

14th. Sunday in Ordinary Time

If you were having a cup of coffee with one of the 40% of Australian who put themselves down in the last census as having no religion, what would you say to them if they asked you why you believe in Jesus?

Perhaps you would say something about how believing in Jesus is a gift that you have been given and how your relationship with Jesus shapes who you are and how you live as a person.

Today we hear about 70 of the first disciples of Jesus being sent out by Jesus to those who had not heard of him. They were sent to bring a message of peace and to heal whoever they encountered. They were sent to make welcome into the kingdom of God whoever would accept that message of peace and healing. It is a delightfully simple message that they are called to share. In many ways it is the message that shapes who we are as Church today: bringers of peace and agents of healing. How appropriate that message is for us today as we celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday.

Much of today's gospel is about the instructions that Jesus gives to the 70 so that they may deliver their message effectively. They are to travel light, carrying no food, no extra clothes. What they did need to carry and use well was the authority that Jesus gave them to speak and act in his name. They are not to be distracted by

choosing where they stay or what food they eat. If their message is not accepted, they are to move on.

Today is the beginning of the second session of the Plenary Council. At least two members from every Diocese and four from every Archdiocese along with their bishops and Vicar Generals will meet in Sydney to shape the way that our Church in Australia can most effectively continue the work of Jesus. We have all been given a chance to say what we believe the Holy Spirit is saying to us about what kind of Church we need to be.

It will be a very big task for the Plenary Council to be faithful to all that we have said and to be faithful to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit in all of that. I suspect that much of what is dealt with will be like the instructions that Jesus gave his disciples in today's gospel. Much will be said about how we can be more effective in the task that Jesus has given us to bring the good news of the kingdom to the people and the world of today. My hope is that we may not spend all our energy in working out how we might do what we do but save some energy to focus in on the message of peace and healing that is presented to us in today's gospel. To be Church we need to know who calls us into community and sends us out. We need to be identified with Jesus.

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 to be 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." I think too much energy has been spent on getting all the rules right in our Church at the expense of us becoming all together new creatures. As Paul 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.