

Peter and the Apostles went fishing. After a night's labor, they have nothing to show for their efforts. Jesus calls out to them: "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something" (Jn 20:6). Three years earlier, it was Jesus who cast his net to call the disciples: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). Now that Jesus has risen from the dead, he is passing on the mission to Peter and the apostles to call others to be disciples and to build the church.

At the command of Jesus, they cast the net and haul in 153 large fish. The load is heavy enough to tear their fishing net but miraculously the net holds. Beyond the catch of the day, Jesus is teaching a lesson to the apostles to listen to him in prayer as they start out in ministry. Following Jesus, they will be able to draw many people into the faith.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter had invoked the name of Jesus to help a crippled man rise and walk. The man had been crippled all of his life and was in front of the temple begging for money. Peter told him: "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, [rise and] walk." (Acts 3:6). The newly healed man jumps for joy and the miracle attracts a crowd. Peter does not let the opportunity pass by. He casts his net by proclaiming the Good News of the resurrection and challenging the people to repent and receive forgiveness for their sins. "Many of those who heard the word came to believe and (the) number of men grew to [about] five thousand" (Acts 4:4).

Peter's boldness in the Acts of the Apostles is a stark contrast to his fear on Good Friday or even on that first day of the week when he and the others were locked in the Upper Room for fear of the Jews. The Lord has risen. He has strengthened all of the Apostles with the Holy Spirit. They are on fire with a zeal to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth beginning in Jerusalem.

The Acts of the Apostles tells of the rapid growth of the Church following Pentecost Sunday. "Quickly, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and inspired them with a vision of how they could communicate in a bold and new way. The Spirit has and will continue to enable the Church, even in a time of lockdown and isolation, to help us overcome our feelings of fear, loneliness, and vulnerability by reminding us that God is with us, always!"ⁱ

Through the radio and through the live streaming of the Mass, the Church is able to reach out to thousands as never before. One bishop described this as a 21st Century Pentecost moment. One might describe these means of social communication as a new net for fishers of men. As we hear in the Gospel of John, Peter dragged the net ashore to where Jesus was, and they then shared a meal together. Beyond the digital net, we must bring the fish to Jesus. "Digital communication is not a substitute for face-to-face encounters. Our communication should always be an opportunity for encountering and accompanying [one] another."

Jesus gave Peter and the other Apostles the mission of calling others to be disciples and to build the church. Jesus calls each generation to be missionary disciples. Let us see Christ in one another and work together casting our nets over the side of the boat to build the church. As vaccination rates increase and people feel safer, please reach out to someone who is isolated and invite them to return to church.

ⁱ Burbidge, Michael. "In Tongues All Can Hear." Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Arlington 9/15/2020