

GOSPEL*Matthew 9:36-10:8*

When Jesus saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.”

He summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows:

‘Do not turn your steps to pagan territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.’

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Today, in the Gospel, Jesus calls [the Apostles] by name — he calls them by name — and sends out the twelve Apostles. As he was sending them out, he asks them to proclaim just one thing: “Preach as you go, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand”” (Mt 10:7). It is the same proclamation with which Jesus began his preaching: the kingdom of God, that is, his lordship of love, has come near; it comes in our midst. And this is not just one piece of news among others, no, but the fundamental reality of life: the closeness of God, the closeness of Jesus.

Indeed, if the God of heaven is close, we are not alone on earth, and even in difficulty, we do not lose faith. Here is the first thing to say to people: God is not far away, but rather he is a Father. God is not distant, he is a Father, he knows you and he loves you; he wants to take you by the hand, even when you travel on steep and rugged paths, even when you fall and

struggle to get up again and get back on track. He, the Lord, is there with you. Indeed, often in moments when you are at your weakest, you can feel his presence all the more strongly. He knows the path, he is with you, he is your Father! He is my Father! He is our Father!

Let us linger on this image because proclaiming that God is close is an invitation to think of oneself as a child, who walks hand in hand with his father: everything seems different. The large and mysterious world becomes familiar and secure because the child knows he is protected. He is not afraid, and learns how to open up: he meets other people, finds new friends, joyfully learns things that he did not know, and then returns home and tells everyone what he has seen, while the desire to become a grown-up and do the things he saw his father do, grows within him. This is why Jesus starts out from here. This is why God’s closeness is the first proclamation: by staying close to God, we conquer fear, we open ourselves to love, we grow in goodness and we feel the need and the joy to proclaim.

If we want to be good apostles, we have to be like children: sit “on God’s lap” and, from there, look at the world with trust and love, in order to bear witness that God is the Father, that he alone transforms our hearts and gives us that joy and that peace that we ourselves cannot attain.

To proclaim that God is near — but how can we do this? In the Gospel, Jesus advises not to say many words, but rather to perform many deeds of love and hope in the name of the Lord. Not saying many words, but performing deeds! “Heal the sick”, says the Lord, “raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without pay, give without pay” (Mt 10:8). Here is the heart of proclamation: freely given witness, service. I will tell you something: I am always puzzled by the “talkers” with their endless talk and no action.

At this point, let us ask a few questions: Do we, who believe in God who is close, confide in him? Do we know how to look forward trustfully, like a child who knows he is held in his father’s arms? Do we know how to sit in the Father’s lap with prayer, by listening to the Word, partaking of the Sacraments? And finally, close to him, do we know how to instil courage

in others, to make ourselves close to those who suffer and are alone, to those who are distant and even those who are hostile to us? This is the substance of faith. This is what counts.

And let us now pray to Mary; may she help us feel we are loved and transmit closeness and trust.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel?



Head: Jesus sends the disciples with a simple message: the Kingdom is near; what does it mean that the heart of the Gospel is not complexity, but the closeness of God?



Heart: Pope Francis describes faith as living like a child who knows the Father is near; where do you struggle to trust in that closeness, especially in difficulty or uncertainty?



Hands: Jesus tells the disciples to proclaim not just with words but with freely given love and service; how can you make God's closeness tangible this week through concrete actions?

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. Offer 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 praying the 'Glory Be'.