Immediately following the ordination of a deacon, the deacon kneels before the bishop; the bishop then places the book of the Gospels in the hands of the newly ordained and says…

"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you preach."

For me this is a most profound command that I take with all seriousness and with joy – even as I struggle to live up to the full measure of what I have been commanded. St. Paul makes this the same imperative to Timothy in today’s excerpt from this letter to his younger protégé (2 Timothy 3:14-4:2). This command to preach and to live the Gospel is a command that all Christians receive at baptism with the words of the celebrant as he blesses the ears and the lips of the newly baptized saying,

"Ephphetha, (Aramaic for ‘be opened’) The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May He soon touch your ears to receive His word, and your mouth to proclaim His faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen"

The profound role of scripture in our lives begins in our infancy, as Paul writes, and is the source of wisdom that leads us to salvation by way of faith in Jesus Christ. As Christians we become the prophets of the Good News that is available to everyone and is made know to all through our sharing of this most hopeful message. There are many opportunities for all of us to teach others the truths we have found in joy by our own sincere study of these sacred texts. Our teaching could be as instructors in our parish religious education program and RCIA
sponsorship. For many the most impactful way to teach, is in our daily lives at work and in our neighborhood by the way we live and the love we share.

St. Paul wrote this letter from prison where he will soon be put to death for his prophetic role of bringing the Good News of Jesus to the Gentiles – even though, he is still full of hope and positive in his approach as he provides this final instruction to Timothy. His command is simple, and to the point; “proclaim the word.” Further, Paul insists that the proclamation of the Gospel is to be persistent and to be done whether convenient or inconvenient. This calling is not as dangerous today as it was in Paul’s day, but it is not easy. We compete with a media that captivates many people for several hours a day, at a time when people leave church early, because the Sunday Mass has run a little over 60 minutes. It is at times like these that I think about the question Jesus poses in today’s Gospel (Luke 18:1-8), “… when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

The challenge for us today is how to convince others of the value we have found in God’s inspired word, in a way that convinces others of its practical value and usefulness. Of course it is important to stay positive and approach others with patience, as Paul encourages, but the most important attribute of our teaching is much more about who we are and not what we say or how we say it. If others see in us a people who are loving, caring, and joyous, then others will naturally be drawn to us. They will be drawn and they will want what we have that makes us this way, and they will want to be associated with others who live lives of joy and peace. What the world offers are things and things will be unfulfilling. What God offers through His word is faith, hope, and love. These are things that last and fulfill the deepest human desire. Once we possess these, and live them out in our daily lives we will draw others to make the same discovery we have made. Then we will be true heralds of the Gospel of Christ.