

14th Sunday of the Year

Today's readings remind us, that, announcing the Good News of the Kingdom by words, deeds and life is not the task of only a few. Rather, it is a task for all baptized Christians.

In the first reading, Isaiah announces the good news to the returned Babylonian exiles that the ruined and isolated Jerusalem will take care of them "*as a mother comforts her baby son.*" Isaiah assures the returned Jews that they will live in the certainty of Yahweh's promises of love, protection, prosperity and salvation. In today's second reading, Paul removes the confusion created by the Judaizers in the minds of the new Gentile Christians of Galatia. He clearly conveys the good news that it is Jesus' death on the cross which brings one's salvation and not Jewish heritage or practice of Torah laws. Paul reminds us that the mission of each member of the Church is to bear witness to the saving power of the cross of Christ through a life of sacrificial, self-giving service.

In today's Gospel, Luke describes the fulfillment of the prophetic promise made by Isaiah in Jesus' commissioning of 72 disciples to preach the Gospel or the good news of God's love and salvation in towns and villages in preparation for his own visit. Jesus gives the disciples "travel tips" for their missionary journey. They must be walking witnesses of God's providence, relying on the hospitality of others, living very simple lives, preaching the Good News and healing the sick. Today's Gospel reminds us that we, the 1.5 billion Christians in the world today, have the mission of the 72, to preach the Gospel of Christ to the rest of world's 4.5 billion non-Christians.

We need to continue Christ's mission by proclaiming the Good News: Just as Jesus in today's Gospel gives instructions to the seventy-two missionaries, he also gives each one of us a mission to carry out. There were just a handful of followers in Jesus' day to preach the Good News, but, today, there are over one billion Catholics and about a half billion other Christians (in 30,000 denominations!) who accept Jesus as "Lord" and "Savior." So there are 1.5 billion missionaries in a world of six billion people.

A recent survey asked the question, "Why do adults join the Catholic Church in spite of the scandals publicized in the media?" Seventy-five percent of the new adult converts to the Catholic Church reported that they were attracted by a personal invitation from a Catholic who had a lively relationship with Christ and his Church. As faithful Catholics, we will attract

others to the Catholic Church—just as a rose attracts people by its beauty and fragrance. It's our job. It's our responsibility. We must not miss the current opportunities to be apostles in everyday life by our words and deeds.

We need to avoid giving counter-witness: The Church is founded on the rock of Peter, a humble, uneducated fisherman, who died for the Lord he loved. Compare his Faith and heroic witnessing with the “supermarket Catholicism” some of our leaders who publicly proclaim their “Catholicism,” yet support abortion, gay marriage, human cloning and experimentation with human rudiments. We should not be “Catholics for a Free Choice” who oppose anything proposed by the Church, including the most basic right to life. Nor should we be armchair Catholics, spiritual weekend-warriors, “cafeteria Catholics,” or “barely-make-it-to-Mass” members of the Church, who bear counter-witness to Christ. Instead of giving counter-witness, let us become heralds of the Kingdom in our own homes by treating each other with profound respect. When spouses respect each other and, thus, teach their children to do the same, our neighbors will experience the Kingdom in our families, because the Kingdom of God is God's rule in our hearts enabling us to do His will.

The modern world needs the heroic witnessing of martyrs: The early writers of the Church never called the first Christians “martyrs,” in the modern sense of the word, but rather gave that name to those who died “giving witness” to Christ. The most important element wasn't their deaths; it was their fidelity to their Faith until the last moment of their lives. Martyrs are not people to be consigned to the distant past. Recent history abounds with examples of martyrdom: civil war in Spain, religious persecution in Poland, Mexico, Vietnam, Russia, China, India and Africa.

The names of Edith Stein (Germany), Maximilian Kolbe (Poland), Miguel Pro (Mexico), and Pedro Poveda (Spain) are only the beginning of a long list of innocent victims, witnesses for their Faith. Even today, religious freedom is still denied in various countries. In our day, there are also “moral martyrs” who, although they are never physically killed, die a humiliating death, persecuted in the press, defamed in the media and falsely accused of faults they never committed. As successors of the seventy-two disciples, we are called upon to do Christ's work with the courage of these martyrs' convictions.