

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

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Matt. 9:36 When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

Matt. 10:1 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

Matt. 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

The story of the call of the apostles begins, appropriately enough, with his awareness of the sorry state of the people who are dejected and harassed 'like sheep without a shepherd'. The people are ready to hear the good news, but who will proclaim it to them? These twelve 'apostles' are people sent by their master and empowered by him for their task. In terms of church history, the twelve represent the authentic tradition of the church as it seeks to be faithful to the word and work of Jesus. It is striking that the group chosen for this task are such a motley crew and from a wide variety of backgrounds. They include rebels and collaborators, one who will deny Jesus, another who will betray him and others who are only interested in who should be first. And all of them will run away in the end.

Reflection

In choosing the twelve Jesus is in a way choosing us all, willing to risk himself and his message to weak human beings who will fail him and give scandal by their behaviour. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that the good news continues to be heard. If Jesus only called the perfect or those who could be depended upon to be totally committed to their task, what would we be left with? A church of the elite! However, Jesus came to call sinners and that's the reason we know he is calling us.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

We often 'feel sorry' for people but in a condescending way which confirms our position of superiority. Jesus rejects all condescension; he wonders at the extraordinary potential of the people. What he 'feels sorry' for is that they are not being given the opportunity to fulfil this potential. Lord, teach your church to look at the modern world with the eyes of Jesus. So often we look on the world as evil, to be shunned as evil and dangerous. Help us rather to look on our contemporaries with sympathy, to see that their violence, greed, mindlessness, instability are symptoms of a lack of meaning or direction. Help us, like Jesus, to recognise the graces of our modern world, its insistence on: human rights – equality of all cultures. The world is an abundant harvest which you have sown, send us more labourers to do the reaping. We thank you that in this age, as in all ages, you have sent us great men and women to show us the power of nonviolence, to teach us to re-discover that nature is your sacrament and that generosity is more powerful than self-interest. Truly you have summoned disciples of your son Jesus – many of them not members of our church – and given them authority over the unclean spirits of our time, with the power to cast them out and to cure the different diseases and sicknesses which afflict us. Help us Lord to look at ourselves honestly but without cynicism proclaiming to ourselves that your kingdom is within our grasp.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL _ Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

Jesus paid close attention to the people in need whom he met on his travels. Moreover, the Gospels present him frequently with his gaze fixed on the crowds. Matthew reminds us "On seeing the multitudes he had pity on them for they were weak and abandoned like sheep without a shepherd". Neither the representatives of Rome nor the religious leaders in Jerusalem cared for those people of the villages. His decision to call the twelve apostles and send them to the lost sheep of Israel was born of this compassion.

For that purpose he himself gives them authority; but what he gives them is not a sacred power for them to use arbitrarily as they wish. It is not a power to govern people and nations like the Romans did. It is a power whose purpose is to do good, driving out evil spirits and healing every kind of disease and sickness.

The purpose of all authority in the church is to heal, to alleviate suffering and to do good. It is a gift from Jesus. Those who exercise it must do it "for free" because the church is a gift of Jesus to the nations. It does this by bringing health, life, community, and by freeing the possessed. This is what the four commands of Jesus suggest: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons."

JOSÉ A PAGOLA-Following in the Footsteps of Jesus

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Jesus allowed himself to be touched by the needs of the crowd. When you are with people, what difference does it make to the way you relate to them when you have empathy with them?
2. The commission Jesus gave the twelve "to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness" is a reminder to us that we all have the capacity to be an influence for good in the lives of others. In this we continue the mission of Jesus (cf. St. Teresa's Prayer). When have you experienced yourself as having a healing or life-giving influence on another person? Who has had that influence on you?
3. At a first glance it might seem that Jesus made some bad choices in his twelve apostles. One will deny Jesus, another will betray him and others are only interested in who will be first. All of them will run away in the end. This reminds us that all kinds can share in the mission of Jesus, no matter how we see ourselves..
4. The instructions Jesus gave the disciples before he sent them out have a note of urgency about them. What difference does it make for you when you approach a task with a sense of urgency?
5. He also tells them their service should be 'without charge', keeping in mind what they have received without charge from God. Remember when you have received generous and undemanding love from another.

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

Pope Francis's annual pre-Christmas address to Vatican cardinals has become something of a hit. He is not shy of naming truths that might be hard to hear. During the 2015 address, Pope Francis criticised those who were trying to block reform in the Church and said that changes at the Vatican should be seen first and foremost as a sign of life. The Church needs reform because 'she is alive'. Pope Francis does this from a place of love, as a pastor who has genuine care for people, for the Gospel message and for our common home.

Where reform is concerned, there will always be obstacles. These obstacles usually come from within, because reform means letting go of what no longer serves. The ego finds this difficult. Individually and institutionally we are in need of conversion and transformation. Conversion enables us to be authentic to the inclusive, communal, and universal message of Jesus. Today many people are rediscovering the wisdom traditions of Christianity, turning toward the mystics, turning to practices like *Lectio Divina*, embracing contemplation and silence, reconnecting with treasures we have forgotten, or perhaps were never taught.

***"Tradition is not a museum, true religion is not a freezer, and doctrine is not static but grows and develops, like a tree that remains the same yet which gets bigger and bears ever more fruit."* (Pope Francis - Let us dream, p.57)**

How do you deal with change? Can we, as individuals and as members of the Church community, learn to see change as a sign of life?

Do you experience the Church as a place of encounter and dialogue? What can your parish or community do to provide safe places for people to discuss, to ask questions and to grow in faith?

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The appointment and sending of the twelve marks an important evolution in the ministry of Jesus. The Gospel reading today offers us three panels: the motivation, the call and the sending. Each moment will speak to us today: why proclaim the Gospel? Who is to proclaim it? How is it to be offered?

Kieran O'Mahony OSA- tarsus.ie