

So with today's gospel I guess I am almost required to start off with a fishing story. So here goes: A man was stopped by a game-warden in a State Park with two buckets of fish leaving a lake well known for its fishing. The game warden asked, "Do you have a license to catch those fish?"

The man replied to the game warden, "No, sir. These are my pet fish."

"Pet fish?" the warden replied.

"Yes, sir. Every night I take these here fish down to the lake and let them swim around for a while. I whistle and they jump back into their buckets, and I take 'em home."

"That's a bunch of nonsense! Fish can't do that!"

The man looked at the game warden for a moment, and then said, "Here, I'll show you. It really works."

"OK. I've GOT to see this!" The game warden was curious. The man poured the fish into the lake and stood and waited. After several minutes, the game warden turned to the man and said, "Well?"

"Well, what?" the man responded.

"When are you going to call them back?" the game warden prompted.

"Call who back?" the man asked.

"The FISH!"

"What fish?" the man asked the man asked the game warden.

But actually the image I am thinking of today isn't fish, it's the Impala – and I don't mean the car made by Chevrolet. The Impala is an African deer with a supercharged spring. It has a vertical leap of over 10 feet and can broad jump over 30 feet.

You would think that the zoos of the world would find it impossible to keep such an animal enclosed. Not so! It's rather easy because the experts discovered something about the Impala. It will not jump unless it can see where it is going to land. So a solid wall even 6 feet tall is a sufficient enclosure.

Lots of Christians have the Impala problem. They won't take a leap in faith unless they have all the answers in advance about where the leap will take them. But God is looking for some bold believers who, even in the face of the unknown, will leap when the Spirit says leap, fish when the spirit says fish, speak the word of God when the spirit says speak.

Once a month, four couples, all Catholic, all in their early 30's, would meet in one of their homes for an evening together: cards, talk, maybe a movie and snacks. On one of these evening, Joe got off on his regular tirade against the two priests in the parish and how horrible their Sunday sermons were. As usual he didn't stop there, next came his criticism of the pastor's new car and the associates weekly game of golf.

Calmly, but strongly, Donna, one of the other members of the group, spoke up. "Joe, let's all be honest. We all have our cars. I don't play golf, but I do go to aerobics class twice a week and you play racquetball. And as for preaching the gospel, I wonder if anyone on my street or where I work even knows I'm a catholic. SILENCE

Donna went on --It was quite a surprise, because she was always the quiet one of the group. "Why should religious be the only one who are supposed to live simply?

Joe, you and Marie don't have any kids yet and you've been married for six years. I don't why, but it sure makes winter trips to the Caribbean that much easier, and you said you were going to France next summer. Not bad. You have all the latest gadgets and weren't you looking at a boat? Not bad, not bad." SILENCE

Donna continued as everyone else sat there nervous and stunned. "What about Jesus words about how hard it is for the rich to get into heaven -- like a camel through a needle. Was he talking about us?" After still more silence another couple broke the tension and said, "Well we have to get home. We told the baby sitter we would be back by 11:00." Quietly people cleaned up and headed home.

Four weeks later they met as usual and Joe -- the man who now decided not to buy a boat -- told Donna, "We were stunned at first, but we really appreciated your remarks last month. Marie and I thought about what you said and we are finally talking about having a family again. I guess it takes all of us a long time to get our priorities straight. Thanks." Donna had proclaimed the word of God -- probably unaware that she had. All of us are called to wake up and do the same; to say "here I am, lord, send me." To take that leap with being sure how we will land.

All Christians are called to be prophets, preachers, proclaimers of the word of God, but most for folk the attitude is leave it to priests and deacons and leave us alone. We chicken out like Peter in the gospel saying "leave me alone lord, I am a sinful man." We usually have a sort of grudging admiration for church groups like Mormans and Jehovah's Witnesses for being willing to give up a couple of years of their life to proclaim their

religion. Well the surprise is that all Catholics are called to proclaim the gospel all their life.

Let me tell you a true, but humorous and slightly scandalous story that comes out of the early days of the church. When the father of Origen, a third century theologian, was arrested for being a Christian, Origen, then only 17, was aflame with the desire to follow his Dad and share in glorious martyrdom. His mother pleaded with him not to go, but the headstrong boy did not want to listen to reason. His quick thinking mother did what she could. She hid his clothes. Though Origen stormed and protested, she wouldn't reveal where they were hidden. He couldn't leave the house, and so he was unable to volunteer for martyrdom. Isn't it interesting? Origen was brave enough to be martyred, but not brave enough to go outside naked.

In a sense, I suspect that talking with a friend about our faith is, for many of us, the equivalent of going outside naked. It makes us uncomfortable. We feel exposed. In baptism and confirmation we declare that we will give our lives for Christ if he should ask it, but to risk a bit of embarrassment for him seems to be beyond our level of discipleship. I'm just an average person we protest, what can you expect of me?

In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe "Pioneer 10." Its main mission was to reach Jupiter and send back information about that planet. It was a bold plan because at that time no satellite had gone beyond Mars. Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and so much more. It swung past Jupiter in November, 1973, then passed Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto.

By 1997, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun. Despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to earth. The most remarkable thing was that those signals were powered by an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light. Not even the most optimistic scientist could have ever imagined what that little 8-watt transmitter could do. Likewise it's amazing what God can do through little 8 watt transmitters like us.

It's doesn't mean holding up a sign at football games that says "Jn 3:16", it does not mean standing on a soap box in the streets. It does mean speaking the right word and the right time -- and as with telling a joke, timing is everything when it comes to spreading the gospel. Telling a friend at the right time that he or she is drinking too much, or that an affair will ruin their marriage and hurt their children, suggesting prayer to someone in distress, speaking up for someone who is being torn down. If we acknowledge our call to preach the gospel we will find the opportunities. We won't have to go very far, but we do have to say, "Lord, send me."