

Evangelism – A Debt We Owe?

The debt we owe? How does one consider these two thoughts in the same context? The idea of a debt is not a pleasant thought. We are also quite often uncomfortable with the notion of sharing the faith, not that we ourselves don't want to – but fear enters the picture.

In 1954 Clifford Hood, president of US Steel spoke to the Men's Corporate Communion Breakfast in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and said: "What the Church needs today is more effective merchandising and this will call for a greatly expanded sales force. As a member of the steel industry, I can give it to you on good authority – you may have excellent facilities and you may have a product of superior quality, but gentlemen, you cannot succeed unless you get out and sell as individuals. You can't leave the job to the clergy alone."

Perhaps he was mindful of St. Paul's letter to the Romans, the first chapter, where St. Paul speaks about his reluctance to share the gospel in Rome. We find verse 14 translated in a variety of ways. In the NIV it is rendered *I am bound*; in the RSV

– *I am under obligation*; and in the KJV – *I am a [a] debtor*.

The concept of an obligation or a debt is at first difficult to grasp. We generally think of a debt as something we owe through our own actions. When we borrow \$100 from a friend, we incurred the debt by our own action.

Let us consider, however, if a friend who owes our neighbor \$100 gives the money to us and asks that we give it to our neighbor on his behalf. When we accept the \$100, at that point we now have a debt to the neighbor that we owe. We did not borrow anything from our neighbor that we must repay, nevertheless we owe a debt to him.

Our blessed Lord did not ask us to give \$100 to our neighbor, but in His holy gospel we read of that which he did tell us to share. He gave a Divine Command to Baptize and to Teach the faith. This is the debt we owe our neighbor. If we are unsure who is our neighbor, we need only recall the parable of the Good Samaritan.

May we be ever mindful of our debt, and try through the week in our interactions with others, to work to pay the debt.

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