



St. Paul's Key to Successful Evangelization: *Flexibility*

Read:

1 Cor. 9:16-19, 22b-27

Luke 6:39-42

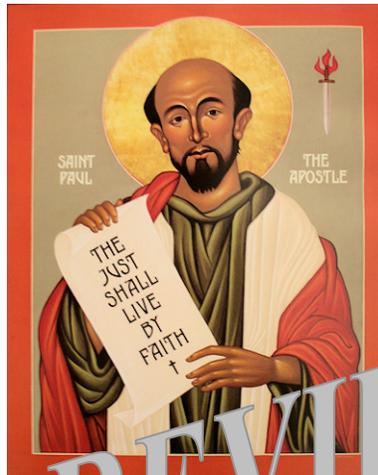
In 1 Cor. 9:16-19, 22b-27, St. Paul shows us the importance of flexibility. He was single-minded in his commitment to spread the Good News, but he was open-minded about how to do it.

After 2000 years of rules and norms and Canon Laws, it's easy to forget where there's actually room for flexibility. Or perhaps we're afraid of change and adaptation, because we interpret "flexibility" as compromising the moral truths of the Church — but that's not the kind of flexibility that Paul promoted.

Paul maintained strict obedience to God's commands and embraced his obligation to preach the Gospel, yet he remained flexible in how he preached it. His calling is our calling, too: passionately running for the eternal prize given to winners in the race against evil. To defeat evil, we have to be flexible so that we can get around its obstacles.

An example of Pauline flexibility is how he preached without charging a fee. Jesus said that servants of God should be paid (see Luke 10:7; Paul acknowledged it two lines above today's scripture, in verse 14). Does this mean he was disobeying Christ? Of course not. Paul chose to obey the higher command of making himself "a slave to all".

And by becoming "all things to all, to save at least some", he met people where they were at, sharing the Good News with them in ways that they could understand.



A good example of this today is the young adult outreach ministry of the Paulist Fathers in North America, www.BustedHalo.com. It attracts people who are on the edge of belief and who are disconnected from the institutional Church. It's effective in drawing them into the Gospel by inviting open discussion, accepting them where they are in their spiritual journey, to inspire new growth.

We can do the same in our everyday lives by accepting others as they are instead of expecting them to adhere to every Church rule *before* teaching them how to find and embrace Jesus in those rules. We help no one when we condemn them for what they're doing wrong, but we help some when we invite them to grow at a pace that doesn't drive them away.

People are only accountable for their sins when they know they are sinning and freely choose to disobey anyway. We, on the other hand, having learned the truth, are accountable for the love and knowledge that we fail to give them; as Jesus says in Luke 6:39-42, we're being hypocritical, fussing over the speck of their accountability while a huge log of our own accountability is jamming up our vision and blinding us to the mercy that God is flexibly offering to all of us.

If this style of ministry appeals to you or someone you know, consider a vocation as a Paulist Father or a lay associate.

For more information, visit

www.paulist.org.