

Fourteenth Sunday of the Year

The Church, as explained by the Second Vatican Council, is by her very nature missionary, since according to the plan of the Father, she has her origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize. Consequently, she can never be closed in on herself. She is rooted in specific places in order to go beyond them. Her action, in support to Christ's word and under the influence of his grace and his charity, is fully and currently present to all people and all peoples, to lead them to faith in Christ.

The Gospel of today tells us that Jesus summoned his seventy committed people and sent them two by two to communicate God's love, to bind up wounds, and to be peacemakers in a troubled world. These ordinary people took with them no great plan, no set speech, and no practical manual to tell them what to do. They brought only their faith, their trust, and their experience of Jesus. They in fact had lived with him and had experienced him. Jesus also knew that they would make mistakes. In spite of this, he called them to himself, gave them his mission, and gave them his authority, to heal, rectify, and bring people back to life.

Today's Gospel reading tells us of the missionary journey of the disciples. The persons who had lived with Jesus and understood his mission and his work now go out to continue his mission. Luke tells us that Jesus appointed seventy disciples or seventy-two and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. Some think this has a symbolic reference to the seventy nations descended from Noah described in Genesis chapter ten. Most probably it reflects the time of Luke's community and sets forth the outline form, expected of a missionary. The disciples go in pairs and not as isolated individuals. In order that the fire of love may blaze in the hearts of men and women of every race and nation, Jesus sends his disciples, two by two to perform his task. The disciples of Christ are called to testify to the love of God in all of their life, and even in their death as well.

Jesus tells them that there is seriousness about seeking and spreading the message of peace. He tells them not to indulge in distractions but get on with their work. Jesus recommends his disciples as they go on their mission, not to weigh themselves down with all kinds of bags and baggage. Their security is not in material possessions, such as money, property, protection, and comfort. His advice is that the missionaries as they go to proclaim peace and kingdom take no walking staff, or a travelling bag or sandals, but trust fully in the divine providence.

The work of the disciples is not going to be easy as they will be required to enter very precarious situations with absolute minimum equipment. They will be like lambs being sent out to work among wolves. The urgency of the mission is captured by the mandate that they go in poverty and emptiness and not greet anyone on the way, something that would appear very strange in a culture dominated by gestures of hospitality. The core of their message must be peace. They in reality explain what Jesus is about and what the kingdom of God is about. This was the message at the Nativity and later at the resurrection. The disciples have their mission for the kingdom carefully planned out by Jesus for them. It includes three things: first, they have to establish a community, a community of love. Second, they are called upon to heal those who are sick. Thirdly, they are to announce that the kingdom of God is close at hand. Ultimately they are called upon to proclaim Jesus in their mission.

One word that occurs and is repeated in all three readings today is “peace”. Peace is not merely the absence of war or maintaining a balance of power between adversaries. It is the tranquility of order, it is the effect of justice and it is the effect of charity. Isaiah, in the First Reading, speaks of God sending “flowing peace, like a river”. Paul speaks of the peace and mercy that come to all who become that transformed person in Jesus Christ.

Like those seventy-two persons we too are called to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand and this has to be proclaimed through our lives. It is still possible for us to do it even after two thousand years through our simple acts of caring and our personal ability. It is necessary for us to lend a listening ear to the sick and lonely, helpless and elderly and give them that consolation and healing. The call of Jesus continues to come to us even today in our world. We have to give them the peace of Jesus.