



## **“All of Us Are Called to Be Missionaries, Ministers and Witnesses of the Gospel”**

Christ calls the two sons of Zebedee, Peter and Andrew, and immediately, they leave their nets and follow Christ. You can almost see their willing heart to sacrifice everything in order to follow Christ, to serve Him, to become the “fishers of men” that Christ has called them to be. Their response is astonishing, childlike in its innocence, manly in its ready and courageous response. They left the security of their father, their homes and families, their livelihood, everything, to follow Christ. Often, they didn’t even know where their next meal would come from or where they would lay their heads. After Christ’s resurrection, all were imprisoned, persecuted, tortured, and, eventually martyred or exiled for sharing the Gospel, the Good News that Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, had come to give mankind new life—eternal life—to all.

In other words, in calling them to be “fishers of men,” evangelists, Christ God wasn’t calling them to a life of ease or even physical safety, and certainly not to comfort, but rather, of self-denial, of service, of dying to self—even at the cost of their earthly lives, so that they could enable others to attain to eternal life as well. He called them to put Christ and His Church, the life of the Gospel, above all things. He was preparing them to take up the cross to spread the Gospel, the Good News of mankind’s return to Eden, to a transformed life, with Christ God.

We often think of missions, missionaries, and evangelists as something that only a select few are called to—something that’s the job of the bishops and priests. The reality is that ALL of us by virtue of our baptism are called to be missionaries, ministers and witnesses of the Gospel—loving God and caring for the salvation of others, more than fearing the rejection of others.



St. Tikhon the Confessor and Enlightener of North America, whose memory, together with the other North American Saints, we keep today, has this to say to us on this topic of evangelism:

**“The spread of Christ’s Faith ought to be near and precious to the heart of every Orthodox Christian.”**

Christ, in His own words, says, “you are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world” (Mt.



5:13-14). His commandment to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 28:19) and teaching them to observe all things He’s commanded is the calling of every baptized Orthodox Christian.

This calling means that we need to be willing to give up some of the “creature comforts” our society tells us we need to do more to participate in the worship of Holy Church in a sacrificial way, to support her ministries, and to be ourselves part of her ministering to others. This goes beyond and above our tithing, giving alms, and doing good. It means that each person is responsible for how you live out the Gospel in your own daily life and how faithful and fervent is your witness to those who do not yet know Christ and His holy Church.

This is the part most people find challenging—we’re called to witness to the truth of Christ, the new life in Christ, to a world or even in a family that tells you to keep your faith quiet, that constantly presents a way of life contrary to the Gospel and Orthodox Faith. In last Sunday’s Gospel Christ says, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me... and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” (Mt. 10: 37, 38).

Through their communion with and love for God, the disciples also grew in love for their fellow man. This is the natural fruit born from a growing relationship and communion with God. At great cost to themselves, they brought the world to the knowledge and love of Christ and His salvation through their authentic and true witness of the new life offered to all in Jesus Christ.

We see this same example of selfless and Christ-centered love in the Saints of North America. They risked their physical lives on this continent to bring the life-saving Gospel and Orthodox Faith, the very presence of Christ, to this spiritually barren and hostile land (we remember that St. Juvenaly and Peter the Aleut were both martyred). They all suffered, just as the Apostles did, to preach and witness the timeless truth of Christ for love of a people they didn’t even know.





Later, as the number of Orthodox increased through conversion and immigration, they reassured their scattered, uncertain flock that it is in their grounding, their identity in Christ in His Church, that they (and we) find our true home—beyond any ethnic or national identities, beyond what it means to be an American or, at first, in the case of Alaska, good Russians. Instead, they came to make men and women true Christians, to bring them to the knowledge and love of God. Two of them went from being missionaries in America to being two of the greatest hierarchs of modern Russia. [St. John Kochurov](#) became the first clergyman martyred by the Bolsheviks.

We celebrate their legacy of love, courage, and zeal for the Gospel today as their spiritual progeny in this land. We ask for their prayers in our own efforts to carry on their work—with all its challenges wrought by aggressive humanism and secularism—to grow in courage to share the Gospel and the Orthodox Faith in this spiritually dry and thirsty land in great need of Christ.

The Lord calls on us in today's Gospel to be “fishers of men” too—in our homes, businesses, at the grocery store, at school, in the midst of the hardships of your Plebe Summer training, to serve and evangelize in His name. Wherever you and I go, we need to be conscious of striving to bring Christ with us and be ready to stand up to identify ourselves as Orthodox Christians, worshipers of the One true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Keep the Faith and share it because it's life for us and those who receive it! We witness to the truth and living faith we share as Orthodox in our daily struggle to pray, to repent of sin, to live humbly and in accordance with the Gospel.

How? Authenticity speaks, our witness speaks, but it costs us something: it costs us our time, coming to worship even when we don't feel like it or when those errands are pressing, inviting others to join us for worship, loving each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, being willing to tell others about Christ and the Orthodox Faith, even just identifying ourselves as Orthodox Christians, making the sign of the cross before starting to eat—fearing God more than we fear men. All of these actions help promote a culture of Christian faith in our secular culture.

If we want to see our church grow and our region changed into a God-loving, God-fearing place, more reflective of God's Kingdom, if we want to see others experience the new life in Christ we have, if we want to see strong families and children growing confidently in their identity, firmly grounded in Christ, then we come to see ourselves as “fishers of men,” missionaries, Christ's evangelists, living this life for God's glory above all else. May each of us pray for such love to be true fishers of men. Holy Saints of North America pray for us that we too may be missionaries, glorifying God with our lives through our witness, our words, and our deeds!