

14TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (C)

Our scripture passage comes from the Gospel of Luke 10:1-12 and 17-20. In this passage, Jesus sends out the seventy-two disciples to continue His mission. As He does so, some interesting teachings emerge and are worthy of our reflection and prayer.

The image of the harvest is both powerful and deeply rooted in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. In Joel 3:13 and Micah 4:11-14, the harvest was a metaphor for the time of judgment. Jesus uses the harvest in this passage to describe the work of the Gospel and the mission of the Church. By using the image of the harvest, Jesus is communicating a sense of urgency and the need for everyone to be involved. The harvest waits for no one and the magnitude of the work is seemingly greater than the workers can handle. It requires the efforts of everyone, each in their own capacity, for the harvest to be successful. If we wait, or if we choose to not be involved, then the ripe harvest will be in jeopardy and what was intended to be a bumper crop could be a lost crop. This sense of urgency, all-encompassing work of the harvest, and need for everyone to be involved is communicated through the opening verse of this passage when we are told that Jesus sent seventy (or seventy-two as some translations indicate) disciples on mission. Although scripture scholars differ on which is the correct number, the significance remains and indicates that the mission of the disciples is to encompass the whole world.

In addition to the universal mission of the disciples, the number also indicates how important it is that everyone be involved in the work of the harvest. In Nm 11:16-17 Moses selected seventy elders to share in his work with the people and in Ex. 24:1, 9-24 the seventy go with Moses to the mountain; the number seventy-two also has a tradition of including everyone because when the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek in the third century BC, it is related that seventy-two scholars spent seventy-two days working on the translation -six people from each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

- *What are some of the "harvest" moments you run across in your daily life (family, profession, and other social encounters) when situations are "ripe" for a message of faith or an expression of Christian charity?*
- *The harvest requires everyone but sometimes we find it easy to dismiss ourselves from the task while waiting for others to step forward, and the opportunity of the harvest is oftentimes lost. What are some of the excuses we use to exempt ourselves from working in the harvest?*
- *By using the image of the harvest, Jesus is stressing that there are opportune moments of faith that do not last forever in people's life. What is the harvest the Church is missing out on today and who are the workers the Lord wants to send into that harvest?*

In the face of such great need, it would have been easy for the disciples to think their first action should be that of organization, planning, and travel. However, Jesus is very clear about what their first action should be. After explaining the huge work they have to do, the Lord simply commands them to "Pray". Prayer is essential in the life of a disciple and is necessary before we begin an effort so that whatever work we do may be in accord with God's will and guided by the Holy Spirit. It does not matter what we accomplish if it is not in accord with God's will. In fact, disciples sometimes act with good intentions but end up working against the Gospel rather than for it. Prayer keeps us focused on our purpose, open to the Lord's inspiration, and aware of the sacredness of our efforts. Without prayer, we risk doing our own will rather than God's will. Jesus sent the disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God and in order to do that, the disciples had to know clearly what the Lord wished to occur in every situation they faced.

- *What prayer do you use to start your day so you can be guided by the will of God and responsive to the harvest you will encounter?*
- *One of the prayers at Mass reads, "Lord, may everything we do begin with Your inspiration, continue with Your saving help, and come to completion in Your Kingdom." How does this prayer speak to you?*
- *What happens when we begin doing without first praying?*

When Jesus sends the disciples on mission, He tells them to basically do three things: Foster community (table fellowship and staying in one place), take care of people's physical needs (heal the sick), and deepen their faith lives (proclaim the Kingdom of God). These three tasks continue to be essential elements of the mission of the Church today. In order to foster community, the disciples had to "eat what was set before them." That would have been very difficult for a Jew going into a Gentile world where Kosher food laws were not observed! Jesus was telling the disciples to meet people where they are and to remove all social barriers that would prevent them from effectively ministering to others. Sometimes we like to minister to people on our terms that is when it is convenient for us, in the way we want, and so forth; this admonition of our Lord tells us that the setting for preaching and ministry is to be set by those we minister to and not by us as the ministers.

Also, when Jesus tells them to not move about from one house to another He is doing so because He does not want the disciples to give the appearance that their ministry is about seeking personal comfort or to prolong their stay in a particular community when the Gospel needs to be preached elsewhere. Such pursuits of personal comfort and self-interest can compromise the witness of the Gospel. (The prohibition against carrying a money bag is most likely intended to address a similar concern so that the disciples are not perceived as using their healing ministry for a source of personal profit as did other miracle healers of their time.) As a parish, we are responsible for fulfilling each of these tasks as well. It takes creativity and flexibility to

meet people where they are. It takes selflessness and detachment to be free of the desire for personal comfort and self-interests. It takes courageous witness to speak a message of faith that is relevant for people's lives. It takes initiative and compassion to alleviate the suffering of others.

- *How do we currently foster a healthy community life?*
- *How can the desire for personal comfort and the pursuit of self-interest compromise the witness of the Gospel today?*
- *What are opportunities to increase our community life so that all social barriers are overcome?*
- *How do we currently take care of people's physical needs and what are opportunities to do more in our outreach efforts for those in need?*
- *How do we currently deepen people's faith lives and what more could we do?*

When the disciples returned, they were filled with joy because they were victorious over the forces of evil. Jesus, too, shares in their joy but He also cautions them to rejoice more in the fact that God has given them a share of His ministry rather than in their ability to overcome evil. This is an important lesson for us as well. You see, sometimes we can find ourselves rejoicing in our own victories and personal credit for our accomplishments. When we do so we lose sight of what those victories mean in God's overall plan and that we could do nothing if it were not given to us by God. Our deepest joy should be rooted in the fact that God believes in us and has confidence in us so much that the Lord actually entrusts to us a mission. We should rejoice, then, that we have been found worthy to be co-workers with the Lord. That is a joy that will endure regardless of success or failure, acceptance or rejection. If, on the other hand, our joy is only based on our success and victory, then life will be a roller coaster as we move from happiness to sadness based on how our day is going. Jesus wants disciples who have a deep and abiding joy—a joy that is rooted in their relationship with God meaning their names are written in heaven and not just in their daily successes.

- *What are the daily experiences that bring you joy and sadness?*
- *When has your relationship with God given you peace and joy even in the midst of troubling moments or situations of seeming failure?*
- *In our American society, we tend to see people in terms of their accomplishments rather than their relationships. When do you find yourself evaluating other people that way?*
- *When do you find yourself evaluating your own self-worth in that way?*
- *How will you take the necessary step of faith that roots your identity first and foremost in your relationship with God?*

