

14th. Sunday in Ordinary Time

One of the hardest things that I was asked to do as a newly ordained priest was to go to the government High Schools to teach religious education. If I was honest, I would have to say that I didn't want to be there any more than the young people that I was trying to teach. But I was there because I was sent and somehow the Lord must have been there with me helping me to survive, and despite my fears and the opposition that I encountered, must have been doing something good.

When Jesus sent the disciples out on mission they too must have felt somewhat out of their depth. They were on hostile Samaritan ground doing something that they felt that they had not been trained for. But Jesus does give them instruction enough and more importantly the authority that they needed to speak in his name. The number sent out is not so clear. The ancient manuscripts are evenly divided in using seventy or seventy-two. There is a strong argument that Luke used the number seventy to link this episode to what happened when the Spirit of prophecy came down upon seventy of the elders in the time of Moses. There is the same sense here that the disciples were sharing in the prophetic mission of Jesus as the seventy elders were sharing in the prophetic mission of Moses.

The disciples were reminded that they needed to travel light. They carried with them the authority of Jesus and the power to act in his name. That was all they needed. They were on a dangerous mission, like lambs in the midst of wolves. They were to rely upon the hospitality of the people to whom they were sent. But they were warned to expect that not everyone would make them welcome. Just as Jesus was rejected by many, they too could experience the same fate. Jesus told them not to be upset by that but to use it as an invitation to remind people of how close the coming of God's kingdom was.

We are told that he sent them out ahead of him. Not only were they being sent by Jesus, but they were also sharing in his mission. It was his work that they were doing, not their own. I often have to remind myself of that when I am faced with Pastoral Work that is beyond me. We need to read this passage as more than what happened for seventy disciples, but as a way of describing the ongoing mission of the Church. You and I are among those seventy sent out by the Lord. He sends us out with the simple mission of preparing the hearts of people for the Lord. Whatever good we do for others allows the Lord in to do something more. Whatever healing we offer, whatever forgiveness we can share allows the Lord to do more. Sometimes it may be through us, but often it is in ways that we never know about.

The Lord sent the disciples out in pairs. He knew that we need the support of others to do his work. He knew that much more can be done when people work together to do it. The church that Jesus founded is a community of people who together use the gifts that have been given to each of us. No one is meant to work alone.

I think we would have to admit that the way that we see ourselves as Church has changed during our lifetimes. We can no longer see the Church as being made up of those who lead and those who follow. Pope Francis keeps reminding those who are in any way called to leadership in the Church that they are the servants of everyone else. Jesus is our model of servant leadership. The Holy Trinity is our model for community.

St. Paul is sometimes thought of as being a person who had a singular personal mission from Jesus to preach the gospel. But Paul would not have thought of himself in this way. He went on his missionary journeys in the company of others. Barnabas and Luke were his companions for many of those missions. He went on those missions as someone who was commissioned by the ordinary people who made up the Church at Antioch. Today we read the concluding part of Paul's letter to the Galatians. He had to say some harsh words to them in the course of the letter. But he said those things to protect them from the outsiders who had come to disturb

their faith by telling them that they had to keep practising the details of the Jewish Law if they were faithful to Jesus. Paul told them, "It does not matter if a person is circumcised or not; what matters is for him to become an altogether new creature." Paul spoke harshly to the Galatians because he felt so connected to them. He loved them and was on their side. He wanted them to see themselves as sharing in the same mission that he was on. As he concludes his letter today he prays that the grace of Jesus be planted deep within them and calls them his brothers and sisters.

In our gospel today we see that the disciples came back overwhelmed by what Jesus was able to do through them. And so it is for us. Jesus rejoiced with them in the success of their mission but urged them to see that what was really worth celebrating was that their names were written in heaven. It was God's choice for them to be one with Jesus and to be part of his mission that was to be treasured and celebrated. It is God's choice for us to be his Church that we can celebrate again today.