

GOSPEL

MARK 6:7-13

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs giving them authority over the unclean spirits. And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals, but, he added, ‘Do not take a spare tunic.’ And he said to them, ‘If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust from under your feet as a sign to them.’ So they set off to preach repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today’s Gospel passage narrates the moment Jesus sends the Twelve [Apostles] on mission. After calling each of them by name “to be with him” (Mk 3:14), listening to his words and observing his gestures of healing, he now calls them again to “send them out two by two” to the villages he was going to visit. It is a sort of “internship” of what they would be called to do following the Resurrection of the Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel passage pauses on the *style of the missionary* which we can sum up in two points: the mission has a *centre*; the mission has a *face*.

First of all, the missionary disciple has his *centre* of reference who is Jesus himself. The narrative indicates this by using a series of verbs which have him as the subject — “He called to him”; he “began to send them”; he “gave them authority”; “he charged them”, “he said to them” —, so that the going out and working of the Twelve appears to be radiating from a centre, reaffirming the presence and work of Jesus in their missionary actions. This demonstrates that the Apostles have nothing of their own to proclaim, nor any abilities to manifest, but rather that they speak and act as “emissaries”, as messengers of Jesus.

This episode of the Gospel also applies to us and not only to priests but to all baptized people called to witness to the Gospel of Christ in the various spheres of life. And for us too, this mission is authentic only in so far as its unchanging centre who is Jesus. It is not an initiative of faithful individuals nor of groups and not even of large gatherings. It is the mission of the Church, inseparably united to her Lord. No Christian proclaims the Gospel “on his/her own”, but is only sent by the Church who received the mandate from Jesus himself. Indeed it is Baptism that makes us missionaries. A baptized person who does not feel the need to proclaim the Gospel, to proclaim Jesus, is not a good Christian.

The second characteristic of the missionary’s style is, so to speak, a *face*, which consists in the *poverty of means*. His accoutrement responds to a criteria of modesty. Indeed the Twelve have the order to “take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts”. The Teacher wants them to be free and unhampered, without reserves and without favours, certain only of the love of the One who sends them, strengthened only by his Word which they go to proclaim. The staff and the sandals are the gear of pilgrims because that is what the messengers of the Kingdom of God are, not omnipotent *managers*, not irreplaceable officials, not celebrities *on tour*. Let us think for example of this Diocese of which I am Bishop. Let us think about some saints from this Diocese of Rome: Saint Philip Neri, Saint Benedict Joseph Labre, Saint Alessio, Blessed Ludovica Albertoni, Saint Frances of Rome, Saint Gaspare del Bufalo and many others. They were not officials or business people, but rather humble workers of the Kingdom. This was the face they had. And to this “face” also belongs the way the message is received: it can happen that one is not welcomed or listened to. This too is poverty: the experience of failure. The experience of Jesus who was rejected and crucified anticipates the destiny of his messenger. And only if we are united to Him, who died and Rose, can we find the courage to evangelize.

May the Virgin Mary, the first disciple and missionary of the Word of God, help us to convey to the world the message of the Gospel in a humble and radiant exultation, beyond any rejection, misunderstanding or tribulation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to you to be a messenger of Jesus?
- We are called to be humble workers for the Kingdom. What are some ways we can grow in humility?
- Have you ever tried to share the Gospel and felt rejected? How did you feel? Did you learn anything from the situation?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.