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How to Defend the Faith Without Raising Your Voice

More than 600 people gathered at St Joseph's Church in Singapore, to hear Jack Valero, founder of Catholic Voices and press officer of Opus Dei UK, share how to communicate the faith clearly and charitably.

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In conjunction with the upcoming centenary of Opus Dei, the Information Office in Singapore

organised a talk entitled, How to Defend the Faith without Raising Your Voice by Jack Valero, press officer for Opus Dei in the UK.

Jack is currently touring several Asian countries to give communication courses to different groups. In 2010, he founded Catholic Voices, a project that helps lay people tell the Church's story in the media. That same year, he served as press officer for the Beatification of Cardinal Newman by Pope Benedict XVI, and later for Newman's canonisation by Pope Francis in 2019.

About 650 Catholics from across Singapore filled St Joseph's Church to learn how to speak about the faith in ways that foster understanding rather than disagreement.

The influence of St John Henry Newman

Valero began by recalling St John Henry Newman's belief that lay people, when well-formed, have the power to transform how the Church engages with the world.

"This isn't a job for experts," he said. "It's something we are all called to do."

He added that public opinion rarely changes through power, but through personal relationships and genuine dialogue.

He encouraged lay Catholics to be thoughtful, informed, and ready to communicate God's mercy in daily life.

Valero then described how Catholic Voices began during Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 visit to Britain, an event that was expected to be controversial. Some Catholics were nervous then, but he saw it as a chance to speak.

That moment led to the creation of Catholic Voices, a project that trains ordinary Catholics to represent the Church in public with clarity and composure.

“When a storm comes,” he said, “don’t just try to survive it. Learn to dance in the rain.”

Understanding before answering

Much of the talk focused on what Valero calls the frame, the assumptions people already have when they think about the Church.

When someone hears that a person is Catholic, they might assume the Church wants to impose its ideas or morality. Sometimes, the way Catholics speak can unintentionally reinforce those perceptions.

Valero encouraged the audience to look for the shared value behind a criticism.

“When people say the Church doesn’t care for the poor, behind that is love for the poor, one of the Church’s core values.”

By beginning from that shared ground, he said, Catholics can express the truth in a way others can genuinely hear.

“The truth is like a diamond,” he quoted Pope Francis. “Beautiful to show, but if you throw it at someone’s face, it cuts.”

The Catholic Voices framework

Valero explained that the Catholic Voices method has three parts: first, recognise the frame and try to understand how others see the Church or the issue; next, find the shared value, something both sides genuinely care about; and finally, shape the message by speaking from that shared ground.

He acknowledged that whilst the method sounds simple, it requires humility and genuine listening.

He shared examples from media interviews on difficult topics such as clerical abuse, sexuality, and Church authority. In one case, two guests who began on opposite sides ended up agreeing that they both wanted justice and healing. The producer then didn't know what to do as there was no argument left to film.

Clarity with charity

“We're not trying to win arguments,” Valero said. “We're showing who we are.”

He explained that communication is an act of witness. Before speaking about marriage or morality, we must first show that we love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves. Without that, nothing we say will matter.

Valero encouraged the attendees to practise this method regularly. He suggested starting with a newspaper article or online post they disagree with and asking: What's the frame here? What might this person think about me as a Catholic? What values do we share? Then, shape a response from that common ground. "With practice," he said, "you'll grow more confident and more peaceful in your conversations."

During the Q&A, someone asked how to use this approach with family members who had drifted from the Church. Valero's answer was straightforward: "When a controversy comes up, in the news or in conversation, that's your opening. Find what you agree on, start there, and speak gently. You'll be surprised how much further the discussion goes."

He closed with a reflection that summed up his message, “It’s easy to be clear, you can throw the Catechism at people. It’s easy to be kind, you can say nothing. The real challenge is to be clear and charitable. That’s when hearts open.”

Photo credits: St Joseph's Church (Victoria Street)

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