

## The Universal Call

Edwin Uzi Mendez and the ganglords

- when Uzi was young in Chicago, gang lord of Cobras

- he developed a heart for evangelization by reaching out to estranged dad who received confession before he died

- set up a table with SPSE within Latin Kings territory and some thugs approached him

  - “We don’t need you! We’re members of the biggest gang in the whole country!” one of them sneered. Then they flashed their sign to me.

  - “Oh, yeah? I belong to the biggest gang in the whole *world!*”

  - This got them thinking. “What gang is that?” they wanted to know.

  - I flashed the sign of my gang. I made the Sign of the Cross.

  - “The Catholic Church!” I replied.

- they stayed as they talked about the Lord’s mercy, protection of our Lady greater than any gang

  - people had to pay money for protection from the gang

- that evening they went to church and went to confession, Divine Mercy Sunday

Now most of us are not called to go into gang territory to set up a table and evangelize. **But we are all reminded of our duty this Pentecost Sunday to evangelize. Pope Benedict XVI says that “the work of evangelization is a fundamental duty [and imperative] upon the whole People of God.”**

I will share the three basic keys to evangelization to assist us in this call to evangelize. However, we may feel like we are not qualified. We may feel like we all need PhDs in theology and so we leave the work of evangelization up to the priests and the nuns. But really at the heart of evangelization is sharing what you love.

I really love Vietnamese beef noodle soup. I know I may be biased but it is excellent. But whenever people ask me to hang out I always tell them let’s go for pho! I am like a pho evangelizer. I can tell you why that broth is good, the quality of beef at this place or that, the type of hoisin sauce they use, with a little bit of lime and sriracha to spice it up! Truly I can tell you that I have many converts.

See, I don't need a PhD in pho in order to speak about my love for pho. My love for pho itself speaks to the intrinsic goodness of Vietnamese beef noodle soup.

This is the first key: likewise, we do not need a PhD in theology to speak about our love for Jesus. We should not fear that we are not qualified, because what qualifies us is that we love the Lord and our genuine love for God is what gives credibility to our message.

The beautiful thing about this is that the more we love Jesus, the more we want to share him with others and the more we share him with the others the more we want to learn about him to share him more effectively.

For some of us, we may be called to evangelize in far off lands and mission territory. But in some ways, our mission territory is right here. I can tell you right now that if we walk outside this Church we are already in mission territory. And some of the best mission territory we have is in our relationships with our family and friends. Sometimes we may feel that it is probably easier to go into gang territory to evangelize than to evangelize to our family. No prophet is accepted in their own town.

But this is the second key which is important to evangelization: evangelization always happens in the context of a relationship. No one will care what you know until they know that you care. People can tell if you are trying to sell the faith like a sleazy car salesman or whether you genuinely care about them and this happens in the context of a relationship.

There is a story of a famous Catholic speaker who was reaching thousands of people all over the world, but he despite that he could not reach out to his son. He felt like he was losing his son. So what he began doing is he started trying to know the interests of his son. Through some awkward conversations he found out that his son was into this heavy metal band. He did not like heavy metal at all but he bought some CDs, listened to the songs, memorized some of the lyrics, researched the history of the band.

Then one day, he found out that the band was coming into town so he bought two tickets and told his son that he could go to the concert on the condition that his dad could come with him. So this Catholic speaker and his son are at this heavy metal concert and to the surprise of the son, the father was singing along and speaking knowledgeably about the band. This opened doors in their relationship and that evening after the concert while they were eating out, the son started talking about his difficulties in life and faith and the father was able to reach out to him in a way he had never been able to before. And now the son is more involved with his faith and attending a Catholic college.

No one will care what you know until they know that you care. Whether it is in your family, workplace, spin class, your barber, these are opportunities for us to charitably but also prudently bring up the topic of faith.

Finally, the third key is that we have to realize that we are not doing this on our own. We have to realize that we are the messengers of the message and not the Lord of the message. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who will change hearts and so we need to pray for those we want to evangelize.

During Bishop Barron's visit, he asked how things were going at their new outpost. One of the missionaries responded, "Well, when we first got here, we decided to identify the most influential student on campus and then pray for his conversion. The most influential person here is the quarterback of the football team, so we've been eagerly praying for him." "Oh," Bishop Barron replied. "How's that working out?" "Well," the student responded, "We've been praying for him every single day, by name, for three or four months now. And though we haven't gotten him yet, we have his roommate and his girlfriend. They've both converted to the Catholic Church. We figure it's only a matter of time before God wins him over, too."

This Pentecost Sunday, we are reminded that we are all called to evangelize. We can summarize the keys to evangelization like this: evangelizing out of love, evangelizing because of love and evangelizing by the Spirit of love. We are called to evangelize from the fullness of love we have in our hearts, because of the love and concern we have for others and by the power of the Spirit of Love who makes all things possible. Out of love, because of love and by the Spirit of love. That is why we evangelize and we are reminded today we ask for a new outpouring of

the Holy Spirit, a renewing and a reawakening of the gift of the Spirit that is already within us to give us the courage, the strength and the power to evangelize just like the apostles did.