



Dear Folks,

Jesus calls some fishermen and tells them “From now on you will be catching men.” Notice that He did not start with a promise of saving from sin, talk of healing, but of being fishers for souls. The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church teaches that the “obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his ability (LG #17).” The question “are we dedicated to following Jesus?” cannot be answered without asking “are we dedicated to spreading the Gospel to all people (Matthew 28: 18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-38)?” Our Church has been going through some serious challenges lately. What if God is allowing us to be tested, that we may show if we take Him seriously? What if part of the answer is how we respond to the call to share our faith with the world? The future of our faith communities could very well depend on how we respond to God’s call now.

The problem, of course, is that we were not taught how to do it, and it seems that most Catholics have not been taught that they should. Even in the seminary, they did not teach us how to share the Gospel with people who did not already accept it.

We shall need to work on this for some time, but I would share some ideas to stimulate thought and conversation. United State Conference of Catholic Bishops put out a document “Go and Make Disciples.” They described three tasks to spreading the Gospel:

1. Grow in enthusiasm for the Gospel ourselves until it spills out of us. This is essentially a call to continue to be evangelized. As long as our love is imperfect and we do not see things the same way God does, we are incompletely evangelized. That task will not be finished until we are in heaven (1 Corinthians 13:9-12).
2. Invite everyone, everywhere to share the fullness of the Catholic faith. This suggests if they are outside, invite them inside. If they are inside, invite them further inside. Everyone can come closer (see #1). This is evangelizing other people. Note the word “invite.” How do we invite people to something wonderful?
3. Transform the world according to the love of God. Our society should be structured in a way that serves the life, the dignity, the flourishing of all people. This is essentially evangelizing society itself.

This should keep us busy for a while.

I would suggest the best book on evangelization is Acts of the Apostles. It shows the early Church growing like a grease fire despite determined opposition. It seems to me it describes the early Church doing four things: Telling the Gospel story, working together as community, worshiping God, and helping people in need. I say that if we get good enough at those four things, no one on earth can stop us.

If you want a very simple way to start, I suggest some very basic actions: Tell someone one good thing about your faith community, learn something new about the faith and share it, Introduce yourself to someone you don’t know at church, create a holy moment (a moment in which our actions show the love of Jesus). Anyone can do this. Once we start, who knows where it will lead?

The second reading for today is 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. St. Paul gives the most basic form of the Christian message, that Jesus died for our sins, rose from the dead and now offers us salvation. This is called the “kerygma,” and everything else follows from it. Part of telling the Gospel story is presenting the kerygma and doing it in a way that is compelling and persuasive. Simply repeating formulas that people have already heard is not going to make much of an impression, or at least not a good one. One might ask how we can talk about salvation to people who don’t think they need saving, and how can we talk about salvation from sin to people who don’t think sin is an issue? That, folks, is the subject of next week’s column.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim