perhaps this is because Catholics have come to think of evangelization and mission as being judgemental or disrespectful. “Isn’t evangelization about forcing our beliefs onto another person?” some naively ask. Others may question whether it is intolerant or disrespectful. With such false ideas about mission/evangelization, it is no wonder that most Catholics are not interested.

Here is the crux of this problem: When Catholics think of mission and evangelization, they rarely think of it the way *the Church* does. Instead, they follow the way *the world* has defined it for them. And since *the world* tells us that it is “judge-y” and rude, and since *the world* tells us it is terrible to be judge-y and rude, we think mission/evangelization is bad. But nothing we have reflected on so far has anything to do with being judge-y or rude. Quite the opposite, in fact.

To evangelize as *the Church* understands it, and as Christ revealed it, is merely to *propose* the Good News. It is the sharing of freedom, fulfillment, forgiveness, and salvation. All of these are offered freely and as a gift without condition. There is no pushiness, disrespect, or anything of the sort.

Evangelization is to announce to everyone that Christ knows them, loves them, and offers them salvation. Sin and death have not won the ultimate victory. God desires intimate friendship with us and wills that we spend eternity united with Him in heaven. *This is the Good News*, for it not only reveals the salvation that awaits us if we respond, but it also manifests the goodness of God. *Evangelization proclaims* the depth of Christ's love: conquering sin and death, and opening for us the gates to eternal life (cf. John 3:16).

Salvation is undoubtedly offered to every person, but it is not automatically realized. Evangelizing means offering the invitation to repent and believe, to be baptized, and to receive all the treasures God wishes to bestow—yet each person must freely choose to respond. In a sense, we must allow ourselves to be ransomed by God. Like those captives in the castle, we must respond to gift of freedom which is offered. God does not force faith or conversion on us. Instead, He invites us. This is an invitation to us to respond; to say “yes” to opening our hearts to all the goodness that He has for us.

To evangelize requires acknowledging the fallen nature of humanity and therefore the fallen nature of every person. Each of us is a sinner. I am a sinner. You are a sinner. We have all merited hell. But Christ has come for those like us. And He didn't just come for *those* other sinners. He came to save *this* sinner—me. He has come, for my sake and for your sake, to do battle with evil, sin, and death. And from this battle, He emerged victorious. We announce this victory when we evangelize, and thereby invite everyone into reconciliation and friendship with God. Then it is for them to decide if they will respond.

The Universal Call to Mission

Some people believe that evangelization is not for them. Even if they recognize that inviting someone to friendship/reconciliation with Jesus is a good thing, it is not something they want to do. “Let the priests or the extroverts or the educated or the courageous evangelize. It may be good work, but it is not my work,” they say. And in saying so, they reveal the poverty of love in their own heart.

This view sees evangelization as a burden rather than a gift. Yet isn't sharing good news always a joy? Wouldn't it be amazing to announce to someone fighting cancer (and indeed to the whole world) that a cure has been found? Don't new parents love sharing the news of the arrival of their child with family and friends? Even the person who has found a great restaurant wants to tell colleagues about it.

Jesus invites us into His mission—His saving mission—as an act of love. To share the good news of salvation ought never to be seen as a burden, but as a privilege. Jesus loves *you* so much that He includes *you* in His mission. He involves *you* because He wants *you* to share in His joy of seeing faith and conversion.

We can see this from another perspective: evangelization is an essential part of being a Christian. Pope Benedict XVI said, “The rediscovery of the value of one's baptism is the basis of the missionary commitment of every Christian, because we see in the Gospel that he who lets himself be fascinated by Christ cannot do without witnessing the joy of following in his footsteps... we understand even more that, in virtue of baptism, we have an inherent missionary vocation” (Homily, 29 October 2006). Having a cross in your hallway, reading The Imitation of Christ, or praying the rosary on Tuesday afternoons are all *optional* elements of the Christian life. They are all excellent, commendable, and likely means for your growth in communion with the Lord, but they

are not essential. You could become a great saint without these.

But can you be a saint without praying? Of course not. Prayer is an *essential part* of Christian life. There is no intimacy with God if we are not communing with Him in prayer. Likewise, evangelization *is an essential part of Christian life*. It is not for the chosen few, but, like prayer, is normative for the Christian. Why? Because God has chosen *you* for His mission. The Great Commission—to make disciples of all nations (cf. Matt. 28:19)—was given to every one of us Christians. This is how Jesus will realize the fullness of His victory in space and time. This is how *Part Two* happens. Jesus' mission depends on our participation. Our cooperation with this is essential since it naturally flows out of a relationship of love. If we love Jesus and know what He has done for us, and if we understand how desperately every soul needs Him, of course we will evangelize. How can we not take up this mission? As St. Paul said, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).

But wait. Is it not incredibly difficult to evangelize? What if I feel unprepared for the task? What if I don't have the skills or gifts to do it? How can a simple average Catholic be part of such a noble task? Is it really possible that God can use me to help effect the salvation of another?

These are questions that are found in almost every heart.

If you are terrified to talk about your faith, if you don't know where to begin, if you are unsure of your capacity to do it, *then you are in precisely the right place*. These meditations will fill in some of those gaps. The meetings with this group will bring you along with others who have the same challenging questions. But you are in an excellent place for an even more important reason: *You are right where God wants you*. He has brought you to Mission Made Possible. He has a plan for you that is beautiful. He desires that you thrive. He sees how your life can bear abundant fruit for the Kingdom. There is no difficulty either within you or outside of you that God cannot overcome.

Jesus is with you. He may lead you places you never imagined going. He may ask things of you that seem beyond your capacity. He may use you in ways that seem almost unbelievable. But in all of these situations, He will be sanctifying your soul, revealing your full potential, and giving you a life of meaning that is deeper, richer, and more wonderful than anything the world could ever offer.