

How many of us would feel uncomfortable if we were asked to share publicly about our faith? How many of us would feel unequipped to explain to friends or colleagues what we believe about God and the Church? And these feelings of discomfort or fear come for good reasons. It seems to be pretty generally regarded as impolite to bring up topics like faith or religion. Sharing our religious beliefs in public is frowned upon in many places in our society. Yet, this attitude of many in our present culture does not seem to be the attitude of God in the Scriptures we hear today; and it does not seem to be consistent with Jesus' call for his disciples.

The readings today remind us that Christian discipleship means more than just a private relationship with Jesus. It means more than just spending time in daily prayer and striving to do good and to avoid evil. These things are important to be sure. In the sacrament of baptism we first enter into our relationship with Christ. We are washed clean from sin and filled with faith and hope and charity so that our lives can become a reflection of the light of Christ.

But there is another sacrament which strengthens us to do more than just practice our faith in private. The sacrament of confirmation fills us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that we can go out to the world to be witnesses, so that we can spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. This is the second part of discipleship. Not only must we develop a relationship with Christ, but we must look for ways to evangelize!

We see this in the Gospel today. Jesus called four men to follow Him: Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John. All four were hard at work as fishermen, working for their fathers. But at the call of Jesus, they drop everything and follow Him. Now the call of Jesus here is interesting because He calls these four not only to be His disciples, His followers. Jesus also calls them so that He can put them to work. “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” For Jesus, discipleship leads to evangelization. Following Jesus means sharing with others that joy of being a follower of the Lord so that others can share in that joy.

To evangelize means to spread the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Evangelizing means sharing with others the faith that we have received. To evangelize does not mean beating others over the head with the Bible, or even the catechism, so that they will accept the faith. It does not mean standing out on the street corners or in the French Quarter threatening people with hell if they don't believe in Jesus. Those things might feel good for a moment, but rarely will they be effective ways of spreading the Gospel.

Instead, evangelization means sharing with others the joy of the Gospel. Evangelization most often is a relationship, a process. It almost always takes time. Perhaps this is why Jesus chose fishermen to be His disciples - because they knew the virtue of patience. Anyone who has

ever gone fishing knows how important it is to be patient, unless you're really lucky... Fishing almost always requires waiting. For an experienced fisherman, knowing the weather and the fishing spots and the bait can help; but even when everything is perfect, fishing usually involves some waiting. It is just the same way in our efforts to share the Gospel. It requires time and patience. It requires a humble recognition that conversions happen according to God's time, not ours. This is why patience of a fisherman can be so valuable for one who is fishing for men.

Finally, the readings give us one more lesson in our call to share the joy of the Gospel: we should not be reluctant or hesitant to speak when God gives us the right moment. In the first reading we hear the preaching of Jonah which completely converted the hearts of the people of Nineveh. But the reading leaves out some important context. I encourage you to pick up the Bible this week and read the Book of Jonah. It's one of the shortest book in the Bible, only about four chapters, and it's really funny. When God first calls Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh, he runs away and famously ends up in the belly of a giant fish. But when he prays to God, the Lord causes the fish to spew him out on the shore. Then Jonah does make his way to Nineveh, as we heard in the first reading, and the people there repent. But even after his successful mission, Jonah is angry. The people of Nineveh were great enemies of the Hebrew people, and Jonah did not really want God to spare them.

As people called to share the Gospel, we must not be reluctant as Jonah was. We must not run from the opportunities to share the Good News and we must not run from the times when we are called to speak out against injustice. When God gives those opportunities, we must pray for the grace to seize them.

This week is one of those moments for us as Christians. [On Monday/Tomorrow] we commemorate a terrible anniversary of injustice in our own nation. January 22, 1973 was the day of the Supreme Court decision in Roe vs. Wade. On that day the right to life of unborn children was destroyed as abortion became legal across our country. This injustice, this genocide of abortion requires us as people of faith to stand up and speak out so that evil will not prevail. And as people of faith, we must never fail to show the mercy of God to those who have participated in this evil.

As people called to evangelize, we must share the joy of the Good News that Christ loves us and became one like us and died for us and rose from the dead. As people called to evangelize, we must also speak out against the evils of our world so that all people may live in justice and peace.

Let us pray for the grace to be faithful disciples of Christ. God fills us constantly with His love and He strengthens us daily with the Eucharist. May we then proclaim with joy the Good News of our faith, the Good News of God's unending love for us.