

# got Kerygma?

Unfortunately for us, English is not the original language of the proclaimed or written Gospel. More than likely, the earliest Christian's heard the Gospel in one of the Aramaic languages of the ancient near-east such as "Old Judean," "Samaritan Aramaic," or "Syriac," among others. As I understand it, these languages were variably influenced by Hebrew, Canaanite, Syrian and Phoenician languages. It seems that by the time Jesus came into history, Hebrew had been supplanted by Aramaic as the everyday language, with Hebrew remaining the language of religion, (much the way Latin was in our own Church).

The written word of the Bible was, for Christians, primarily a form of Greek called "Koine." The word means "common," as in "common dialect," and it was the language of trade in the Greco-Roman world.

We still use some words from these ancient languages in our Sacred Tradition such as the Greek word "Eucharist." The word means "thanksgiving," but we don't translate it because the English word has so many other connotations that the significance of Jesus' action would be watered down or obscured.

The word at the heading of this column, "kerygma" is a much less familiar Greek word, (if not altogether unknown to the average Catholic). It is the Greek word for "proclaim" or "herald." In the 19<sup>th</sup> century biblical scholars came to distinguish this word from other Greek words used by early Christians such as "catechesis," (= instruction by word of mouth), and "didache" (simply "teaching").

Kerygma is defined as "the core of the early church's oral tradition about Jesus." Another way to say it is that it is the basic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ by the Apostles. According to one source, the elements of this proclamation are as follows:

1. The Age of Fulfillment has dawned, the "latter days" foretold by the prophets.
2. This has taken place through the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God as Messianic head of the new Israel.
4. The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory.
5. The Messianic Age will reach its consummation in the return of Christ.
6. An appeal is made for repentance with the offer of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and salvation.



For quite some time now, pastors, directors of faith formation, catechists and others have lamented what is sometimes termed "the failure of catechesis." Children have filed through our parish programs having attained some knowledge but without any "fire of faith" burning in their hearts. And the most recent analysis I have read provides what I would call a "dope slap" upside our collective heads: We've been doing it backwards! Before we can catechize we need to evangelize! The "kerygma," the basic proclamation has to be heard and a person has to come to faith before there can be any progress with catechesis, (teaching). **People need to hear the kerygma from true believers.** Pope John Paul put the matter concisely in a document on the matter:

*Thus through catechesis the Gospel kerygma (the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith) is gradually deepened, developed in its implicit consequences, explained in language that includes an appeal to reason, and channeled towards Christian practice in the Church and the world (CT 25).*

How we adjust to this realization seems to be a matter of some experimentation. There is no "silver bullet" to which we can turn. It is my contention that it will require a cultural shift in the Church over time. Currently we are "experimenting" with "Family Faith Formation" and "Parish Cell Evangelization". Please pray to the Holy Spirit for our progress.