

**Msgr. Dennis Sheehan**  
**Homily Given on May 11, 1997**  
**Seventh Sunday of Easter**  
**Liturgical Year B**

Once upon a time, there was a young man who had a strong sense of his call to spread the gospel. He was, however, of a very shy and retiring temperament, with a weak squeaky voice that failed him whenever he tried speaking in public. What should he do? As the story goes, he set aside a small amount of his weekly pay to buy pamphlets and booklets on Jesus, the gospel, and Christian life. He would leave one or two of these in doctors' offices, airport lounges – wherever people were waiting. He wondered about the effect. Only years later did he hear a renowned Catholic speak of conversion. "My own journey," the convert explained, "began with a pamphlet I found in this city in the railway station waiting room."

"As you have sent me into the world," Jesus prays to his Father, "so I have sent them into the world." The Scriptures today proclaim a community of disciples with a deeply rooted and inescapable sense of mission.

Going back to the reading from Acts, a closer look shows how careful Luke (the author of the Acts) is to show Matthew, the substitute for Judas, is chosen for "apostolic ministry". He joins the Eleven in witnessing to the earthly ministry of Jesus and the power of God's new creation bursting on the world in the Lord's resurrection from the dead. But do not think for a moment that this call to spread the gospel is the limited ministry of the Apostles. It is the mission and ministry of the whole community of baptized disciples.

We stand today between the mystery of Christ's ascension – his return to the Father – and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost next Sunday. Christ's ongoing mission is now confided to us – we are his voice, his hands, his heart, his presence and power. Augustine said it so powerfully: "The Church is Jesus Christ extended in space and time." Without us – each of us and all of us together – Christ's work does not continue.

Where there is no preaching, Christ's proclamation of the kingdom is silenced. Where men and woman do not raise their voices and put lives on the line to bring justice for the oppressed, Christ's mission is stunted. Where Christians are silent in face of threats to life, especially life in its weakest and most vulnerable members, Christ's passion for life finds no echo in the world. Where families choose simplicity of life – forgoing luxuries for the education of their children and for gospel simplicity itself – there Christ's life begins to take root. Anywhere and anytime a Christian – in the home, the workplace, the neighborhood, the city – shows care for the weak, concern for the sick, outreach to the poor – in that person and that place, the mission of Christ continues.

For this, Christ tells us, he consecrated himself in the mystery of his cross and resurrection. For this he gives us the Spirit which empowers our witness in the face of a hostile and uncomprehending world.

Every time we gather at Eucharist Christ says again: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." A religious ed teacher once asked a group of third graders which was the most important part of the Mass. "The dismissal," one youngster replied. "Why?" asked the surprised teacher. "Because Jesus speaks to us, give us his Spirit and feeds us with his Body and Blood so we can go out and change the world," came the reply. In that same wisdom, Eucharist has been called the Mass – from the dismissal.

Today again, in the power of Christ's Spirit, we are sent to be his presence, his voice, his hands and heart – to transform the world in his name.