How to Be a Fisher of Men

I've been fishing all of one time in my life.

I was a transitional deacon (you are ordained a deacon about a year before you are ordained a priest), and the summer before you are ordained a priest you are assigned to a parish to work at leading communion services, doing some preaching, visiting the sick and the homebound; kind of a "sneak preview" of what priesthood will be like. Overall it was a great summer, and I actually was assigned to the parish a couple of years later (Saint Hubert's in Chanhassen).

One day an elderly parishioner asked if I had ever been fishing, and when I said "no," he asked if I'd like to join him. And so after getting a one-day license, we headed out to an area lake and I caught absolutely nothing. Sitting in the boat was nice though. And I'm actually quite good at that part, and these days while I don't fish or ever plan to again, I love going out in a boat to try to find loons come June.

However while I might not be all that great of a fisherman, like all of us, I am called to be a fisher of men. And in this week's Gospel, Jesus we hear how Jesus calls the first apostles. Mark's Gospel isn't quite as detailed as to what happens, but we are told that Peter and Andrew drop their nets and follow Jesus. They will then learn by journeying with Jesus what works and what does not work, and become the men who will form the early Church.

To this day, Jesus is calling each and every one of us to go out into the deep with Him, to evangelize, and to help win souls for Christ. And this Gospel invites us to think about how we do that.

As a starting point, it starts by looking in the mirror. We can't pass on the faith if we don't know it. So we need to ask ourselves how we live out the faith. How is our prayer life? Do we try to deepen the faith in our souls by growing closer to God, and also trying to know about the faith more deeply? What do our actions (and inactions) show others? Daily we strive to grow in holiness and become the people we want to become.

Second, what do our actions show others? When I think about evangelization, I've learned so much from my parents over the years. They've certainly expressed their love and care in words, but it's been the things they haven't said that have really shown me much; their hard work in turning our house into a home; being there for me from the time I was very young to today; the hard work they did at their jobs and for others in our extended family; and making weekly Mass a priority just to name a few things. So often we don't think about the things we do over the course of a day let alone a lifetime, but when we are people of mercy, charity and kindness, we do so much to evangelize people in our own home and people who know us as they are inspired to emulate us.

Third, how do we treat others who are different than us? One of the big things our faith emphasizes is how God loves us all equally, and Jesus came for all people. However

we can get so divided over various things. Differences are of course OK, but they can become toxic. So how we treat others whom we disagree with and what we say about them, in particular around the dinner table with kids, can have a big impact; both in that it teaches others how we treat others, but it can also impact people in the sense that we may form new friendships, or get people who are seemingly very different from us to think more deeply about the faith.

Fourth, where are our priorities? Note Peter and Andrew drop their nets and follow Jesus; He takes priority. When Jesus is our priority and others know this, it is a powerful evangelization tool. Particularly within a family, when kids learn that God is like the north star, not one thing among many, but He whom we center our lives around, this means so much. Unfortunately for so many, priorities can become work, school, hobbies, etc; all good things, but nowhere near as important as God.

Fifth, how do we evangelize at home? As I shared I learned so much about the faith from my parents, and it's so important we strive to share our faith with both kids, but also older children and other family too. We all know people who maybe fall away from the faith, or make some bad choices - in these cases we need to be willing to reach out to them with love, and not fear helping them to try to find the path back to happiness.

Sixth, are we patient? Odds are if I went back out fishing or really got into it, I'd learn the best locations and times to fish and catch something. I have no interest in catching fish, but I do want to try to win souls for God. This requires patience though. We all want people to grow in the faith, but it can be frustrating when results don't happen right away. Don't give up on people who have fallen away - rather keep praying for them, trying to inspire them, talking to them, and journeying with them.

Lastly, we can't keep our faith a secret. Evangelization doesn't mean that we are forceful with the faith or overbearing, but it does mean we talk about what we believe and why; from why we believe certain things on issues of faith and morals; to why we go to Mass; to why the Eucharist means so much to us. It's only by not being afraid to cast the rod that we can get a bite.

As we are reminded at the end of the Mass, our job is to "go forth" for we are sent, not to remain in the pew all week but to go out into the world. God gives us grace which is truly amazing, so let's not be afraid to help others experience a relationship with God as well by, like Peter and Andrew, being a fisher of men.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul