

Masolino da Panicale
St. Peter Preaching (ca. 1427)
Santa Maria del Carmine (Florence)

ECHOES OF CHURCH LIFE

BY FATIMA MONTEERRUBIO, M.A.



*Fatima Monterrubio Cruess, M.A.
is a Catholic school teacher in Boston
and a graduate of the ECHO: Faith
Formation Leadership Program.*

When I got engaged two summers ago, no one I encountered was spared the story of the proposal. Unfortunately for them, this wasn't a story I could really summarize in thirty seconds by describing a single scene and conclude with "and then he got down on one knee." The proposal story was acted out over a full weekend and involved several friends and numerous backstories. You're fortunate I've got a word count limit to work with here.

Through our five years of dating, Greg and I have found ourselves in many different places throughout the world, often separated by distance. Yet, since Greg never failed to write postcards, it seemed fitting to include postcards in the proposal. We were both studying on campus at Notre Dame for the summer. One weekend, Greg had to go back to Texas to visit with family, but had left ten postcards with instructions to my friends. They in turn found creative ways to deliver them to me throughout the weekend. One was planted in my Bible right in the middle of the Gospel passage where Jesus speaks about marriage; one I found among my snacks, another at our usual spot for Mass in the dorm's chapel; still another was unearthed in a sand volleyball court. Another was given to me at my old workplace; I followed sidewalk-chalked arrows to the seventh, and received another while praying in the chapel.

The postcards chronicled the various countries we had visited. They also contained beautiful reflections on our relationship, our travels, our inside jokes, and marriage. The final postcard led me to a bench overlooking St. Joseph's Lake, where Greg and I loved to sit and talk. He was waiting there for me dressed in his nicest suit. He nervously told me about how much I meant to him, pulled out his grandmother's ring (which he had gone back to Texas to retrieve), and asked me if I would marry him. Who could turn that down? But the surprises were not over yet! Following an impromptu blessing, a visit to the Grotto, and a beautiful Mass at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Greg had arranged for a party back at the dorm. There, we celebrated with friends and recounted the entire story in detail.

The funny thing is that a vast majority of the people that heard this story didn't generally seem to mind, despite the fact that relating it took at least a half hour. Though it would be perfectly understandable if anyone shied away from such a long and personal story, most showed genuine interest. I could tell that each listener could relate on some level: whether it was because they too had felt that same uncontainable happiness, it reminded them about their own relationships, or because it prompted feelings of longing for when they might get to have a similar joyful experience. The general reaction was one of amazement at the details and beauty of the story. It was clear to them that this was an incredibly life-defining moment for me and I just couldn't contain the love and ecstasy I felt.

The Apostles were no strangers to Good News that simply had to be shared. On Pentecost, a feast during which Jews from every nation gathered, Peter was overtaken with ecstasy after having seen his Risen Lord and having been filled with the Holy Spirit; he simply couldn't hold his tongue. There, in front of a multitude that had gathered, Peter seized the opportunity to speak of Jesus. Peter recounted a Story of the utmost importance, referring to key characters who summoned episodes from their collective history as a chosen people. He spoke so movingly that when the crowd heard it "they were *pierced to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we *do*?' (Acts 2:37).

This first telling of the Good News proffers an inspiring example. It wasn't the eloquence of this fisherman-turned-preacher that resonated with the crowd; it was the Story itself, each meaning-filled detail, its relevance to their lives, and the passion with which Peter shared it. They may have begun listening out of curiosity, but it did not take long for them to be profoundly moved. Indeed, the crowd was "pierced to the heart."

The power of the Story of our salvation is one that necessarily engages its listeners so that when it is proclaimed it does not simply evoke emotions, though certainly it elicits recollections of joy and feelings of longing, as the proposal story did. The Gospel draws us into the drama it narrates and moves us to action, to follow Jesus, and to be incorporated into the Story ourselves.

Just as the story of the proposal chronicled important episodes of a meaningful relationship which, among the seeming banalities of life, was permeated with Scripture and prayer, good evangelization weaves from these elements the essence of our salvation history. Evangelization takes this incredible life-changing Story and pulls in everyone that hears it. Though it may begin with polite listening, genuine passion about the intricacies of the Story sparks an interest that grows until the listener feels his heart burning within him, for after all, it is a Story of Love. It continues to be retold and relived everywhere it is recounted, and we must take part in its recounting.

The way we share that Story will differ. We each bring our own life experiences to the mix, and countless others have a hand in its telling for our own lives. They add depth and detail and color. It's a unique narrative every time it is told and yet it remains unchanged: the Good News that we are loved by Love Himself who comes to be with us. In the end, the Story begs to be told, and we, my friends, are the privileged story-tellers. We must do the Story justice, telling it with our words and actions in such a way that our listeners will be left with the question, "What shall I *do*?"

