

Franciscan University Presents
“Catholic Apologetics”
With guest, Patrick Madrid

An excerpt from
“Search and Rescue”
by Patrick Madrid

We all make excuses

It’s a fact: the single biggest impediment to sharing the Faith is the excuse we conjure up just at the moment we’re supposed to begin. Admit it.

And the excuses are as old as the hills. God has heard them all before, and if He didn’t accept them from others, why do you think He’ll accept them from you?

Let’s look at a few of the excuses you’ve probably used:

Excuse one: “Lord, you’ve got the wrong person.”

A few times, you’ve probably shirked your obligation to try to draw your loved ones into the Church by claiming that you’re unqualified. After all, evangelization is a job for priests, nuns, catechists, and guys like Patrick Madrid, right?

Wrong.

Moses tried this excuse when God asked him to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land: “Who am I that I should be the one to go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?”

And God answered, “I will be with you.”

Today God is asking you to rescue a soul who has left the Catholic Church or has never known the freedom of the Catholic Church-and He promises to be with you. Don’t forget this when you worry about the risks involved in talking to others about Christ. Sure, you may be worried that you’ll get clobbered in the discussion and humiliated in the process. You may fear that you’re too shy, you lack eloquence, and you don’t have ready answers to people’s objections to the Faith. But if you think you’re the wrong person for a search-and-rescue mission, you’ve forgotten what God said to Moses in the same circumstances: “Don’t worry. I will be with you.”

Because if God has chosen you for this search-and-rescue mission, you’re the right person; and if God is with you, what further qualifications do you need? “Cast yourself into the arms of God,” says St. Philip Neri, “and be very sure that if He wants anything of you, He will fit you for the work and give you strength.”

Excuse two: “What authority do I have to do this?”

You’re likely to make this excuse when you’re faced with an opportunity to talk about the Faith with someone who knows you well, someone who knows your faults and weaknesses. You worry that he will say, “Who are *you* to tell me about all this? You’re not perfect, yet you think *you’re* qualified to tell *me* about God? Get real.”

Moses tried this excuse, too: “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” Moses feared that the Israelites would reject him because they would think he was acting on his own authority. What authority did Moses himself have, after all?

Notice God’s response to this excuse: “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you ... The Lord, the God of your fathers...has sent me to you.’”

When those close to you ask of you — as Christ’s own neighbors and friends asked of Him — “Who do you think you are?” remember that, unworthy though you are, you are still God’s messenger. He chose you for this mission. When you speak to your cousin Mark, who has left the Catholic Church to become a Fundamentalist, or to your friend Pam, who has simply stopped going to Mass, let each of them know that you’re not offering them a new message. Rather, you’re reminding them of something they were taught in their youth — something they know, deep down in their hearts, to be true (even if they won’t admit it to you). If your loved ones have drifted away from God because of a divorce and invalid remarriage, because of an abortion not repented of, because of some other sinful life-style choice, or simply through apathy, reminding them of what they know to be true and inviting them to embrace it once again can have great spiritual impact.

So when your loved ones accuse you of being a “holier than thou” know-it-all and when they ask what authority you have to speak to them about God, tell them that you’re simply reminding them of something they already know. This response does two things:

- It saves you from having to prove that you’re not being “holier than thou.”
- It leaves the door open for you to emphasize (lovingly and with patience, of course) what they know in their hearts: they’ve departed from the truth they once held.

Excuse three: “What if they simply ignore what I’m saying?”

This excuse is understandable, but irrelevant. It really means that you don’t trust that God will act in a way that will help the person you’re evangelizing to see the truth of your message. Remember: you’re only planting the seed — in what might seem to you like infertile, inhospitable soil. But don’t worry. It is God who will give it growth. Your friend may ignore or even reject your words today, but God can later lead him to reflect on them more deeply and see the truth in what you said.

Believe it or not, Moses tried this one, too: “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’”

The Lord's response? He told Moses that He would work miracles through him as a means of convincing Pharaoh, who was holding God's people in slavery. Pharaoh certainly did not accept Moses' message when he delivered it to him. He spurned Moses and then ignored him. But God stepped in, as He promised, and sent plagues that made Pharaoh change his mind. God made the Egyptian king an offer he couldn't refuse: "Let my people go, *or else*."

Now, in the ordinary course of events, this isn't the means God uses to accomplish His will, but it isn't unheard of for miraculous events to happen in the lives of ordinary people. Ask God to give you the grace to do whatever He wants done in your search-and-rescue mission. It may be that God will work a miracle that will manifest His power — although it may be a hidden one, known only to the soul you've been sent to rescue.

Keep in mind that, in most instances, God doesn't use miracles to get people's attention and stimulate their faith in Him. Remember what Christ said to Doubting Thomas the apostle: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Sometimes God simply offers someone His grace and waits for a response. So pray for the person you are sharing the Faith with. Ask God to bestow His grace on him in a way that will open his eyes as well as his heart.

Excuse four: "I don't have the training to speak to people about You, God."

This is an easy way to avoid sharing the Faith with others. Many times I've heard people say, "I'd like to be able to talk about Christ and the Church with others, but I get nervous and tongue-tied." How many opportunities for grace pass you by because of this excuse!

Guess who else made this excuse. Yes, Moses again: "Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past ... nor now that You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and tongue."

Of all Moses' excuses, this is the lamest. I think God agrees: you can almost hear the exasperation in His voice when He responds, "Who gives one man speech and makes another deaf and dumb? Or who gives sight to one and makes the other blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Go then! It is I who will assist you in speaking and will teach you what you are to say."

What God says to Moses He says to you, too.

Consider Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She has been widely recognized as a saint and she converted many, yet she wasn't what people typically think of as eloquent. She drew others to Christ with her simple, humble, direct way of teaching and defending the Faith, without using fancy words or sophisticated rhetoric.

God used Mother Teresa, and He wants to use you, too. Whether or not you're eloquent may be an issue for you, but it isn't for God. Remember what He told Moses: "It is I who will assist you in speaking and will teach you what you are to say."

Excuse five: "I'll do it next time."

How many times I have used this excuse myself! This is the Big Enchilada of excuses, the one you're apt to fall back on when no other cop-out comes to mind. It allows you to salvage a little bit of self-esteem and still avoid having to evangelize. "I'm going to do it, at some point," you reassure yourself, "just not right now. I'll do it next time." The problem with saying, "I'll do it next time" is that you have no way of knowing whether there will be a next time, either for the person you're trying to reach or for you. Opportunities pass, never to present themselves again; people die suddenly or are lost to you for other reasons. So don't put it off; you may never have a chance to help this person again.

Think often about this caution from St. James: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain' whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that.'"

And there's another problem with this excuse. Saying, "I'll do it next time" is really just a slightly more dignified way of saying, "I don't feel like doing it right now."

In my work as an apologist, I have to travel by plane frequently. This is where I often find myself falling into the excuse I'm most prone to: "I don't feel like doing it right now." It's one of the temptations I struggle with, because in airplanes I have a chance to get into a conversation with the person sitting next to me, and I know that sooner or later it will get around to the subject of Christ and the Catholic Church.

Sometimes I sit in my seat ready and willing to engage in conversation; sometimes I don't. If you travel by plane much, you know that when you get settled in your seat, if the person next to you is at all talkative, he or she will almost always ask you two questions: What's your name, and what do you do? The first question is easy for me. But the second question is harder. If I'm willing to get into a conversation, when the person asks, "What do you do?" I say, "I'm a writer." Of course, the next question is "What do you write?" And we're quickly into a conversation that can be steered toward the Faith.

But if I'm feeling lazy and don't want to be bothered with a conversation, or if I have a good book that I'd rather read, then, when the person asks, "What do you do?" I reach slowly into my briefcase, pull out my Bible, and lean toward him with an intense gaze. "I'm glad you asked." I say with a smile, "I'm a Catholic *evangelist*." (I've heard others recount similar experiences.) Then, of course, I can read that book, because the person has very quickly decided he's not all that interested in knowing what I do.

Now, this isn't always bad; each of us needs some leisure. But do you know what? When I do that, I miss forever the chance to speak to that person about Christ. I won't ever have a next time.

Excuse six: "I don't want to."

This excuse may lie behind all the others, or perhaps it's a combination of all the others: "I'm lazy and afraid and unsure of myself. I'm not the right person for this job. And when you get right down to it, God, I really don't want to go on this mission for You."

Moses tried to get away with this: “If you please, Lord, send somebody else!”

The Lord’s reaction was predictable: He became angry with Moses. Yet, in spite of all Moses’ objections, God was willing to reassure him one more time. He promised that He would provide Moses’ brother, Aaron, to be Moses’ speaker, his mouthpiece. Aaron was an eloquent speaker.

Today, in your own life, God has given you many “Aarons” that you can use to share and defend the Faith: numerous books, tapes, and videos that you can confidently hand to a friend or coworker. If you’re not yet comfortable speaking to others about Christ, pray that you’ll develop the courage and willingness to do so, and, while God is cultivating that courage in your heart, let books and tapes do the speaking for you.

Each year, as I travel the country giving lectures and apologetics seminars at parishes and universities, I meet people who tell me how they abandoned their former anti-Catholicism and became Catholic all because someone had started the divine chain-reaction of grace by handing them a good Catholic book or tape.

When God provided Moses with Aaron’s assistance, He not only reinforced His commitment to help Moses in this difficult mission; He also emphasized how important it was to Him that Moses in particular be the one to carry out this mission. This is as true for you as it was for Moses.

Just think of it!

From all eternity, God, the Lord of the universe, has been thinking about you specifically, knowing that you will play a unique and vital role in His drama of salvation. He has chosen you specifically to bring His message of truth and life to those around you. Regardless of your state in life, God has a plan for you to be a search-and-rescue apostle in His name. But He won’t force you: you must choose it yourself. And then you must just do it.

Search and Rescue: How to Bring Your Family and Friends Into—or Back Into—the Catholic Church. He is also the founder of Envoy Magazine, a Catholic apologetics magazine. You can find out more about him at www.patrickmadrid.com.5

**Titles Mentioned on *Franciscan University Presents*
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Catholic Answers: www.Catholic.com

* *Search and Rescue: How to Bring Your Family and Friends Into or Back Into the Catholic Church* by Patrick Madrid. Sophia Institute Press.

Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion by Ronald Knox. University of Notre Dame Press. Available on www.amazon.com.

* *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Image Publishing.

The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux Publishing. Available on www.amazon.com.

* *Surprised by Truth* (3 volumes) by Patrick Madrid. Basilica Press.

Patrickmadrid.com

* *The Suffering of Love: Christ's Descent Into the Hell of Human Hopelessness* by Dr. Regis Martin. Ignatius Press.

* *The Truth About Trouble* by Father Michael Scanlan, TOR. St. Anthony Messenger Press.

* *Signs of Life: 40 Catholic Customs and Their Biblical Roots* by Dr. Scott Hahn. Doubleday Publishing.

* *Let the Fire Fall* by Father Michael Scanlan, TOR. Franciscan University Press.

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