

Divine Renovation: Part One – Identity Crisis

Father James Mallon writes extensively in his book entitled *Divine Renovation* about the identity crisis among the members of the Catholic Church. Instead of being a missionary Church - an outwardly focused community that exists for others and is called to make a difference in the world - we have regrettably turned our focus inward on ourselves. Influenced by a self-centered and secular culture, we became comfortable with the idea of becoming a social club where events and programs satisfied our wants and needs. In doing so, Father Mallon claims that we have forgotten who we truly are. We have forgotten that we are a missionary Church. Every baptized Catholic needs to come to this basic understanding – this new way of thinking – which is that I exist for the mission of the Lord.



And so, what is the mission of the Church? What did the Lord ask His first apostles to do? In The Great Commission, Jesus called them to go out to the whole world, baptizing and teaching in His name. By doing this, Christ is asking us to do one thing: **to make disciples**.

Who, then, is a disciple? A disciple is someone who has encountered the Lord, developed a personal relationship with Christ, and has made a conscious decision to follow Jesus. They have surrendered their life to Him. Such a person is hungry and desires to grow closer to the Lord and to contribute to the growth of His Church.

How do we make disciples? We accomplish this in our parishes through the process of Evangelization. We provide opportunities for unbelievers and unchurched people to encounter the Lord, to build personal relationships with Jesus, and to consciously commit to becoming His disciples. Evangelization is completed when a person becomes a disciple (someone who learns.) However, this is not the end of the journey as a disciple needs to evolve into an apostle (someone who is sent – a missionary.) This process requires further growth, ongoing formation and training. The primary task of the Church is to make disciples, to bring them to maturity, and to equip them for ministry so that they can faithfully live out their mission in the world.

With that in mind, we need to become an outwardly focused church – we need to go out and make disciples of all nations. This is our fundamental identity – to be **missionary disciples**. This understanding of the Church's true mission needs to take root in our parishes. The cultural shift needs to happen - and it will eventually happen when more and more people come to know Jesus personally and begin to share their conversion stories. In order to actively inspire this cultural shift, Father Mallon strongly recommends the usage of written and spoken testimonies, as well as launching the evangelization tool called ALPHA.

In conclusion, Father Mallon asserts that if we clarify the purpose of the parish and rediscover our missionary identity, we will instinctively know where we need to go as a parish community. Consequently, we will then be ready to craft a new vision for the future of our parish.