

**Homily for January 23, 2005
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 8:23-9:3

Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Matthew 4:12-23

We are called to be like soap.

A clever advertisement for cellular phone service has found a niche in the popular consciousness. The question, "Can you hear me now?" suggests that with this system, reception is good anywhere in the world - if you are open to the call.

This all sounds like a vocation ad - not merely vocation to priesthood or religious life, but vocation to a life of Christian ministry - to that of compassion and healing. God says to all of us, "Can you hear me now?" And we can hear this call anywhere in the world, if we are open to it.

Today's Gospel reading, Matthew chapter four, recounts Jesus' call to two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John, all of them fishermen. He invites them with simple, direct, forceful words: "Come after me." Their response is immediate and total. They leave their trade. More than that, James and John leave their father. In a patriarchal society, the father-son relationship is one of the most intimate bonds. It suggests family responsibilities as well as the family business. These men are called from their previous lives of fishing to new lives of teaching and healing.

Their response to the call of discipleship may

appear to be quite radical. Actually, very few of us are asked to leave all behind and launch out into new lives and new ministerial responsibilities. Most of us are expected to answer the call and remain where we are, doing what we do, but now with a view to proclaiming explicitly with our lives the Gospel of the reign of God.

This weekend, the Church again proclaims through its teaching - but more significantly through our lives and through the faith lives of all Catholics - the absolute value of every human life, from conception to natural death. This weekend marks yet another anniversary of the Roe versus Wade and Doe versus Bolton abortion decisions and provides an opportunity to re-affirm the Catholic Church's pro-life position, which defends all life from cradle to grave and the church's opposition to abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment.

Specifically, the Church has inaugurated a "Project Rachel," designed for those who have had abortions and now feel alienated from the Church, God and the community. Although it often happens that many people bear the responsibility for an abortion, it is usually only the child's mother who bears all the suffering. Project Rachel is to help women and men heal the pain and alienation, to help folks accept God's love and forgive themselves.

More information about Project Rachel and other life issues is available on a table in the rear.

Just as Jesus called his disciples centuries ago, so we are called through our baptism to be there for those in need of healing...who are hurting from whatever cause. I think our role as Catholics in regards to healing and help is much akin to that a priest described of an African catechist. In his African village, Zacharias served for many years as a catechist and elder of his parish. After a long life of service to his church and the people of Kenya, Zacharias was laid to rest. After the funeral, another catechist said of Zacharias, "We will miss him. He went ki-sabuni" - Swahili for "like a bar of soap."

"Like a what?" she was asked.

"Ki-sabuni," she repeated - and went on to explain: "You know. In the house, the bar of soap sits next to the basin, available morning, noon and night to all - children, adults, the elderly, family and guests alike. It never discriminates or complains of being used and reused. It is taken for granted as it slowly disappears, until someone exclaims, 'Goodness, the soap is gone!' Zacharias was that kind of man," she said.

The Spirit is with us, in our ordinary day-to-day living, as common to us in our proclamation of life and the assurance of God's forgiveness and love as it was with those first disciples Jesus called. The world needs us to be "like soap," as present and helpful, consistent and unrelenting in defense of all life, speaking the good news of God's compassionate forgiveness right where we live the everyday. This we are called to do and be.

We are called to be like soap.