

Is Becoming an Intentional Disciple the Goal? (Part I of III)

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Is Becoming an Intentional Disciple the Goal? (Part 1 of 3)

I was leafing through, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*, currently a very popular book in Catholic circles that seeks to describe the practical process of awakening discipleship in our parishes. According to Amazon.com, the work has been very popular, even being ranked in the last year, #9 for sales of all Catholic titles.^[i]

Author Sherry Weddell describes that “The Church fulfills her mission when she guides every member of the faithful to discover and live his/her own vocation in freedom, to bring it to fulfillment in charity.”^[ii] She calls us to become intentional disciples of Jesus by navigating five stages or thresholds of faith, stages which bring new clarity to the process of understanding our own growth, and of evangelizing those we encounter. Weddell’s five



steps to sparking intentional discipleship begin with *trust*, then *curiosity* about Jesus, next *openness* followed by *seeking* Him and finally to serving Him as an *intentional disciple*. Later, Weddell describes the power of praying with intentional disciples in an awakened parish: “I could feel a spiritual energy ...as though the intensity of the prayer of those gathered lifted my own prayer to a new level.”

For many years, we have not understood very well the sequence that believers progress through in coming closer to God, something *Forming Intentional Disciples* answers in part. Many of us have offered full strength Catholic teaching to people who had not begun the journey. However, if we stop the sequence of development at becoming an *intentional disciple* we shortchange ourselves and those we serve in our parishes. Our goal for ourselves and our parishes is *to go beyond being an intentional disciple* for intentional discipleship is just another step in the journey, not the endpoint for we are each called. We are called to more, to true holiness and contemplative union with God!

Dr. Ralph Martin, STD, Director of Graduate Theology Programs in the New Evangelization at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Michigan,^[iii] describes that what we need “To be holy is not primarily a matter of how many Rosaries we say or how much Christian activity [intentional discipleship] we’re engaged in; it’s a matter of having our heart transformed into a heart of love...to love God and our neighbor wholeheartedly.”^[iv] To go to the depth of living our vocations, we have to **be** more than intentional disciples. Intentional discipleship helps us form the correct dispositions to resist His grace in nothing, in order to go on further, to be “the salt of the earth” and the “light to the world.”



Saint John Paul the Great challenges us further with the words: Parishes of the Third Millennium are to become “schools of prayer” and places where training in holiness is given.^[v] As a follow-up or supplement to Weddell’s classic, in our parishes we need to cultivate seeds from the riches of our Catholic heritage and recognize that even though challenging, contemplative union with God is possible. Spiritual master Father Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O. P. affirms, “The value of a seed can be known only if we have some idea of what should grow from it; for example, in the order of nature, to know the value of the seed contained in an acorn, we must have seen a fully developed oak.”^[vi]



Martin helps us move from *doing* as intentional disciples to being, to envision ourselves as oaks. He describes that to do this, we must avail “ourselves of the wisdom of the mystical tradition of the Church, [those]...writings and witness of life that [focus] on the process of prayer and stages of growth in the spiritual life.”^[vii] As we pray, serve our parish and go outward for mission in the world, we must keep before us, “the normal possibilities of the human soul in a person who has reached his full development.”^[viii]



We want to renew and awaken ourselves and our parishes so others can sense the living water of Jesus, as Weddell describes. We do this by continuing the journey of union with God, beyond intentional discipleship, to “remain humble, meek, and merciful in the midst of persecution, even toward persecutors, and in this torment not only to preserve peace but to communicate it to others. This is truly the full perfection of Christian life” and more than what we do intend ourselves. In the next two posts, we will explore a few themes for today’s disciple that facilitates true growth of union with God^[ix] so others can seek solace in the shade of our branches!

^[i] http://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Books-Catholicism/zgbs/books/12292/ref=zg_bs_nav_b_2_12290#3

^[ii] Weddell, Sherry, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, Huntington, IN, 2012, p. 82.

^[iii] Dr. Ralph Martin is also Consultor for the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, and expert for the World Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization.

^[iv] Martin, Dr. Ralph, *The Fulfillment of All Desire*, Emmaus Road Publishing, Steubenville, OH, 2006, p. 2.

^[v] cf *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 1, 2001, paragraph 33.

^[vi] Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., Fr. Réginald, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Tan Books and Publishing, Rockford, Ill, 1947, p. 4.

^[vii] Martin, op cit, p. 3.

^[viii] Garrigou-Lagrange, op cit p. 30.

^[ix] My new book chapter, “Spiritual Direction: To Radiate His Love in the Parish and More”, being published soon will explore these themes further.

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