

COLLECT: O GOD, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we can be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and' ever. Amen.

THE LESSONS: First Lesson: Isaiah 66:10-14

Psalm: 66:1-8

Second Lesson: Galatians 6:1-17

Gospel: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

THE SERMON: Good morning and happy 4th of July tomorrow. I hope that you will be safe and enjoy this day commemorating the day of independence for our nation.

When we think of Jesus and his disciples, we normally have in mind the 12 men that Jesus specifically chose: His A Team. These were men that Jesus “handpicked” to specifically mentor and share experiences with. We see them depicted in paintings of the Last Supper as his companions at the table. We think of Mary Magdalene, on Easter morning taking the message to them, safely hidden in the locked upper room, that he has been resurrected. I can imagine her standing in front of Peter shouting: “He is alive.”

Yet, Jesus had other disciples, men and women, who were with him. They traveled from town to town with him, they sat and listened to the lessons he taught, they too were partners in his ministry.

In today's Gospel, we read that Jesus had 70 disciples that he commissioned to travel in pairs to towns and villages he wanted to go to. They would preach, spread the word and do some healing. They acted as an advance team for Jesus. They prepared the way for his coming.

When Jesus sent these teams out, he told them to take no extra clothes, no extra sandals, no purse which meant they traveled with no money. Another Gospel said they could carry a staff. A staff would be helpful, for support, as they walked often rocky road or paths. It would also be important to have as a weapon to fight off those who may have attacked them as they traveled in isolated areas.

They were to talk to no one they met on the road. Jesus didn't want them side-tracked. He wanted them focused on the task that was ahead of them and the people to which they were going. He wanted them to conserve themselves for as he stated: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers/workers are few."

Jesus understood the task could be difficult. He spoke as sending these laborers like lambs out in the midst of wolves. He realized that there would be those who opposed the message and the methods of the disciples. He knew there would be resistance to changes the disciples presented. He knew religious authorities and people in the synagogues would be opposed to changes in the way, these disciples, worshipped God and how they dealt with the people. They may have attended the synagogues, but they had some differences.

The people they were approaching were familiar with the God of the Hebrew Bible, the part that we now call the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God could be angry, punishing, and taking revenge. But these

disciples were preaching the words that Jesus taught them. They presented a God of love, a God who forgave, a father who loved them. They were building the New Testament. In the New Testament God would reconcile, bring people into right relationship with him and teach people to love others as they loved themselves.

Reconciliation would become the mission of the Church, and not just obedience to the Law of Moses which was adherence to the 10 Commandments.

Jesus told these disciples, who were going on ahead of him, that they would live on and be fed by the hospitality of the people they would meet in towns or villages. If a person offered them a place to stay, they were to stay in that house until they had finished their work in that town. If someone offered them a better place, they were to refuse the offer. When they entered the house in which they would be staying, they were to bless it by saying, "Peace be unto this house!" They were to eat and drink whatever the host prepared or offered. They were not to ask that something different be prepared.

Jesus knew that people would not only be listening to words of the disciples, but they would be watching what they were doing and making decisions about them. Some would accept the words because they were motivated by the healing as the disciples cured the sick. Some would be doubtful of the disciples even as they cast out demons. Perhaps it was the announcement by the disciples, when they began to work, in a town, that the Kingdom of God had come near to them.

For some the announcement that the Kingdom of God has come near to you was welcoming, especially as they saw the disciples heal the sick and

drive out demons. Maybe they decided that these men were indeed doing the work of God.

Others may have been skeptical because the disciples were just men like them and they found it difficult to accept the fact that God had placed these powers in them. Also, the words they were preaching proposed a change in God's relationship with them. It would be too much and they would drive them out of the town.

Jesus told these disciples if they weren't accepted in a town, they were to shake the dust off their feet in protest and go on to another town. They were not to wish for punishment on that town. Jesus said, "If they reject you, they reject me and the one who sent me."

The disciples were joyous when they returned to Jesus. They marveled that people listened to them and they were even able to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. They were ecstatic they had been given such powers. Jesus told them he had given them the authority to step on snakes and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy and nothing could hurt them.

Jesus also told them he had seen Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. What he saying here?

(Satan had been an angel, a member of the heavenly host. For confirmation read the beginning of the Book of Job. In Revelation 12:7-9, there is a war in heaven between the heavenly forces of Satan and those of the angel Michael. Michael wins and Satan is forced out of heaven and falls to earth.)

Jesus is saying that he had seen Satan love power and even on earth he can be defeated. Jesus tells his disciple to rejoice that their names are written in heaven and not the fact demons submit to them.

Here in this Gospel story, Jesus commissions his followers to go out into the world, spread the word and to continue his work. We, who are Christians, have that same commission. Ours are the mind, heart and hands of God in this world. We are to tell the story of God's love for us. He wants us to do good, to have good lives, to be repentant when we do wrong. He wants us to be peace filled and treat others only as we want to be treated.

It is not easy being a Christian doing the work of God. As Jesus said, "The harvest is plenty, but the workers are few." It can be difficult to be helpful and loving to others. Let's face it, some people are harder to love than others.

Being a worker for Christ also means that we must have JOY: Jesus, Others and Yourself in that order. We who are ordained can find it a hard task sometimes, because we must reclaim the lost and even prevent others from leaving.

In disputes within the Church, the priest can find his most difficult task, He/She has to console, affirm the offended and restore and treat humanely the offender. Most of the time, the offended and the offender are being ministered to at the same time, but in different places, in a state of confidence and quiet. Trust me it can be difficult, but as my grandmother used to say, "I/We are on the battle field for the Lord!"

You and I are both at war doing the work of God, trying to bring in the harvest! Amen.

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