

# ECHOS OF CHURCH LIFE

BY KRISTI HAAS

After several rings around the rosary with a catechist's three-year-old son and four-year-old daughter, a book of Bible stories for toddlers made its way from the shelf into my hands. Catechesis was in session in the rest of the building, and I was watching the little ones while their mother taught first grade. As we collected each other from our final fall down to the floor, I could tell the shy little brother was catching a case of the euphoria that spun in his big sister's eyes. He too yearned to hear a story.

Where in the toddler Bible could I begin? Perhaps because I felt a little seasick, the illustration of the call of Simon the fisherman caught my eye (Lk. 5:1-11). I love the story, and I had recently asked some students in catechesis how they would feel if they were Simon, James, and John—after catching nothing, at Jesus' invitation to cast their nets into the deep, when the abundance of fish weighed down the boat, when he said, "do not be afraid" (5:10).



*Kristi Haas is an Apprentice Catechetical Leader at Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Angleton, TX. She will graduate in 2012 with a M.A. in theology from the University of Notre Dame through the Institute's Echo: Faith Formation Leadership Program.*

The last line of the passage, however, had struck me more than ever as I read it aloud to the students: “When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him” (5:11). After proclaiming that line, I had instinctively avoided repeating, “how would you feel?” The students were already inside the story, in which Christ had stirred up the fishermen’s desire and made his abundance known to them. He was ready to move on. Instead, I had asked, “Do you want to follow him?” It was their turn to respond. Some heads nodded. Some said yes. I do not know all of the complicated causes, nor whether these causes include the idea that when in church, the best answer is the one your catechist wants to hear. But this was a place to start—a simple yes, a simple desire—a moment of evangelization.

Recalling this memory, I read the same story to the toddler siblings. Prepared this time for the stark ending, I read slowly, showed pictures, hoped the kids would say “yes,” and finally pronounced the last words on the page: “filled with fish.” Fish? Where was the rest?

I stammered to summarize the ending myself: and the fishermen were amazed, and they followed him. Then I asked the little girl why Jesus wanted them to follow. Visions of Galilean marine life danced in her head. Overflowing with delight, she grinned, “because he wanted to catch more fish!”

My summary of the disciples’ response was not quite satisfactory. Had the book left out that part so important to evangelization, the abrupt ending that invites us to respond in the same way? No, I had simply neglected to turn the page. Too many pockets-full-of-possibilities, perhaps.

Through her declaration that Jesus was hungry for fish, though, the little girl revealed that the truncated story was missing something else, something just as important as the fishermen’s response. The last few verses also tell what was behind their response: the conversation, the explanation of the desire of Christ for them and their growing desire for him. He hastened to meet them in the midst of their grimy nets, and he made himself known to them in anticipation of their desire.

Evangelization is our participation in his haste. It is pointing out Christ who is already among us, already after us, already revealing God to the world. If he had simply walked away from the boats with no explanation, we would be left with piqued curiosity, a warm feeling, enough fish for a whole Lent—and no companion. We would not know what we longed for. Rather, he invites us to talk with him, to follow him, and to go into “the vast and complicated world” today to announce his invitation into God’s still burning love (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* §70).

*That love is catching.*

