

We continue today with our series on giving an effective witness. Last week, I spoke about the role we play in spreading the gospel. It does not all rest on our shoulders; in fact, we are not the primary driver – God is. We must believe that God is at work in the lives and in the hearts of those around us, and that our part is to facilitate their coming to know and love Him. Because if God is not at work, it won't matter what we do or how clever we are - we will not be successful in our mission. If He is at work, then all things are possible.

This is demonstrated somewhat humorously in our first reading. If you can call any book of the bible “funny,” it would be the book of Jonah. God gave Jonah a seemingly hopeless task. He tells him to go to the great city of Ninevah, proclaiming that in forty days, it will be destroyed because of its evil ways. Jonah doesn't like this mission that God gives him, because he doesn't want the people of Ninevah to be warned. Ninevah was the enemy, and if God says that He will destroy the whole city in forty days, then let's start crossing off the days on the calendar, not warn them and give them a chance to be saved.

So he says “I won't do it,” and tries to run away from God, fleeing on a ship rather than obeying. Running away from God worked as well as one would expect - God sends a storm while they're on the sea, and Jonah's shipmates realize that it was because of Jonah's rebellion against God that this inexplicable storm had suddenly come. So naturally, they throw him overboard. Jonah is fighting with God, and

they don't want to get stuck in the middle of it. Then Jonah is swallowed by a whale, and is spit up; where? On the shores of Ninevah. Ok fine, Jonah sees he can't get out this mission, but he still doesn't like it. He complains that his mission is hopeless, but he goes anyway, proclaiming to the people of Ninevah that their judgment is at hand.

It does seem pretty hopeless – how can one man's preaching convert an entire city? And yet Jonah doesn't get a third of the way through the city, when everyone believes him, they stop their evil ways, and declare a city-wide fast as a sign of their repentance. You can picture Jonah just staring in disbelief as the people drop to their knees around him and beg God for forgiveness.

God can work marvelous things through us if we simply respond to what He is calling us to do, rather than trying to run away and hide from our task. What has He put on your heart? Who is He calling you to reach out to? When Jesus called his first apostles in today's gospel, he asked them to trust him and follow him, but didn't give them many details, simply telling them that they would become fishers of men. What has He put on your heart? How is He calling you to give witness to the gospel to those around you?

That can seem like an overwhelming task, to invite others to discipleship when we ourselves are still figuring out what that means in our lives. Who are we to call others to follow Christ when we, so often, fail to do it ourselves. When we think

that, it's important to remember two things, that 1) the only people available to preach the gospel are sinners, so being a sinner doesn't get us out of it, and 2) we are not alone in this mission. We work together, as a parish and as a Catholic school, to form growing disciples. Catholic Schools Week will begin next week, so I'm happy to speak about the blessing that we have to be part of Notre Dame Academy. There will always be competing narratives that we have to fight against, ideas that are contrary to the gospel that we have to resist and refute. The greatest value in Catholic schools is that it provides a faith-based education and environment, one that isn't intermingled with competing narratives or understandings of the human person that we know are false. At Notre Dame Academy, we have faith in all our children, so if you are parents looking for a school, it's hard to do better than Notre Dame Academy.

Our mission of forming growing disciples can seem like a daunting task. But there's no reason to be anxious. If we do our part and respond to God's will in our lives, then He will make sure that good fruit is produced. The work is His, not ours. Let us remember that the burden of success is not on our shoulders; we are simply the instruments that will be used by the Lord of all creation.