

## **Fourteenth Sunday of the Year July 03, 2016**

Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

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 adherence 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 peace makers 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, to rectify and bring people back to life. Today all the baptized do understand their call to the mission of Jesus and their task to do the ministry for others. Jesus calls each to be ready for the mission, to leave behind the luggage and set out with hearts fully attuned to his call.

The First Reading from the Book of Isaiah the Prophet sees many blessings in store for the people. They will know the joy of being God's special people. The passage begins by saying that we should rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all of us who love her. The prophet sees the blessing in store for his people. They will know the joy of being God's special people. The prophet joyfully announces the transformation that has taken place in the royal city of Jerusalem. The city now can consider itself like a mother of a large family with plenty of resources to keep them alive and healthy. The prophet calls them to rejoice with her in joy, all of those who had been mourning over her. Based on these words, it appears that their joy should be for the physical City of Jerusalem. The verse that follows implies that Jerusalem is alive, being a life giving body. It states, "That you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom." In darker days the kings in Jerusalem had to worry about food and water. They were surrounded by threat of war and famine. Now the city is secure with plenty of things that make life worth living. God's grace is abundant

that it is like a river of water flowing through the streets. Jerusalem's future is full of life and promise.

In today's Second Reading taken from the Letter to the Galatians Paul tells the Christian community that in order to bring God's reign into our personal world, we must boast of nothing other than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross of the Lord means the whole Christ event. He expresses with joyful pride what Christ crucified has done to him. He tells them that whosoever has to boast must boast in the Lord." Paul is happy to explain to them of the marks of Jesus branded on his body and he has been carrying them. This does not mean that Paul had the marks of the cross of Christ on his body. Paul in fact was referring to all the suffering that he had to endure for Christ. He has surrendered totally to Christ who is crucified. Nothing else in his life means anything to him. He endured illness, flogging and stoning, all sorts of persecutions for Christ. These marks that he carried on his body were proof that he was a slave of Christ. Paul's enemies should recognize all he has suffered for the Gospel and should trouble him no more. Equally today in our own times, we are aware that many Catholics bear marks of suffering, torture and imprisonment for Christ. Through their suffering, they have brought God's reign into our world. They are living examples of Saints who are ready to suffer so the glory of God may be seen in the world.

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 number two also adds to the witness value which required the testimony of two people. The disciples are called to demonstrate, in every aspect of their lives, the love that they are to bring to the world: they go out two by two in order to testify to the unity of the disciples of Christ, they must pray that the Lord calls other apostles of love, they try to imitate the gentleness of the lamb who forgives and allows himself to be mistreated by wolves and ferocious beasts. 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. There is also a certain eschatological urgency indicating the harvest is ready and there is immediate need of the labourers. Those words may also have been directed

towards early Christians as they lived in relatively tiny communities in a sea of paganism and had to work hard to bring them to Christian faith.

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 bag 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. It is not in their status and standing high in the eyes of others that they proclaim the Kingdom; it is not in the power and influence that they can wield that they win over people. Their security comes from deep within, a security that no one or no circumstance can take away from them. The person then becomes vulnerable making God to work through their weakness.

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. If they are accepted their mission is complete but if they are rejected then those who do so will have a fate worse than Sodom, notorious for its lack of hospitality.

The mission was dangerous and difficult, yet indeed challenging to the disciples. The seventy two returned with joy and their hearts filled with thanksgiving. They were back from their mission rejoicing and excited. They discovered they could do the same things that Jesus was doing. They could do the healing, drive away demons and even bring dead to life. They were the extension of Jesus in every possible way. To be a labourer in the harvest is for the happiness of others to be as important as your own. It is to experience inner peace and to be a bringer of peace to others. Their life was transformed with the mission given to them. They tell

Jesus that even the demons submitted themselves to them in his Name. To this, Jesus answers, "I watched Satan fall from Heaven like a flash of lightning." Jesus declares that the success of the disciples demonstrates that the kingdom of God is winning out over the power of Satan. Using the futuristic language and applying it to the present situation, Jesus emphasizes that the disciple will be able to exercise the power of the ministry without being subject to harm. However these signs of immediate success are not the most important aspects of the ministry. Most important is that the names of the disciples are written in heaven, a symbol of salvation.

Jesus is the messenger of the Father: he is the beloved Son, the one in whom the Father put all his love. Jesus is he who comes to bring to the world all of God's love for men! For love wants to propagate itself always further and further: all love - and God is love - is in God from all eternity, but he can and always wants to pour himself out into the creatures whom he calls to participation in his own life. And therefore Jesus, who is God, has no other desire than that of seeing the love of God spread out more and more across the earth, like a devouring fire: I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled. Now Jesus calls his disciples to him and sends them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He tells them to inform people that the Kingdom is close at hand and immediate. There is a sense of urgency in the invitation to the kingdom. There is a single hearted purpose in accepting this invite and hence he tells them that nothing should hinder them: no purse or haversacks or tunic or sandals or money purse. They are to be empty before God and seek him alone among the people.

One word that occurs and is repeated in all three readings today is "peace". Peace is not merely the absence of war or maintaining 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. And, in the Gospel, Jesus sends his disciples as lambs in the midst of wolves, and tells them to proclaim peace and to bring peace with them to every house they enter. This peace is not dependent on outside circumstances. It can exist even when we are surrounded by storms. It is the peace Jesus experienced after his prayer in the garden. It is the peace Jesus experienced on the cross in the midst of sufferings. It is the peace that Paul experiences, even though he has had his share of the "cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" and who bears in his own body the marks of Jesus' pain and suffering. So our task as Christians is to be bringers of peace. It is a peace that a close following

of Jesus can bring. It is a peace that will transform our lives and make us available for others. Finally peace is oneness with God's will.

The Gospel and the other readings tell us that we too have the task to proclaim the kingdom and we are now able to bring God's reign into our world. We have been made part of God's family and we have the responsibility to reach out to God's children beyond all barriers we can imagine. Jesus wants us to rejoice, not simply in what we have done in the past but in the fact that we have worked out our salvation by being part of the kingdom. Let Peace be our greeting and peace be our hallmark. Peace is the sign of the presence of God's kingdom. May the God of peace be in our hearts and in our homes today and every day.

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 peace of Jesus. The love of God must not make us forget his justice and his rigor. Let us always remember that the mercy of God cannot be separated from his justice. God is infinitely good, but he is also infinitely just. While he rewards good, he also punishes evil. The grace of God calls us, it invites us to follow Jesus in his mission of love throughout the entire world. The grace of God is powerful, it is the most powerful proof of the love of God for us, but we have to fear that this same grace that is offered to us today will never again be given to us in order to call us to follow Christ.

Many years ago, when a social worker worked as a volunteer at a hospital, he got to know a little girl named Liz who was suffering from a rare & serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her 5-year old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness. The doctor explained the situation to her little brother, and asked the little boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. All saw him hesitate for only a moment before taking a deep breath and saying, "Yes I'll do it if it will save her." As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled, as all did, seeing the colour returning to her cheek. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, "Will I die right away, or how soon?" The boy had misunderstood the doctor; he thought he would have to give his sister all of his blood in order to save her. WOW!!.....Beautiful.

There was a tightrope walker, who was so good that he could walk between two twenty stories building on a tight rope with a balancing pole. Thousands of people would watch him perform his breathtaking feat. After he walked across the building he would have his assistant sit on his shoulder and he would proceed to walk across the building. Everybody was amazed and gave him a thunderous applause. He asked them whether they believed that he could do it again. The crowd said, "Yes, we believe that you can!" After a while he asked the crowd again, "Now, who wants to volunteer to get on my shoulder?" With that the crowd became silent. There is a difference between Believe and Faith. We can believe what we see. In the above story, the crowd believed in the tightrope walker because they saw him perform the feat. But when he asked them "Who wants to get on my shoulder?" everyone was silent. You see, the crowd had Belief but they did not have Faith. This story clearly illustrates the difference between belief and having faith.

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