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Inconsistent messages damage credibility of the new evangelization

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NCR Today

"Inconsistency on the part of pastors and the faithful between what they say and what they do, between word and manner of life, is undermining the Church's credibility," Pope Francis stated Sunday during his first papal visit to the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.

I couldn't agree more. Inconsistency is one of the greatest obstacles to the new evangelization. It might be the greatest obstacle.

The new evangelization is aimed mostly at Catholics who have "drifted" from their faith. Papal and episcopal fingers of blame have pointed outward to the evils of secularism and other temptations of our modern age. But a simple mirror of introspection will show that the lack of credibility in the church is a major cause for the mass emptying of pews.

True, some may have drifted apathetically away but others have stomped out of the church in disgust, happy to slam the door behind them. The disgust comes from the glaring divide between the message preached, and the message lived.

Inconsistency is present when a parish describes itself as a welcoming, inclusive community but single mothers, questioning Catholics, divorced, re-married or LGBT persons do not experience that welcome.

Inconsistency is present when a diocese claims to be a faith-centered communion of communities, but all you see is division, financial or legal cover-ups, or a dysfunctional leadership.

Inconsistency is present when Catholics publicly rage against specific culture war issues, while

disregarding the truly seamless garment of human dignity and life.

Inconsistency is present when we are told to give generously to church coffers to build extravagant worship spaces while schools, shelters and hospitals struggle to serve those in greatest need.

Inconsistency is present when priests who question the male-only or celibate priesthood are defrocked, but child abusers are not.

Inconsistency is present when more time, money and energy is put into petty and obsessive liturgical changes than into teaching women and men how to form a loving, personal relationship with God in prayer.

Inconsistency is present in each and every one of us when we lack the crucial balance of faith believed, faith prayed and faith lived. The more consistently we ponder, proclaim and live the gospel message in our everyday lives, the more credible we are as Catholics.

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In the short month since his election, Francis has shown a gift for saying a lot in a few words and with the smallest of actions. Simplicity has the power to reach many hearts.

It is, perhaps, the most brilliant form of evangelization and our new pope does it well: ?Those who listen to us and observe us must be able to see in our actions what they hear from our lips, and so give glory to God!?

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