Dear Sisters and Brothers

Wow. It’s already 2014! My heart is filled with gratitude as I think back over the past year – and the past 34 years of Renewal Ministries’ history – and marvel at all the Lord has done and is doing. I am grateful for you who have been such faithful supporters.

Peter Herbeck and I often talk about what we are discovering in Scripture or what we sense is happening in our culture and periodically we note how an alleged famous saying of St. Francis – “Preach the Gospel and if necessary use words” – is not really an authentic saying, and is so often used to justify not speaking the name of Jesus or the truths of his message when it is both appropriate and necessary to do so. Peter has written a good article on this and since it is longer than usual I am keeping my remarks here somewhat shorter.

I continue to be amazed at all the opportunities the Lord is giving me to contribute to the strengthening of leadership in the Church. As 2013 came to an end I was able to give three talks to over 200 priests of the Archdiocese of Washington, DC at their annual Clergy Convocation. It was good to see Cardinal Wuerl again after the month we spent together in October of 2012 during the World Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, and to meet his auxiliary bishops for the first time. It was also good to be able to conduct a study day for the clergy of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky.

We have a significant anniversary coming up in 2014 – 30 years of The Choices We Face on EWTN. Who would have thought! In the March issue of our newsletter you’ll be able to get a preview of some of the new programs that will launch in March.

Until next month; I am grateful to God and grateful to you.

Your brother in Christ,

Ralph Martin
How many Catholics know deep down that they have been personally sent by Jesus to proclaim the word of God? How many have ever felt the burden of this responsibility?

St Francis the Preacher

“Always preach the Gospel, and, if necessary, use words!”

I think most Catholics have heard this quote at one time or another. It’s the line we as Catholics like to use when speaking about evangelization. As you probably know, it is attributed to St. Francis.

There is a double irony in using this phrase. First, St. Francis never said it, and second, it is often used to imply that somehow St. Francis only rarely found it “necessary to use words.” The saint’s approach to preaching couldn’t be further from the truth. St. Francis loved to preach:

“He filled all the earth with Christ’s Gospel, so that often in one day he would make the circuit of four or five villages or even towns preaching to everyone the Gospel of the Kingdom of God: and, edifying his hearers not less by his example than by his words, he had made a tongue of his whole body.”

(First Life of St Francis, Thomas of Celano, Chapter IV, #97)

This understanding of St. Francis, given repeatedly to us by his primary biographers and from those who knew him best, is mostly ignored today. The contemporary picture of St. Francis is either focused on his heroic virtues, particularly his love for the poor, or a more ideologically driven image of Francis as an environmental activist or the patron of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

How did this quote ever end up being the standard interpretive key to St. Francis’ attitude toward preaching the Gospel? The quote is not in any of the small number of written documents or letters attributed to St. Francis, nor can it be found anywhere in the Omnibus of Sources for the Life of St Francis.

In defending the quote some people point to a command given by St. Francis in Chapter 17 of the First Rule from the year 1221:

“No friar may preach contrary to Church law or without the permission of his minister. The minister, for his part, must be careful not to grant permission indiscriminately. All the friars, however, should preach by their example.”

He expands on that same command in Chapter 9 from the Rule written in 1223:

“The friars are forbidden to preach in any diocese, if the bishop objects to it. No friar should dare to preach to the people unless he has been examined and approved by the Minister General of the Order and has received from him the commission to preach.”

The point here is that friars are to preach under right authority, whether that be the Bishop of a Diocese or the Minister General who has the authority within the order to commission friars to preach.
We need to be honest with ourselves. Have we ever made the effort to speak directly with another person about Jesus and the good news of salvation? If not, why not?

Faith Comes Through Hearing

The recent Popes have exhorted all the baptized to take up the mission of proclaiming the Gospel, not just in deeds, but also in words. Pope Benedict provided a typical example in his encyclical Verbum Domini:

“Since the entire People of God is a people which has been ‘sent’, the Synod reaffirmed that ‘the mission of proclaiming the word of God is the task of all of the disciples of Jesus Christ based on their Baptism.’ No believer in Christ can feel dispensed from this responsibility which comes from the fact of our sacramentally belonging to the Body of Christ.” (Verbum Domini, #94)

How many Catholics know deep down that they have been personally sent by Jesus to proclaim the word of God? How many have ever felt the burden of this responsibility? Here Pope Benedict simply echoes the clear teaching of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity:

“However, an apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one’s way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life.” (Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, #6)

To “announce Christ by words,” to believers and non-believers alike, ought to be a normal part of a mature, authentic and integrated Catholic life. Simply put, it’s what followers of Jesus do.

Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi, challenges all of us to examine ourselves on this very point:

“Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the Kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.” (EN #24)

Has the “unthinkable” become the norm today for most Catholics? How many in our day ever feel it “necessary to use words?” Instead of finding in
From the Field

St. Francis the inspiration to use words, the “if necessary” emphasis provides an excuse to avoid speaking about Jesus.

If the New Evangelization is going to become more than an effort of a very small minority of Catholics to proclaim the Gospel, we all need to examine our lives in light of Pope Paul VI’s “test of truth.” We need to be honest with ourselves. Have we ever made the effort to speak directly with another person about Jesus and the good news of salvation? If not, why not?

We have to overcome what Vittorio Messori described so aptly as a “mutism” that grips the Church in our time:

“Today, precisely today, we may note on the part of many Christians—and, unfortunately many Catholics—a kind of mutism, a kind of reticence of re-proclaiming the faith and its reasons. So many who could alleviate the current lethal claustrophobia of the world, by explicitly re-proclaiming the Word that does not delude and that saves us from despair, seem to want to be merely ‘like others’: devoting themselves indeed, to others, but only as human, extremely human ‘social workers’; devoid of any wish to say that it is Christ who inspires them and that it is he who gives a significance to their actions.” (Vittorio Messori, “Confessors of the Faith in Our Time,” from Laity Today: Rediscovering Confirmation, p. 29)

How many of us stand mute today? What is the reason for so few words about Jesus? Is it the fear of others? What is holding us back from speaking to others about Jesus? Are we embarrassed by the gospel?

St. Paul tells us, that “faith comes through hearing, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.” (Romans 10:17) The proclamation of the gospel is an essential and irreplaceable part of evangelization. There is no evangeliza-

The proclamation of the gospel is an essential and irreplaceable part of evangelization. There is no evangelization without it. Until we understand that and embrace it, the New Evangelization will never get off the ground.

Please Pray...

+ that in this new year all Catholics can respond to the call of the New Evangelization and share their faith with courage and confidence.
+ for continued opportunities to strengthen and equip the leadership of the Catholic Church.
+ in thanksgiving for thirty fruitful years of producing and airing The Choices We Face television series.
+ for the prayer intentions of all our supporters and their family members, especially as they face the challenges of illness and economic uncertainty.
tion without it. Until we understand that and embrace it, the New Evangelization will never get off the ground.

We all must take to heart the words of Pope John Paul II to the Church in America:

“Everyone should keep in mind that the vital core of the new evangelization must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom. (Ecclesia in America, #66)

“Everything planned in the Church must have Christ and his Gospel as its starting-point. Therefore, the Church in America must speak increasingly of Jesus Christ, the human face of God and the divine face of man. It is this proclamation that truly makes an impact on people, awakens and transforms hearts, in a word, converts.” (Ibid, #67)

Unleash the Word

The time has come for all of us to “speak increasingly of Jesus Christ.” The tendency to limit evangelization to the witness of life, as important as it is, is simply not enough. Authentic Christian witness is necessary, but it is not sufficient.

Proclamation is irreplaceable because the gospel message about Jesus Christ “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.” (Romans 1:16) This is why proclamation “makes an impact,” and “awakens and transforms hearts.” Only the power of God can awaken the human heart. God set it up that way. He has decided to reveal himself and the plan of salvation through the preaching of the gospel:

“For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” (1 Cor. 1:21)

St. Francis understood this. He embraced the folly of the cross with passion in his own life and he “preached Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23) knowing that through the folly of that message God’s power would go forth to win souls for Christ, to snatch them from the clutches of the devil, to free them from sin and the death-directed destiny it produces.

St. Francis shows us the way forward with holiness and mission, witness of life and proclamation. It’s time to break the silence and to unleash the power of God’s word!

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Save the Date!

22nd Annual Lift Jesus Higher Rally
Saturday, March 1, 2014
9:00 AM - 5:30 PM
Metro Toronto Convention Center
North Building, 255 Front Street West

For Tickets, Consignments and Information call 416.251.4255 or 905.270.2510, email: pdkromer@rogers.com or visit www.lift-jesus-higher-rally.org

Special Guests: Cardinal Thomas Collins, Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC
The Renewal Team: Ralph Martin & Sr. Ann Shields, SGL, Fr. Scott McCaig, CC

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“I FORGIVE WHOEVER WILL KILL ME.” This note was found near the body of a young man who was sitting alone as the sounds of the genocide drew nearer, until they engulfed him and left his mutilated body in a pool of blood. As this testimony was shared with us on this trip, I once again marveled at the infinite grace that was released from the Cross of Calvary when Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” This grace of forgiveness is a major part of the Good News that Renewal Ministries shares around the world, but way too few have heard that in Christ, this is possible.

For the people of Rwanda the wound of the genocide is real and very deep. Almost everyone we met had lost some or all of their family members and beneath their bright smiles lay a deep emptiness and despair. Once again we taught and ministered to leaders from most of the dioceses in Rwanda. As we prayed with many of them we saw God bring healing and restoration.

After flying from San Antonio to Chicago we boarded a flight to Brussels in route to Rwanda. Nearly 1000 miles out, the pilot informed us that we were returning to Chicago. Someone had tampered with the food and it was a security threat. Four hours later we landed and the help desks were crowded with several hundred passengers. We slept in Chicago and boarded the flight the next evening, arriving Sunday night. My luggage was lost and did not show up for four days!

Our training sessions began on Monday morning at nine; there were 85 participants representing most of the dioceses of Rwanda, as well as nine priests and Bishop Kizito. All came for the Freedom in Christ sessions using the Unbound model of healing and deliverance. Most were totally new to this teaching but a few returned for either a refresher course or a deeper understanding. We taught all morning, took a break for lunch, and then ended with Mass at 6 pm.

Lloyd began the sessions by placing our teaching within the context of the New Evangelization and holiness. He used the Catechism, Scripture and several papal documents to show that both healing and deliverance are meant to bring about a personal encounter with Christ.

As usual I spoke about God’s love, the call on our lives and the understanding that we were created for His delight. This seemed to be a new concept to the participants; they paid rapt attention and took lots of notes. Many people had been involved in witchcraft and all wanted to be free of that particular entryway of evil. In one of the sessions I taught on forgiveness and how unforgiveness is probably the greatest block to receiving God’s healing and freedom. Their questions revealed the deep pain of the genocide and how even people who deeply believe in Jesus and have given Him their lives still struggle with this issue.

Albert, the head of the Emmanuel Community, told this story about a young woman who was brought by her friends to an Unbound session in his community because she was no longer able to speak. She had gone to other churches for deliverance, but it did not help at all.

In 1994 she had been forced to watch as her father’s neck was slit with a machete. As he screamed and reached out to his daughter and asked for something to drink they cut off one of his fingers and forced her to eat it. Afterwards, when she saw a violent movie she became upset and mute and could no longer eat meat. We (Albert and team) wanted to pray with this girl. She wrote that she’d been prayed for before with no results. We wanted her to go through the key of forgiveness. Whenever she was asked about what happened to her father she could write about everything, but she could not reveal that she was forced to eat her father’s finger. Her whole family wanted to help her, but they did not want the girl to forgive.

Our team decided to visit her father’s killer in prison. We found out that he had met Jesus and joined the charismatic renewal. He said, “Even though I’m a charismatic, when I think about what I did, I always hear in my heart that God will never forgive me. Ever since I’ve been in prison, I have asked God how I can be truly free.”

To our amazement the girl wrote a message that she had forgiven him, and suddenly she began to talk. When the girl went back to her home, she asked the family to prepare something to eat, including meat! She became a member of the choir, and that’s when we realized that really God wanted us all to forgive. Many people said that forgiveness was just impossible in her situation. This girl’s choice to forgive affected so many people who were also able to forgive others.

Throughout the week various participants told us the Lord had given them hope and increased their faith. Here is one powerful testimony of freedom through forgiveness:

A beautiful but very sad woman named Teresa came to me for prayer. Her parents separated when she was three months old and her grand-

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mother raised her. At some point she also lived with her father and stepmother. She was forced to work very hard, was given rotten food to eat and was beaten. Her mother came to “rescue her,” promising to send her to school, but instead put her in the fields with the goats. She was told that the Tutsi curse on her family would never be broken and she believed this lie. She was also told as a child, “You will die in your sadness, you will never be anything, you will never be able to have a family; you are useless.”

Her siblings abused her until she finally escaped back to her father. They took her to the witchdoctors for healing. She married and had four children. During the genocide her husband, her father and all eight of her siblings were killed. Afterwards, she joined a community with a priest and other people. She and her children lived in a shack. This priest promised to build her a new house but for whatever reason he withdrew the money and left them homeless. Now her four daughters hate the Catholic Church.

It took a while as she forgave her mother, father, grandmother, stepmother, all the people who murdered her family, the priest, and the other people in the community. We began to break the power of all those lies. She forgave those who took her to the witchdoctor and renounced any spirits that came through that. We renounced the spirits of abandonment, self-hatred, abuse and many other spirits, and Teresa was set free! She said her heart was opened and that she felt like crying for joy. Before she came to this retreat she had asked the Lord, “Show me yourself Lord, show me you are real.” For the first time she felt true joy and the love of the Father. It was amazing to see the difference on her face.

Here in Rwanda, God is lifting up His children that have been oppressed for so long and setting them free and the job of deep, lasting evangelization has only begun. This is why we travel to far away places and why we don’t care about lost luggage. Rwanda is a sign to the whole world of what can be accomplished by the mercy and love of God.
He who loves is not ashamed before men of what he does for God, neither does he hide it through shame though the whole world should condemn it.

— St. John of the Cross

Renewal Ministries is a Catholic ministry committed to renewal and evangelization in the Church. It seeks to proclaim Jesus Christ through its TV and radio outreaches, as well as through books, tapes, conferences, retreats and other international evangelistic events.

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January 2014
Mission to Mexico City Young Adult Trip
January 2-8
Jim Murphy, Debbie Herbeck and Team
Ann Arbor, Michigan

i.d.916 Monthly Disciples’ Night
January 2, 6:15 Mass, Dinner, Speaker
Mary Healy
RSVP at intentionaldisciples916@gmail.com or i.d.916 Facebook

Centennial, Colorado, St. Thomas More Parish
Talk on the New Evangelization
January 6
Ralph Martin
Contact: www.stthomasmore.org
or rsvp@augustineinstitute.org

Denver, Colorado, St. Augustine Institute
Intensive Course on the New Evangelization
January 6-7
Ralph Martin
Contact: www.augustineinstitute.org

*Plymouth, MI, Spiritus Sanctus Academy
Student Retreat
January 14
Sr. Ann Shields, SGL

Ann Arbor, MI,
Heart to Heart Women’s Apostolate
January 21
Peter Herbeck
Contact: 734-930-7497
or www.hearttoheartcwa.com

*Bloomfield Hills, MI, Parish Staff Retreat
January 21
Sr. Ann Shields, SGL

*Charleston, SC
Diocesan Retreat for Deacons and Wives
January 24-25
Ralph Martin

Mission to Liberia
January 24-February 9
Lloyd and Nancy Greenhaw and Team
Contact: 734-662-1730 ext 132
or kkittle@renewalministries.net

Brooklyn, NY
Most Precious Blood Parish Mission
January 31-February 2
Ralph Martin and Sr. Ann Shields, SGL
Contact Fr. Maduri at 347-682-9931

February 2014
Lincoln, NE, St. Michael’s Evening of Renewal
February 3
Ralph Martin
Contact: www.stmichaellincoln.org

*Lincoln, NE, Diocesan Study Day for Priests
February 4
Ralph Martin

Troy, MI
Awaken Ministry, St. Anastasia Catholic Church
February 9
Peter Herbeck
Contact: awakenministry.org
or Maureen Dierkes at dierkesw@aol.com

* Events not open to the public