

July 15, 2018

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mark 6:7-13

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick - no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals, but not a second tunic. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." So they went off and preached repentance. The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Background:

In last Sunday's gospel (Mark 6:1-6) Jesus had returned to his native place accompanied by his disciples. The people were astonished at Jesus' synagogue teaching, but they found it difficult to accept him because they knew him and his family. That text concluded with Mark stating that it was difficult for Jesus to perform any mighty deeds there.

Today's gospel follows almost immediately after that text. The last half of verse 6 has been omitted, which states that Jesus left his hometown and began to preach in neighboring villages. The omitted section gives the context for Jesus gathering together the disciples and sending them out with his authority and message.

As recorded by Mark, Jesus' instruction to the disciples gives them permission to wear sandals and take a walking stick. In the other synoptic gospels, these items were forbidden along with the others that were listed. The disciples are also instructed not to take any money, not even the small amount that would have been carried in a belt. They must rely on one of the most honored virtues of people of the day—hospitality—and God.

Travel during Jesus' time was considered unnecessary and therefore suspicious activity. Family and neighbors provided everything that a person needed. A person often died within the same household where they were born. In such a culture, strangers were naturally considered with suspicion. But they also brought news of the outside world, and the possibility of an allegiance that could be beneficial. Therefore, hospitality to strangers was highly valued. Guests were offered food, board, and safety from others who would at the same time be suspicious of their intentions.

Jesus sends the Twelve out two by two. Traveling in pairs would provide a degree of safety and companionship and a measure of credibility. Two is the number of witnesses necessary to establish the truth of one's claim. Jesus sends them out also with authority over unclean spirits. The last verse of the text states that they preached, performed exorcisms, and healed through anointing. This is the same ministry that Jesus himself had taken on as described in the first chapters of Mark's gospel, and it is what he tried to bring to his native place in the text that precedes this one. However, it is clear that the disciples do not do this on their own. Jesus has entrusted them with his power. They act as his ambassadors.

Reflection Questions:

1. When you think of traveling, some of the things that come to mind are ...
2. What is your experience of being a stranger among people you do not know?
3. If someone in your family or community suggested that you might host an exchange student for a year, you would ...
4. Why do you think Jesus sent his disciples out to preach on their own just after he had received such a poor reception in his own hometown?
5. When you hear the traveling instructions that Jesus gave to his disciples, what goes through your mind is...

6. Imagine you see two of the disciples standing at the very edge of town shaking the dust from their feet. What goes through your mind at the sight?
7. Can you take some time to talk to God about how you feel about his instruction to the disciples, or about your sense of also being sent by God, or can you spend some time thanking God for the success of the disciples throughout history that brought you into your relationship with God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for July 15, 2018, the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amaziah, priest of Bethel, said to Amos, "Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah! There earn your bread by prophesying, but never again prophesy in Bethel; for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple." Amos answered Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor have I belonged to a company of prophets; I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. The Lord took me from following the flock, and said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.
I will hear what God proclaims; the Lord—for he proclaims peace.
Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land.
Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss.
Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven.
The Lord himself will give his benefits; our land shall yield its increase.
Justice shall walk before him, and prepare the way of his steps.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved. In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that

he set forth as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth. In him we were chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ. In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised holy Spirit, which is the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

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Excerpts from Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 85:9-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; and Mark 6:7-13