

JOHN EUDES: THE PREACHER

by Ronald M. Bagley, c.j.m.

In chapter 10 of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul speaks about the importance of faith. He takes the words of the prophet Isaiah and applies them to Christ: "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." (Isaiah 28:16) He does the same with the prophecy of Joel: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Joel 3:5) And then he uses those words as springboard for some reflections of the importance of the preaching ministry.

But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those bring good news." (Romans 10: 14-15)

Preaching the Good News of Christ was one of the driving passions of St. John Eudes. He wanted everyone to hear the good news of the gospel and put their faith in Christ. Not only did John Eudes recognize that he was sent by God as a preacher of the gospel, but he founded a community with whom he shared that passion.

In the context of seventeenth century France, this was full-blown evangelization. John Eudes believed that his preaching was an excellent tool for strengthening the faith of the weak and inviting back those who had wandered from the faith.

In this presentation we will look at this aspect of the life of St. John Eudes. I will begin by looking at the kind of preaching that John Eudes loved most: the seventeenth century parish mission. I will examine the goal of his preaching: conversion. I will also relate this goal to the work of evangelization today. I will look at what some recent documents of the Church say about evangelization and relate them to the work John Eudes did in the seventeenth century. Finally, I will suggest some concrete applications to the call that each of us also has received at Baptism to be evangelizers.

Parish Missions: the first love of John Eudes

John Eudes preached parish missions for forty-five years and during that time he preached one hundred and seventeen missions. We know that he joined the Oratory in Caen and was ordained in 1677. The Oratorians were involved in preaching missions and John Eudes began preaching while still in the Oratory. The Oratory at Caen was responsible for providing the parishes of Normandy with missions. His first mission was in 1680, just three years after his ordination. It was in the Diocese of Coutances where he eventually preached forty-eight missions.

John Eudes, as a preacher of parish missions, is part of a renewal movement in France in the seventeenth century. Many others were preaching missions as well. Perhaps the best known to us today was St. Vincent de Paul who founded the Vincentians or the Congregation of the Missions, as they are officially called. A little later St. Louis Grignion de Montfort will also begin a popular version of parish missions. There were many others as well.

The goal of the seventeenth century mission was to evangelize a region. Missionaries were often invited to come into a diocese or region and go from parish to parish in an effort to renew the faith. The format was not for a single priest to come to a parish and give a talk once a day for a week. Some of us might remember those old Redemptorist retreats from our childhood.

Rather, the mission began with dozen or so priest walking into town ringing bells. They attracted a lot of attention as they called everyone to participate in the mission. Very often, business as usual stopped. The markets would close so people could attend. People flooded into the town from the countryside.

The primary audience for the mission was baptized Catholics. It was meant to be a time of renewal in faith. The mission was addressed in a particular way to lax Catholics. In addition, John Eudes wanted to reach out to the Huguenots (French Protestants). In this Counter Reformation atmosphere, he often had harsh words for those who had left the Catholic Church. He had a great desire to bring them back to the true fold.

Fr. Bourgoing, the superior of the Oratory when John Eudes entered, had mapped out a plan for the Oratorian missions in a little book he wrote called *Direction for Missions*. In this book he collected and codified the best practices for a mission. The missions he planned usually lasted about three weeks. The missions that John Eudes preached were usually longer than that. Typically his missions lasted two months,

though some were longer.

John Eudes was a creative, inventive person, so he did not hesitate to make changes in the format for the missions he led. Besides lengthening the mission, he added a number of pious practices and introduced family prayers, religious education of children, and conferences for the priests. It was what we might call a "full service mission" in that its aim was bring about renewal in faith for a whole region.

As I mentioned earlier, his first mission was in the Diocese of Coutances. This was an area that was in enormous need of renewal. The diocese did not even have a bishop for six years. This was symptomatic of the lack of spiritual leadership in this diocese. The faith of Catholics in this region was quite lax.

John Eudes begins his career as a mission preacher in the town of Lessay and meets with great success. From Lessay he goes on to four other places in the same diocese. Next he was invited to the Diocese of Bayeux. (Caen is in this diocese.) He went from place to place for five years with numerous requests for his missions. He preached in small towns and big cities as well.

Let's look at the typical mission given by John Eudes. Each day there were one or two conferences. Often when he was out in the country, there was just one talk a day. In the city, there were two talks a day: in the morning around 9:00, and in the afternoon around 5:00. During the mission, John Eudes and his team would reach out to the sick and marginalized, prisoners and public sinners. As mentioned earlier, there was also catechesis for children and adults as well. The early afternoons were devoted to catechesis during which the content of the morning talks was broken down and explained. Then followed the sacrament of Reconciliation.

This was a key element of the mission. While preaching was the primary medium used by John Eudes, the whole mission was geared toward the confessions. There were often fifteen or more confessors who were kept busy every day for the duration of the mission. These confessions were never rushed. The whole object was to achieve a conversion of heart. This conversion was expressed sacramentally in confession. So important was this experience of conversion that sometimes absolution was withheld or postponed until the person had truly experienced the spirit of conversion.

John Eudes was fond of saying: "The preachers shake the branches but it is the confessors who trap the birds." He saw an important link between the preaching and

confession. The work of evangelization was meant to bring about conversion.

From this long and intense experience of hearing confessions, early in his priesthood John Eudes acquired a profound knowledge of the needs of people in the towns and in the countryside. What he learned in confession help him be a better preacher. Likewise, he thought that his experience as a confessor enabled him help people better examine their consciences. In 1644 he wrote a book called *Advice to Missionary Confessors* to help the priests on his mission teams. He summarized his experience as a confessor and shared further developments in his pastoral approach in a later book called *The Good Confessor* (1666).

This reconciliation, celebrated in the Sacrament of Penance, was also intended to lead to the Eucharist. The celebration of Mass was included in the mission, but not until near the end of the mission. Daily Mass was not part of the mission plan. You have to remember that this was a time when people did not receive Communion very often, in fact, hardly ever. That mentality did not change until the twentieth century through the efforts of Pope Pius X. The mission was geared toward preparing the participants to receive Communion before the mission was over.

John Eudes was well known for his preaching. Not only was his content good but his style attracted people as well. His voice was often described as powerful and pleasing to listen to. Even one of his Oratorian detractors, who opposed him on many occasions and spread rumors about him, spoke highly of his style. He said, "This was a small man, but he had a voice that was beautiful and strong, with much pathos." He said that John Eudes had a great facility with words, and "a vibrant and fruitful imagination."

Obviously John Eudes was a good speaker. His preaching was always rich with familiar comparison that helped people relate his message to their own lives. It might have been his Norman heritage that made him so practical. This is one of the things that made him popular.

He would employ a number of rhetorical devices in his sermons. For example, on one occasion, he used the phrase "have mercy on us" at regular intervals throughout his sermon. As he moved through the sermon, he would raise the tone of his voice to lead up to the phrase. After doing the first two times, people caught on. For the rest of the sermon he would just stop at the appropriate times and the congregation supplied the phrase. (This is something like preaching in the African American tradition)

His reputation as a preacher was well known and his missions were very popular. But not everyone welcomed him. Here is an excerpt from a letter he wrote to Madame de Budos in summer of 1636:

Here I am in a borough to begin a mission. I do not know what will happen to me, but during my last mission I was attributed some very fine qualities. Some people called me the precursor of the antichrist; others said that I was the antichrist himself. Some labeled me a seducer, a devil who is not to be believed; still others, a sorcerer enticing everyone in his wake. Some of them discussed chasing me away and would have carried out their plan if our Fathers had not arrived that same day. All that is just roses, but the thorns which prick my heart consist in seeing people following me around, sometimes for a week, without being able to go to confession although there are ten confessors here. [quoted from *In All Things the Will of God, Saint John Eudes through His Letters*, Clément Guillon. Translated by Louis Levesque]

I mentioned before that the mission had a team. John Eudes would share some of the preaching and teaching responsibilities with other Eudist priests. And all of the priests were busy hearing confessions. When you consider the length of these missions and the hectic pace, you can see why the mission was exhausting for the team. That is why John Eudes insisted they take a day off each week (usually Monday). He recognized that they needed some time for their own spiritual renewal. The team also set aside some time for discussion among themselves on how the mission was going.

Another significant factor for the team was the travel involved. The travel to the site of the missions was often difficult. The missionary team would travel on horseback or foot. And the roads were not good at the time. As the Eudist team walked along they intersperse moments of prayer and silence. Each trip was also dedicated to one of the trips Jesus made in the gospels. As soon as they arrived in the town where the mission would be held, they went to the local church to pray in thanksgiving.

John Eudes wanted to offer the missions free of charge. He believed that the mission should not cost people anything. He didn't want to overburden a people already weighed down by poverty. Therefore he sought well off people to underwrite the missions. These benefactors could be lay people, priests or bishops. But the missions were always financed by benefactors. In his *Memoriale Beneficiorum Dei* (spiritual diary), he often mentions who paid for a particular mission.

To get a better feel for the missions John Eudes offered, I want to share with you some

the things he himself had to say about them, as well as some of the interesting things that took place.

John Eudes himself tells us about two interesting missions, the first since the beginning of his new community in 1643:

During the course of this same year we gave two wonderful and extraordinarily fruitful missions, greater even than past missions. It was as if our Lord wanted to clearly show everyone that he was with us and that he himself was the author of this Institution... The first mission took place in Saint Sauveur-le-Victome of the diocese of Coutances. The second in Valgnes. The crowds here were so big that each day I was obliged to preach outside the city behind the castle. On Sundays and holidays there were an estimated 40,000 people present.

On November 30, 1647, he begins a mission in Autun. He tells us that it was supposed to end on February 2, 1648. However, due to the overwhelming response, it was extended until 14th of the same month. The results were immediately evident. The bishop, who was used to a secure and comfortable existence, made a major commitment to fulfill his responsibilities. He himself participated in the exercises of the mission. Other things happened too. Merchants and public notaries promised to keep holy the Lord's day. Two of the city's hospitals were repaired for service to the poor. Because of the great number of needy and vulnerable people, the mission launched the construction of another house which would take them in and give them refuge. In addition, there were bi-weekly conferences for the priests of the area. The missionaries even went to the nearby abbey to help revive its monastic spirit.

Jean-Jacques Olier, founder of the Sulpicians, had been insisting that John Eudes come to his parish in Paris. Finally in 1651 John Eudes agrees to do a mission in Paris. The missionaries were delayed in getting to St. Sulpice because of La Fronde (?), so Olier had to open the mission himself. As he did so, he paid words of tribute to his friend: "I would need to possess the light of that great servant of God whose place I occupy, in order to speak with the same dignity about Jesus Christ, our true light."

In 1660 and 1661, John Eudes led more missions in Paris. One of them was a mission in the hospice of Quinze-Vingts which lasted for seven weeks. St. Vincent de Paul commented on this mission in a letter to his own missionaries in Warsaw:

Some priests in Normandy led by Father Eudes, who I believe you have heard spoken about, came to give a marvelously blessed mission. The very spacious courtyard of

Quinze-Vingts was in fact too small to hold the crowds that came to listen to the sermons.

Another of these Parisian missions was again in the parish of St. Sulpice. It took place in the months of July and August. The mission was actually held in the spacious temple of St. Germain des Pres. Queen Anne of Austria (wife of Louis XIII, came to the last sermon of the mission. She listened to Fr. Eudes speak with zeal about the need to fight heresies, the need to cut down on luxuries and to be involved with the poor in an effective way. During the procession of the Blessed Sacrament which marked the end of the mission, John Eudes got the crowds to shout repeatedly, "Long live Jesus!" He had them crying out for Jesus in the same way that they had shouted "Long live the king" eight days earlier at marriage of Louis XIV to Marie Thérèse.

The missionary zeal of John Eudes did not diminish with age. Fr. Paul Milcent, a Eudist priest in France says that even in his golden years, "He tackled each mission as a new evangelical adventure, as a new spiritual battle, with inexhaustible reserves of enthusiasm and admiration." [Milcent, 406]

In 1669, the Bishop of Rennes (in Brittany) invited John Eudes to preach at a jubilee in the diocese. The only way Fr. Eudes agreed to do it is if he could give a demanding preparatory retreat first. And so he gives his longest mission ever - 134 days. It ran from Advent 1669 until Easter 1670. He shared his excitement about this mission in a letter to a religious:

God gave me such strength during the mission that for two weeks I preached almost daily in the cathedral before a very large audience, as if I had the stamina of a 30 year old. I am truly resolved to dedicate the rest of my life to this type of work." (In fact, he did.)

This mission was very fruitful. Among the many things achieved, he was able to found a new diocesan seminary in Rennes as well as a second convent of Our Lady of Charity.

In 1671 John Eudes was asked by the new archbishop of Paris to preach at the palace at Versailles. A remarkable feature of John Eudes was his ability to relate to royalty as well as the common people. Many aristocrats attended this mission. The king and queen actually came to three days of the mission.

Just imagine this scene! John Eudes, courageous missionary, now 70 years old, stands opposite the 32 year old powerful king. The king greets him with these words: "I am so pleased that the bishop has chosen you for the mission. I am sure that you will do much good here; continue as you have begun."

John Eudes relates the scene in his diary: "During exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, God bestowed on me the grace to give two dynamic sermons before the queen while holding the monstrance in my hand, and then I gave an even more emphatic one before the king."

The event is also recorded in the annals of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary:

He spoke to the king about the Passion of the Son of God for a good quarter of an hour. The king listened to him on his knees and seemed very impressed. At Easter he celebrated Mass before the king who listened to him on his knees with edifying devotion. During the Offertory, John Eudes praised the magnificent example which the king was giving to his subjects by his respect and worship of the King of Kings, in whose presence the sovereigns of this world are merely dust... I wonder, Sire, why it is that while your majesty so perfectly carries out his religious duties... I see so many of your officials and other subjects doing the exact opposite. The king turned to look at his courtiers and they all immediately sat up and looked attentive." [Milcent, 461-463]

On those occasions that John Eudes got to preach before the king and queen, he often liked to contrast the insignificance and transience of the monarchs of this world with the grandeur and majesty of the eternal King.

Two years later, in 1673, he received a request from the king and queen to preach at court during an extraordinary jubilee. In a letter, Fr. Eudes gives a few details of the mission:

On arrival I greeted the majesties and the Dauphin who received me very well indeed. I preached in the afternoons almost daily with unusual verve on subjects designed to touch their hearts. Everyone was very impressed with what they heard and the queen has asked me to continue preaching for the rest of the week.

He adds,

The queen came yesterday to the Carmelite convent while I was at Montmartre. It is

impossible to try and describe how highly she praised the mission and the preachers themselves. She said that other sermons she had listened to had merely been words, but this one had touched everyone's heart and she had even noted a change in the king's behavior. I pray that God will bless our modest work... [OC X, 465-66]

The last entry in the *Memoriale Benificorum Dei* that mentions a mission says:

In the years 1674, 1675 and 1676, we gave a number of missions which God blessed abundantly, especially the one held at Saint-Lo during which the divine kindness converted numerous Protestants.

John Eudes preached missions throughout his life, but the mission in St. Lo was his last one. He was 74 when he left the rest of the task to his confreres.

One final note: It was during the time that he was giving missions that he did a large part of his writing. Not only did his experience preaching and teaching people inform his writing. Most of the time he wrote books which help the missions. Some of his books were for the mission team, like *Advice to Missionary Confessors* (1644), *The Good Confessor* (1666, a further development from his years of experience) and *To Serve with Dignity at Holy Mass* (1660).

In addition he wrote Masses that were often introduced during missions, like the Mass and Office to Heart of Mary. He also wrote Masses and Offices to St. Joseph, St. Gabriel, All Holy Priests and Levites, and other saints and titles of Mary. And we know that eventually wrote the Mass and Office for the Heart of Jesus which was first celebrated in 1672.

He also wrote books to help people better understand the content of the missions. These were also used to reach people who could not attend the mission. Among these extant works are the *Exercises in Piety* (1635), *Life and Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls* (1637), *Catechism of the Mission* (1642) and *Contract with God in Holy Baptism* (1654).

The Goal is Conversion

Of one thing we can be sure: St. John Eudes preached in order to bring about a change of heart in his listeners. His revival-style missions were intended to bring renewed faith to those who had fallen away, to strengthen the faith of everyday Catholics, and to

reach out to those who had no faith. This is what the Church calls the work of evangelization.

In examining the work John Eudes did as a preacher, we hear a call to his sons and daughters to continue the work of evangelization. For some of us, it may mean being good preachers, even leading parish retreats. For most of us the call to evangelize is heard in the context of our various ministries and lifestyles.

In this part of my presentation, I want to explore evangelization and conversion in greater depth. I will look at some recent Church documents on evangelization and offer some comparisons to the work John Eudes did through the missions.

The foundational document for the recent teachings on evangelization is *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Apostolic Exhortation written by Pope Paul VI in 1975 following the Synod of Bishops that was devoted to the theme of evangelization. In 1992, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a national pastoral plan for Catholic evangelization in the United States entitled *Go and Make Disciples*. While there are additional documents, whether in Canada, Africa, Europe, Asia or the United States, I will base my comparison on these two documents in particular.

Evangelization is a fairly new word in the Catholic vocabulary. Other Christian denominations speak of evangelism and have evangelists who preach in pulpits, on television and radio, and through more recent means of communication. Ordinary Catholics seem to shy away from all those terms. The St. John Eudes Center recently developed a parish mission entitled "Becoming an Evangelizing Parish." In two different parishes where I preached this mission, the parish core team was squeamish about using that title for the mission. They liked the content; they just were not sure about using the word "evangelization." In one parish we actually renamed it "Sharing the Good News." I guess not everyone is comfortable yet with the term.

What is evangelization? Following the lead of Paul VI, the U.S. Bishops say that evangelization means "bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself." (EN, 18)

This is clearly what John Eudes sought to do. First of all, he sought to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ into every human situation. He brought the message of Gospel directly to people. He did not sit in the Oratory or community residence and wait for

people to come to him. He went directly to the people who needed to be moved by the gospel. Not only did he preach missions in the town squares, but as we saw, he gathered people from various groups, with various needs, and helped them apply the gospel to their lives. He encouraged priests to be more spiritual. He preached the loving message of forgiveness to prostitutes. He even brought a challenging message to royalty and the rich.

The second part of the definition speaks of "seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself." There is no doubt that John Eudes wanted to unleash God's grace of conversion in those who attended his missions. He wanted to rouse them and enliven their faith. As I mentioned earlier, the ultimate goal was for the participants in the mission to experience the grace of conversion, confess their sins and receive absolution from one of the priests, and return to the Eucharist. John Eudes was well aware of the power of God's grace in the process of conversion.

We see this also in the charism John Eudes bequeathed to the community of Sisters he founded. In the "Special Wishes" section of the original Constitutions he wrote for them, he asks that they focus their attention "above all on zeal for the salvation of souls." They too were to work for the conversion of the women entrusted to their care. There is no doubt that conversion was a major concern of John Eudes.

We hear the same echo in the words of St. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier in words addressed to her Sisters:

Each and every one of you in this Institute, all work for the salvation of souls, or at least by vocation are dedicated to this mission. Even those who work in the garden, at the bakery, in the linen room or have other occupations elsewhere, all work at saving souls. Those who pray as well as those who, instead of prayers, offer their work to God...

Love this precious vocation for which you should be infinitely grateful to our God for his ineffable kindness. Whatever your occupation, remember that you must always have the intention of working for the salvation of souls. You know what the Son of God's mission on earth was. Consider that you are privileged to share a similar vocation... [Lectionary, p. 242]

Conversion is a difficult process to define. It is a mysterious interplay of human effort and the grace of God. John Eudes was very aware that it was

not he that was bringing about these conversions. It was God's grace working through him or his band of preachers or the Sisters. Very often in his spiritual autobiography he makes reference to what they were able to do through the grace of God. While John Eudes was a powerful speaker and his team of missionaries worked long and hard, it was God's grace at work.

John Eudes was familiar with the dynamics of grace in the process of conversion. He had a deep appreciation for St. Augustine and would have been familiar with his great work *The Confessions*. As you know, Augustine chronicles his own experience of conversion. John Eudes would also have been familiar with other important autobiographies that attest to the dynamics of conversion and grace: people like Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila, and *The Story of a Soul* of Therese of Lisieux.

Also very important for John Eudes was what he learned about conversion from the Scriptures. It is a recurring theme in both Testaments, but especially in the gospels and the letters of Paul. A contemporary spiritual writer has analyzed the dynamics of conversion as presented in the Scriptures and described it as follows:

Within the Judeo Christian writings, conversion means a two phased turning: first, it is a turning away from alienation and sin, a phase ordinarily called repentance; second, it is a turning toward the living God, a phase sometimes called enlightenment. The Christian Scriptures refer to this process by two Greek words: *metanoia*, a turning from sin, and *epistrophe*, a turning toward God.

This two fold dynamic is so clear in the writings of St. John Eudes. Think of all those prayers he wrote that describe this process. For example:

Adore, bless and love the infinite charity that God has for all creatures, and for each one of us in particular. Thank him for the numerous signs of his great love. Ask pardon for all of our ingratitude and for all the sins we have committed against charity. Give yourself over to this divine charity, and ask God to destroy in you whatever is contrary to it, that God may establish his throne in your hearts.

Do you hear the double movement in there? Asking forgiveness so that we may give ourselves more completely. That emptying of self that leads to being filled with Christ. Detachment is always for the sake of attachment. It's all the same thing. It is the dynamic of conversion.

Our recent experience with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) has been a wonderful experience for the Church and an instructive experience with regard to conversion. When it is properly implemented, the RCIA outlines the conversion process in four periods. In this four-part process we see a paradigm for understanding and encouraging conversion in other settings of evangelization and faith formation.

Time does not permit us to look at this process in depth, but I encourage any of you who have not experienced the RCIA process to speak to a parish coordinator or meet with someone who has been through the process to appreciate its impact on growth in faith. Listen to Fr. Richard Fragomeni, a well-known liturgist and conference speaker. This quotation is taken from the article on conversion in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*.

From the RCIA, and the pattern of initiation that it outlines, several observations about conversion can be gleaned. First, conversion is imaged as a journey of transformation led by the movement of God. Second, it is a communal experience involving the entire community in its witness and encouragement. Third, the RCIA considers conversion as an ongoing process, celebrated in stages and finding its ultimate Christian expression in the celebration of the Eucharist. Fourth, conversion is not a onetime experience but rather a lifetime transformation that is caught up in savoring the mystery revealed in Christ. Fifth, in keeping with ecumenical insights on the meaning of conversion and the common heritage of baptism, paragraph 2 of the National Statutes for the Catechumenate, an appendix to the RCIA, states that the term "convert," traditionally associated with baptized non Catholics seeking membership in the Roman Catholic Church, is to be "reserved strictly for those converted from unbelief to Christian belief."

Some of these points we have already seen, namely, that conversion is a movement of God's grace in us and the fact that conversion culminates in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is worth noting that conversion is seen as a community experience. In a different way for a different time in the life of Church, John Eudes celebrated conversion as a community event through his parish missions. I think he would also affirm the truth that conversion is an ongoing experience. His pastoral experience helped him appreciate the need for ongoing conversion. As he moved from place to place and eventually returned to places he had preached earlier, he discovered the need to lead people through the process of conversion over and over again.

We need to stop on comment on Fragomini's last point in light of the evangelical work

of John Eudes. While we can find many points of contact between the writing and preaching of John Eudes and the spirit of the post Vatican II Church, ecumenism is not one of them. He was not what we would call "ecumenically sensitive." It is understandable when he is seen in his times. This is the Catholic Counter Reformation and he was an intimate part of its pastoral activity. He wanted to draw those who had gone over to Protestantism back to the Roman Catholic Church. It might be unreasonable for him to think otherwise. However, even though John Eudes sought to convert Protestants, he was also seeking to renew the faith of ordinary Catholics, especially those who were lax. In his mind, the missions were for everyone.

I have already mentioned the importance John Eudes placed on the Sacrament of Penance as a part of the mission. He saw it as the sacramental experience of the conversion the mission sought to enable in each person. Our contemporary understanding of conversion as seen in the Rite of Penance is in line with the pastoral practice of John Eudes. This is evidenced most clearly in The Rite of Penance which, quoting from Paul VI's apostolic constitution *Paenitemini* of 1966, states:

The most important act of the penitent is contrition, which is "heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more" [see the Council of Trent, DS 1676].... "We can only approach the kingdom of Christ by metanoia. This is a profound change of the whole person by which we begin to consider, judge, and arrange our life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in his Son in the last days and given to us in abundance" ... [Paul VI, *Paenitemini*]. The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition. For conversion should affect a person from within toward a progressively deeper enlightenment and an ever closer likeness to Christ" (DOL, p. 959).

It is clear that John Eudes sought a total conversion of the whole person. While he certainly did not put it in these terms, he desired to bring about the intellectual, moral and religious conversion that the great theologian Bernard Lonergan speaks of. I return to Richard Fragomini's article for a good summary of what Lonergan taught:

Intellectual conversion is understood as a radical clarification of experience and meaning that allows the human person to eliminate stubborn and misleading myths about reality, objectivity, and knowledge. Thus intellectual conversion allows the human person to differentiate various levels of meanings, to grasp the horizon of one's own knowing and not to confuse sense perception with objectivity.

Moral conversion is the shifting of one's criteria for decision making from the satisfaction of the self as basis of choice to the discovery and pursuit of value. Moral conversion, therefore, allows the person to opt for the truly good. The morally converted person is able to perceive the inherent biases in the self, in culture, and in history, thus allowing for authentic decision-making.

Religious conversion occurs when one is radically grasped by ultimate concern or love. It is a falling in love unconditionally, leading to surrender to the transcendent, and a gracious being wholeness. Lonergan further differentiates the religious conversion and develops the notion of Christian conversion as God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given in Christ. Thus a person can experience religious conversion without thematizing the phenomenon in Christian categories.

Without eliminating intellectual conversion, John Eudes would have placed far more emphasis on what Lonergan calls the moral and religious conversion. He himself experienced that flooding of God's love into his own life. Many of those who have studied John Eudes' life and writing believe that at some point in his life he experienced a moment of conversion. He does not tell us about it, but at some point he became convinced that God's merciful love was the most powerful force in the world. This is somewhat remarkable given the Jansenist atmosphere in which he lived. His stance on God's mercy and love put him at odds with the Jansenists, particularly some of his confreres in the Oratory. Even so, he preached God's mercy and love, seeking the full and complete conversion of the person.

The definition of evangelization that the bishops gave in their pastoral plan speaks of converting individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel. It is not just individuals who are in need of transformation or the effects of divine grace. Society and culture are in need of conversion. Paul VI comments on this aspect.

... for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humanity's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.
[EN, 19]

The Gospel message is amplified by the Church's rich social teaching. A serious reflection on the Christian message will often call us to confront 'the injustices we see

in our culture and in the larger society in which we live.

John Eudes was not afraid to confront injustice. It was included in his preaching. Let me share one example. In a letter to the priests at the seminary at Caen, he tells them about a sermon he gave on the February 8, 1661, the feast of the Holy Heart of Mary. It was given at the Benedictine Monastery in Paris, and toward the end of his sermon, the Queen herself arrived. He took the opportunity to address her directly. He used the recent fire at the Louvre to make his point.

Madam, I have nothing to say to Your Majesty except to implore you most humbly, since his Divine Majesty has brought you here, never to forget the powerful sermon that God has preached to you and the King through the fire which destroyed parts of the Louvre. You are well aware that for Christians nothing happens by chance, but that everything takes place through the providence and will of God. This fire means several things.

It reminds us that kings are allowed to build Louvres, but that God orders them to lighten the burden of their subjects, to take pity on so many widows, orphans and people overwhelmed by poverty. [Lectionary, p. 134]

He saw it as his duty to confront injustices, to challenge the system and to advocate for the poor. John Eudes realized what the U.S. Bishops meant when they say in their Pastoral Plan on evangelization:

The validity of our having accepted the Gospel does not only come from what we feel or what we know; it comes also from the way we serve others, especially the poorest, the most marginal, the most hurting, the most defenseless, the least loved. An evangelization that stays inside ourselves is not an evangelization into the Good News of Jesus Christ. [*Go and Make Disciples*, p. 3]

I'd like to conclude this reflection on conversion by using what the Bishops said in their Pastoral Plan as a summary:

Conversion is the change of our lives that comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit. All who accept the Gospel undergo change as we continually put on the mind of Christ by rejecting sin and becoming more faithful disciples in his Church. Unless we undergo conversion, we have not truly accepted the Gospel. (*Go and Make Disciples*, page 2)

The Call to be Evangelizers

Once we understand that the goal of evangelization is conversion, it is not hard to hear the call to all of us to be evangelizers. Pope Paul VI said it clearly in his Apostolic Exhortation:

The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give oneself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in turn. (EN, 24)

The mission to be evangelizers is something we share with all Christians. By Baptism, all Christians share in this work. As Paul VI reminds us, the mark of a true discipleship is the willingness and desire to share one's faith with others.

In a particular way, the two congregations that John Eudes founded were both directed toward conversion: the ongoing conversion of their members and the mission of bringing back "lost souls."

Each of us is privileged to share in the continuation of Christ's mission of bringing the Good News to all - the message which leads to conversion when it touches the heart. As we all know, if we are to be channels of God's grace to others, we have to be full of grace ourselves. John Eudes said that divine grace is the first foundation of his congregations.

There are a variety of ways that Christians are called to evangelize. They fall into two categories: word and witness. Again, Paul VI highlights the importance of each in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would dare not imagine... All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers. (EN, 21)

This is what St. Francis of Assisi had in mind when he said, "Preach the gospel at all time, and if necessary use words." The witness of our lives is so important. A friend of mine used to say, "Who you are is speaking so loudly, I can't hear what your saying." Our words on behalf of the gospel will certainly be ineffective if our lives and our actions are not inspired by the gospel.

Immediately after he speaks of evangelization by witness, Paul VI goes on to speak of the need to proclaim the gospel in our words.

Nevertheless [personal witness] always remains insufficient, because even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified - what Peter called always having "your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope you all have" (1 Peter 3:15) - and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. (EN, 22)

Pope John Paul II has also been a strong proponent of the mission of evangelization. In his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, he summed up the three objectives of this mission. The first is to proclaim the Gospel to all people. The second is to help bring about the reconversion of those who have received the Gospel but live it only nominally. The third is to deepen the Gospel in the lives of all believers. (*Redemptoris Missio*, 33)

Paul VI reminded us of those people to whom we are sent with the message of the Good News. Our mission of evangelization today is directed to the same people John Eudes preached to in the seventeenth century. The Pope mentioned five groups.

The very first group he identified was active Catholics. He tells us that we need to hear the Good News over and over again. We need to hear its invitation to deeper faith in Christ. John Eudes preached to the same group in order to sustain and nourish their faith.

The next group the Holy Father mentioned was inactive or estranged Catholics. Statistics show that there 12,000,000 inactive Catholics in United States today. That is 26% of the baptized Catholics over eighteen. There are many reasons for their inactivity, but it is clear that they need to hear the Good News in a way that invites them to return to the practice of their faith. This was a major goal of St. John Eudes.

The next group Pope Paul VI identified as "other Christians." He is speaking of Protestant and Orthodox Christians. In the spirit of Vatican II, we recognize that the Holy Spirit is moving among Christians to help us work past our differences. It seems to me that the ecumenical movement was stronger twenty years ago. Yet there have been significant indications that our present Pope has this as a priority. His writings have made this clear (*Ut Unum Sint* and his messages prior to and during the Jubilee year). He has also made important and symbolic gestures to bridge the gap among Christian churches. Ecumenism is another form of evangelization.

The fourth group that Paul VI mentions includes members of religions that are not Christian. There are 11,000,000 of these in United States. There are a variety of religions included in this group, Jewish being largest. This is a sensitive area. Great progress has been made in Jewish-Catholic relations in recent years. At the same time, it is important for us to hear the words of Paul VI: "Neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ."

There is a final group that is in need of evangelization. These people are referred to as "unchurched." In the United States they number 70,000,000. The unchurched are defined as "those whose ultimate values are not being reinforced by participation in a church, synagogue or temple." For statistical purposes, they are those who have not voluntarily worshipped in a church, temple or synagogue in the last six months (except for weddings, funerals, holy days, etc.) Once again there are many reasons for these people remaining unchurched, but the challenge for us is clear: announce the message of the Gospel to them in a way that invites them to put their faith in Christ.

The United States bishops sum this up when they say:

"Evangelization, then, has both an inward and an outward direction. Inwardly, it calls for our continued receiving of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our ongoing conversion both as individuals and as a Church... Outwardly, evangelization addresses those who have not heard the Gospel or, having heard it, have stopped practicing their faith, and those who seek the fullness of faith." (*Go and Make Disciples*, p. 3)

Thus far we have spoken of the "why" of evangelization, the "what," and "to whom." The last section of my presentation will focus on the "how" of evangelization.

How John Eudes Would Evangelize Today

John Eudes used preaching, teaching and writing as his primary tools for evangelization in the seventeenth century. How would he evangelize today? I think he would still preach, teach and write, but he would also look at the wide variety of means at his disposal and use everything at his disposal.

In that spirit I want to suggest just a few ways that we can evangelize today. To organize this random and incomplete list of strategies, I will use the three goals that the US bishops propose in their pastoral plan for evangelization:

Goal 1: to bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others.

Goal 2: to invite all people... to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith.

Goal 3: to foster Gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society, so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ.

The suggestions that I am going to make are simply meant to serve as a catalyst for your own thinking and perhaps even for further reflection in your community. For a more complete list, see the pastoral plan, *Go and Make Disciples*, part II.

Once again, goal one is to bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others. A variety of movements have this as part of their mission. I think of things like Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, Charismatic Renewal, Search and TEC for young people, and a variety of others. Our involvement in these movements can help us be evangelizers.

For those of us who preach, we recognize the importance of a well-prepared and well-delivered homily. Pope Paul VI highlighted this when he said, "Preaching, the verbal proclamation of a message, is indeed always indispensable... The Word remains ever relevant, especially when it is the bearer of the power of God." [42] He also stresses the importance of the homily at Mass as a tool of evangelization [43].

It is remarkable how many Catholics today still do not read the Bible. Anything we can do to foster a deeper love for God's Word is evangelizing, whether it is by encouraging frequent individual reading of the Bible or organizing Scripture study or prayer groups.

There are formal and informal ways that we share our faith with others. Sometimes we may teach in an organized and planned way, either for adults or children. At other times, evangelization happens through our willingness to talk about our faith to family members, to those with whom we minister, or to people we meet in our daily routines.

Goal two is to invite all people... to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith. To me, one of the obvious things we need to do is to make our parishes more welcoming. We can also look for ways to help Catholics feel comfortable about sharing their faith with others.

Special attention must be given to reaching out to those who join our assemblies infrequently. One group that I think of often is young adults (people between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five). This is the least likely age group to be found in most parish liturgies. Yet we have important moments that become evangelizing opportunities with them, e.g., when they come to get married, or to have a baby baptized, or for the child's First Communion. Do you know any young adults in your own family or among your acquaintances? Have you ever asked them to come to church with you? The main reason young adults give for not going to Mass is: "I don't have anyone to go with." Also, a recent Gallup poll showed that 35% of the unchurched were open to an invitation to return to church but had never been asked.

The third goal is to foster Gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society, so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ. What a challenge!

This goal means supporting those cultural elements in our society that reflect Catholic values and challenging those that reject them. It involves reaching out to those in need and at the same time working to remove the causes of injustice. It includes making sure that our own institutions are just.

When we encourage people of all ages to engage in service to others we are addressing this goal. When we try to foster the importance of the family, or to help people live their faith in the workplace, or to support those who work for justice, we are doing the work of evangelization.

Let me conclude with a few more concrete suggestions for becoming a more evangelizing Church. First of all, each one of us here can look at his or her life from

the viewpoint of evangelization. Where do you have to opportunities to support someone in their faith? How can you share your faith with others?

Secondly, we need to look at the evangelizing aspects of our Congregations. Reread your community's Constitutions with an ear for the challenge to evangelize. Evaluate you're the witness we give collectively to be Christ's presence in the world. pay attention to the opportunities you may have to evangelize in your ministry. Those who work in parishes have an important challenge to make sure that evangelization is high on the list of parish priorities.

Finally, the one thing that is the easiest and most important for all of us is to pray. Pray for those whose faith is weak. Pray for those who have wandered from the fold. Pray for your family members who no longer go to church. Pray for young people who may be searching and looking for a reason to believe. Join the U.S. bishops in their prayer that "God's Holy Spirit will give Catholics the kind of faith needed to begin evangelizing seriously."

With St. John Eudes, we all seek to advance the life and reign of Jesus in the hearts of all the God's people, and freely give ourselves to this task *corde magno et animo volenti*.