

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on January 22, 2006
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Liturgical Year B

Recently I was sitting and chatting with one of our seminarians. I thought he had a cold, but it turned out that he had a condition that had damaged his vocal cords. The prognosis was good, but he was worried that it would be hard for him to preach. At his age, I worried that I *had* to preach! I'd looked forward to all I would be doing in the priesthood – except preaching. At first, many times I was in a full body sweat – at least the pulpit covered half of my trembling body.

Then after three years I was sent to Rome to study. I rarely preached there and found that I missed it! I learned that preaching is not teaching, Teaching is instruction, sharing facts. Preaching is concerned with conversion, sharing life-changing truths. Preparing for preaching kept me in conversion. I didn't want to say and not do – but I found that saying helped me doing.

What is conversion? It's the act of saying 'yes' to God's offer of life as it's meant to be in Christ. It's the process of becoming like Him, little by little. In today's Gospel, we see Simon and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John. They were workers, who wondered... about life...about faith... about the future, before and after death...about being the person God wanted them to be. Christ spoke about these things and they heard something about what they wanted. And so they would follow Christ because they wanted to hear more.

Christ immediately upped the ante – as He is in the habit of doing. He will make them fishers of men and women. They are just beginning to follow, and Christ challenges them to fish for people – to do what He is doing, to become His disciples. As his followers, they say, 'You talk – I'll listen.' Jesus says, 'I'll talk – you listen – then you talk to others.'

But to do this there must be leave-taking. This is less about family and nets and more about listening. Who will I listen to? Christ? myself? others? no one? I need to listen to Christ and to others who help me hear Christ. I need to stop listening to conflicting or discouraging voices, not because I want to be narrow-minded but because I want to be single-minded. As disciples, we need to listen to Christ. As fishers of men and women, we need to be willing to speak for Christ.

St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel always. Use words when necessary." That sounded right to me for a long time. But gradually I found it sounded incomplete. Then I came across something St. Catherine of Siena said, "Cry the gospel as if you had a million voices, for silence kills the world."

This is not just the priest's vocation. This is the Christian's vocation, to preach the Gospel – spouse to spouse, friend to friend, parent to child, child to parent, people to priest, Catholic parish to Christian households, Christians to the world.

Christ comes to teach us with His word, to call us deeper into his life. He sends us out into the world to fish and then to come back next week to go even deeper into his life and to do it all over again.