In these past months of his pontificate, Pope Francis has sounded a note in his preaching, teaching and pastoral ministry that has turned every ear in his direction. The Holy Father has said not once but repeatedly what our Scriptures say today: the Church must become a Church for the whole world. We of faith, says Francis, are to be evangelists, telling the good news, living the good news, becoming good news to a planet so in need of God’s love.

I don’t know about you, but I like that! The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is good news! We heard it today in our scriptures. Isaiah saw the day when God’s people would be “a light to the nations” so that God’s “salvation would reach to the ends of the earth.” John the Baptist declared that our Lord Jesus Christ was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The Gospel we proclaim, the message we share, the life we live, the faith we confess, the example we provide is good news.
So we hear the Scriptures, we pray for the world’s salvation only to come face to face with the seeming impossibility of such a hope coming true. How can we – small in number that we are – make any difference or have any effect on getting the message of Jesus Christ to the masses of people on this planet? (And let’s be clear, most of the masses are not interested in our Lord much less the Gospel). In the United States, fewer and fewer of our citizens claim any affiliation with any church of any denomination anywhere. Even within the Church, the new “weekly participation” is monthly! “I’m a practicing Catholic” we hear, and yet we must face the difference in attendance between Christmas Eve and the following weekend. How many of us have heard folks, friends, or family claim to be “believers” but not “belongers”?

Where once Christianity was the confession of faith for the vast majority of Americans, we now find ourselves a shrinking minority, often within our own neighborhoods and families. I’m one of six children, only four still practice their faith. I have 9 nieces and nephews,
only one lives their Catholic faith. If the Gospel is good news—(and I pray you believe it is!)—how do we communicate the message and become what the prophet believed we would become—a light to the nations? How does our example affect others?

Let’s work on an answer to that important question by beginning with an affirmation at the center of our faith. **Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.** With you, I affirm this centerpiece of our faith. With you, around the altar of bread and wine, I celebrate the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the incarnate presence of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot say it or believe it or embrace it too often or too strongly. Without Jesus Christ, we have no faith to declare, no Lord to follow, and no mission to pursue. Without an awareness of the “bite out of the apple”, and our need for salvation, we have no basis for faith.

Why is it, then, that we get side-tracked by so many other demands upon our life and miss this radical, focused allegiance to Jesus Christ?
Mind you, I am not saying the sacraments are not important nor am I suggesting the good work of this faith community doesn’t matter. But anytime you or I take our eye off of Jesus Christ, we miss the mark and in so doing, misrepresent the One we say takes away not only our sin, but the cancerous, lethal sin of the entire world. Just this week Pope Francis called all priest to recommit themselves to the centrality of Jesus Christ. So whether we are feeding the hungry or caring for seniors, advocating for life, or standing vigil with someone in death, we do all our work affirming Jesus Christ. Whether it’s recycling, or taking shorter showers, are we doing our part to preserve our environment? It’s all part of one picture. How does our claiming of Jesus Christ …change, challenge and define us?

Having made our faith’s affirmation, we ask, “Now what?” What does it mean to live and serve, worship and pray as confessing followers of Jesus Christ? I would think it means (at the very least!) that our Lord’s values shape our values. For persons of faith, our first loyalty
is not a political party or national patriotism, as much as all of us love our beloved country. No, our first loyalty is to Jesus Christ.

What would Jesus say to us who live in this “land of the free and home of the brave” about our war-making prowess on this planet? What would Jesus say and do if he looked over our shoulders and saw the food we eat, the beverages we drink – sometimes to excess – the time we waste in front of the television or on the computer at sites that are inappropriate (dare I even say pornographic?)…or the lack of interest we seem to show in doing any little thing to help those most vulnerable in our society? What would Jesus think? How are his values challenging our values and, by God’s grace, transforming our values into his?

These are tough but important questions if we deeply believe the Gospel is good news. Sad to say, the pollsters tell us that divorce rates are as high among Catholics as they are the rest of the population. Madison Avenue advertisers will tell you that Christians – young and old – have no different buying habits than the rest of the population.
Though the number has dropped, the overwhelming majority of Americans still say they believe in God, all the while living in a society where violence seems to reign and indifference is a tenured resident. Note the school shootings this past week….

**Now what?** What if the likes of you and me dared to do just one radical thing in Jesus’ name this week? By radical, I mean, for example, skipping lunch one day and giving that 10 or 15 dollars to the HEN pantry or *Feed More* or some other charity that directly helps people in need. And if we could skip lunch one day for one week, what if we dared skip lunch twice a month? When you think about it, such a simple gesture could have far-reaching effects on a person or a family trying to get by in this community we call home.

**Now what?** If the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news, if Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, what if we finally came to grips with that festering broken relationship that severed a friendship sometime back? Was it a year or two (or more?) since
someone hurt us deeply? Haven’t we nursed that wound, and polished that grudge long enough? What would it take to find an “on ramp” to the highway of reconciliation? What if you and that other person could feel that God was at work through the mending of brokenness?

With you, I affirm Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. When we think about the enormity of pain and brokenness on this planet, doing nothing is our defeat. But what if you and I could do something – even a very small something – to make our part of this hurting world more like the Kingdom of God Jesus tells us is coming? That, dear ones, is the small work I call us all to take up today and in every tomorrow. That is Evangelization… Evangelization is nothing more than embracing the courage to live the Gospel, Good News indeed!