

One summer a game warden noticed that each evening a certain fisherman brought back more fish than everyone else combined. The warden became suspicious and so he came to the conclusion that he needed to learn more. He decided to go fishing with this fortunate man to see just how he did it.

So, the fisherman navigated his boat to an isolated lagoon. Dropping anchor, he opened his tackle box, and took out a stick of **dynamite**, and lit the fuse. The game warden was in absolute shock as he watched. The man held the dynamite until the fuse was short, then hurled it into the water. And as soon as it struck the water, it detonated. Immediately several dead and stunned fish floated to the surface. As the fisherman collected the fish, the infuriated warden shouted, “Stop! You can’t do this! This is outrageous! It’s illegal! You can’t fish this way!” As the game warden ranted on and on, the fisherman took out another stick of dynamite. He lit the fuse and put it in the warden’s hand and said, “Are you gonna talk or are you gonna fish?”

The focus of today’s Gospel lesson is on fishing. Not the search for fish and definitely not with a stick of TNT! Rather our text has all to do with the active search for people to be brought into God’s kingdom with the powerful, **dynamic** Word of God.

Christ calls **us** to be His messengers like He called the disciples to be fishers of men. He wants **us** to share His Word and invite others to put their trust in Him, as the only Savior from sin and death. This isn’t just a job for “professional church worker types” whether they’re missionaries, teachers, DCE’s, or pastors, this is what God wants **all** Christians to do; to share the Good News about Jesus and invite them to worship to receive His Word in faith.

But that work is not easy, like fishermen, we Christians, we fishers **of** men often get weary from toiling with no results. There are times when we’re so frustrated by the apparent lack of success that maybe we would love to do this kind of fishing with some actual sticks of dynamite! But, of course, we know that’s wrong and **that’s** why it’s good for us **all** to hear our Gospel lesson today which encourages all who labor, but who have no success—success, that is, according to **their** hopes.

### 1. Unproductive Work

“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything.” Those are the words of a lot of people, not only unsuccessful fishermen like Simon Peter. Many weary workers—pastors, teachers, missionaries, DCE’s and lay people—watch days, weeks, months, and years come and go with seemingly

nothing accomplished. The people we have spent time talking with and praying for, still remain unmoved.

There once was a missionary who sailed from Liverpool, England to serve Christ in Africa. Changing ships at Lagos, Nigeria, he boarded a ferry to make his way to a disease-ridden territory where he would devote his entire life. As he changed vessels, a cynical, older missionary looked sternly at him and said, "I have worked this area for years faithfully preaching the Law and Gospel. You will not get anywhere here. In fact you are dead, if you go to that place." The devoted missionary responded saying, "I was dead before I ever sailed from Liverpool."

That missionary was referring to St. Paul's teaching about dying to the world and being made alive to Christ. For example, in Romans 6:11, Paul writes, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (See also Rom 8:10; Eph 2:5; Col 2:13). This is the life to which *each* believer is called. To be sure, not all people are given the calling to be professional missionaries, but no matter what our vocations and no matter what our age, each believer in Jesus is called to die to our old sinful nature, to live to Christ, and share His life-saving Good News with others. But many people become weary from seeing few results. Lots of Christians go through stages of seeing hope slowly fade away, through stages of failure, of disappointment, of despondency until, like that elderly missionary, they come close to complete despair.

## **2. Jesus Calls Us to Fish**

Yet, Jesus calls us to fish with Him for the souls of men. But so few give this calling the attention it deserves. How often does fear and discouragement interfere with our spiritual fishing? We make excuses like, "It's not going to do any good anyway, they'll just say no." Or, "I don't really know what to say. That's just a job for a pastor, or someone who is good with evangelism to do." Well, here are some eye-opening statistics about how people really do start attending church, especially if they haven't been brought up in one. From churchgrowth.org:

# HOW DO PEOPLE START ATTENDING CHURCH?

A Friend Invited Me - 86%

Organized Visitation - 6%

Invited by the Pastor - 6%

Advertising - 2%

churchgrowth.org

It's clear from these figures that when it comes to reaching out to non-believers with the Good News about Jesus, the most effective way to do that is through personal invitation to church and to Bible class by a friend. It's also clear from today's Gospel text, Jesus wants *everyone* to take part in this work, and He sets the example: we are called to follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:2). He left us not only instructions, but also an example. He left the glory of heaven to come to this earth to fish in the sea of sinners—"to seek and to save the lost." He faced the temptation by the devil and rejection by His own people, just like we face many kinds of temptations and the possibility of rejection, but Jesus persevered because He was on His Father's mission. He fulfilled this mission when He died and rose again, paying for the sin of the whole world, for *all* of our sin, including the sin of our halfhearted evangelism (cf Phil 2:5-8).

### 3. Jesus Gives Us The Strength to Persevere

Yet Jesus gives us much more than just an example to follow. Through His Word and Sacraments He comes to us with His *strength*—a strength that

empowers us and enables us to persevere. This is a strength that is not earned or deserved in any way. But it comes totally as a free gift with the forgiveness of sins to all who believe. This power of the Gospel is the very power of God. There is nothing stronger. It is available to all who believe. So the next time you feel weak, and powerless, and miserable remember that by ourselves—left to our own devices—we really **are** weak, and powerless and miserable. **But** with the power of Christ flowing into our lives through His Word and sacrament we are **conquerors**, in fact we are **more** than through Christ who loved us, as St. Paul says in Romans 8:37.

#### 4. Empowered by God's Grace We Trust and Endure

Yes, there will **still** be some days when we will not feel like fishing for lost souls. We might not want to “excel in the gifts that build up the church” (1 Cor 14:12) as St. Paul talks about in our Epistle lesson today. We may feel like Peter apparently did in this Gospel account—that nothing was being accomplished so he might as well give up.

The painting “Faithful Unto Death” depicts a Roman guard standing at his post as the palace at Herculaneum is destroyed. The dead are scattered in the background and on the pavement as the eruptions of a volcano are shown raining down. Nearly everyone is running for his life. However this Roman guard stands obediently at his post, faithful even unto death. Peter and all of us are called to **that** kind of faithfulness. We are called to remain at our post despite every discouragement. To “let down the nets for a catch.”

*Conclusion:* “When they had done so they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.” There is reward in patience and faithfulness in our work for the Lord (see Lk 6:35; Col 3:24). Success may come only after much prayer, much work, and a whole lot of waiting. And the success may only be seen by someone else. Jesus Himself once said, “The saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’” (Jn 4:37)

But whether **we** see the results ourselves or not, let's do as Jesus said and fish for people. Here's what that looks like: Share His love with all. Invite a friend, a family member to church. Read your Bible, so that you can answer some of the questions that people might have about your faith in your Savior. And then sit back and let God do the work of creating faith in **their** heart.

In His great love God has sought **us** out. And now He wants to work through us to bring others into the **net** of His love and care. What a joy to be sought by Him. What a privilege to go fishing with Him! Amen!