

For the past year I've been walking through downtown Kirkland once a week, wearing my black clerics and praying a rosary for the conversion of the city. It's just my way and style of evangelizing our town. I hope to meet people or at least cause people to stop and think, "Hey, the Catholic Church is present here." But I must admit that as the weather worsened, and fewer people are on the street, I've spent less time on the sidewalks and more in the coffeeshops of Kirkland, which actually isn't a bad way to encounter people.

A month or so ago I went into one of the coffeeshops and went up to the barista to order. When she saw I was next in line she stopped and asked, "Are you really a Catholic priest?" "Yeah." "Wow", she said, "I've never seen a real priest." I paused. What to say? "Yep, I'm really a priest." She continued, "But, then, I have never been inside a church." She said it without any edge, challenge, or malice. She was just stating a fact. "What church are you part of?" I probably could have said something better, but all I came up with was, "Holy Family Catholic

Church up on Rose Hill. We're open if you want to see it." She didn't bite at the offer, just moved on and chatted about other things.

These past few years Catholics have often been told to evangelize. I've preached about it many times, as well. But something Fr. Dave Pavonka said struck me about that call to evangelize. He said that the best way to frustrate people is to tell them to do something but not tell them how to do it. That's a problem for many of us.

Many Catholics hear "evangelize" and they understand "try to argue someone into change." But the most powerful way to evangelize the Gospel is by witnessing to it, rather than arguing for it. What is it to witness to the faith? Remember the Rerouting series I preached last Spring? The basic teaching of Jesus can be summed up in a few points. God created us because He loves each of us. But we are separated from Him by our sin. So, to reconciliation with us, God became one of us in Jesus of Nazareth, and He died for us on the cross – and rose from the

dead. And by united ourselves to the Risen Jesus through baptism and faith in Him, we can share in His divine life forever.

To witness to our faith is simply to tell someone else how that basic message has proven to be present and true in my own life. I don't have to argue theology or condemn someone else. I just need to tell about my own experience of God. And this is powerful, not only for those who don't yet believe, like the barista I met. Those of us who are already Catholics can also grow in faith and fervor by hearing the stories of God at work in our neighbors' and friends' lives.

I think here of our Gospel today. We just heard the story of the Visitation. The Visitation is many things, but one thing it is, is a witnessing of faith. Elizabeth has been given the miraculous gift of a son, John the Baptist, in her old age. Mary has conceived Jesus, the Son of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Both have good news to tell of God's great love and personal plans for them. And so Mary goes in haste to greet Elizabeth and they witness God's profound love to one

another by sharing the news about their mysterious, marvelous children. And those divine acts bring them closer.

That is what we are called to do in our own lives – witness to God’s work. To evangelize I just need to think about whether I can tell a story to a friend about the power of God’s grace in my life. Or perhaps it’s a story of how I have fallen, and God didn’t abandon me even in my sin. Or maybe I can tell how my faith has given me new life and helped me through the troubles of my life.

I have my story – but you have your story. And your story is important. Tell it. I talk about each of us doing 20 minutes of prayer each day. Part of that could be just looking at what’s happening in my own life, then remembering the basic points of the Gospel and how they link up. If we can tell the story of God’s interaction with us – and how it has impacted our own lives, we can witness. And that witnessing will not only help the person hearing the story, it will even strength our own faith.

I mentioned that witnessing can help both those in the Church and those not yet in it. I've returned to that coffeeshop a number of times since that first encounter with the barista because I feel drawn to witness to her somehow the love God has for me – and for her. Think about it – she has never been inside a church of any kind. That is the new normal for increasing numbers of people. I don't think she will be open to a theological argument – at least not at first. But she might be touched by a story of God's loving, rescuing, or blessing someone. I don't know if I will be given that chance. I don't want to be creepy or unnatural. But perhaps there will be an opening to tell the story.

You can do it too. To witness to Jesus is just to live out our own version of the Visitation. Everyone deserves to hear the Good News. Let any of us who has been touched by God's grace proclaim the greatness of the Lord who has looked on our lowliness without contempt, but with love.