

Proclaiming the good news with ‘the gospel of the hand’

Pope Francis, in *Joy of the Gospel*, hopes that people have a renewed personal encounter with Jesus, and from that a new chapter of evangelization marked by joy.

The word “gospel” comes from the Old English words for good news. Jesus himself preached about the good news that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and our need to repent and believe in it (Mk 1:15).

But what is God’s kingdom that is at hand? There was a time that I was called upon to teach this to others. But I was hard-pressed to identify, let alone to remember and teach the details of the gospel.

So, I came up with a learning device, inspired by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who used each finger on a hand to stand for a word from Jesus’ parable: “Whatever you do to the least of these, you did it to me.”

My device uses each finger to stand for a message of the good news of the kingdom, gleaned from the New Testament, especially Peter’s post-Pentecost preaching. I even borrowed Mother Teresa’s name for the device: the gospel of the hand.

Your pinky, the smallest and weakest of your fingers, represents the “poor” to whom Jesus preached the gospel. Not those who are materially poor, but who recognize themselves as little, lowly, weak, as utterly dependent on God to be made right with God.

Your ring finger, where spouses wear a symbol of their espousal, represents the “wedding” of divinity with humanity in the person of Jesus. Humanity can’t go to God, so God goes to humanity: the shepherd in search of a lost sheep. This is not something owed to or

deserved by humanity; God is moved only by a love that can't be earned or lost, and that is without reason or bounds, with no strings attached.

Your middle finger, the one that rises higher than the others, represents Jesus raised up on the cross, and raised up from the tomb. By the cross and resurrection, Jesus reversed the curse of original sin, doing what our first parents did not do, namely, obey God, serve regardless of who it is, deserving or not, asks nicely, is aware of the cost, or is grateful.

Your index finger, the one often used to summon people – c'mere – represents the invitation to repent, believe, and be baptized... to be ruled by God. We receive divine life as an undeserved gift, but we each must make that objective reality subjective, personal. Christian faith is participatory; lived in imitation of Jesus' mind and heart, humility and charity, pardon and service.

Finally your thumb, used to gesture to someone to "get out of there," represents the new way of thinking, speaking and acting of a disciple according to Jesus values, which are upside down in relation to the world; for example, if you want to have, give; if you want to live, die (to self).

And so, in a nutshell, the good news to believe in is that, in response to our need for a Savior, God became man in the person of Jesus, whose cross reversed the curse of Adam and Eve, and whose resurrection introduces us into communion with God, all out of love for us, just so that we might be happy with God here and in the hereafter. This is good news; it does bring joy, and a fulfilled life.

Message from Archbishop Jackels, 15 February 2018

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