

“Jesus 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.”

The details of these instructions remind us of the Exodus. When the Israelites were in slavery the Lord gave them very specific instructions on the night of their flight from Egypt. “This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you will eat it in a hurry. It is the LORD’s Passover” (Ex 12:11).

In setting out on their missionary journey, the 12 Apostles are like the Israelites going forth in the Exodus. This Christian mission is a new Exodus. Personally, it is a journey from slavery to freedom. Beyond the personal, this mission brings the liberating power of Jesus Christ to the world.ⁱ

Last weekend was a weekend for travel, more individuals took to the air, land, and sea than in a year and a half. As the nation celebrated 245 years since declaring independence from the tyranny of the King of England, people yearned for life to return to normal despite a pandemic that still severely limits freedom around the world in an effort to stem the tide of a new and more virulent strain of the coronavirus.

Let us return to the instructions of Jesus. “Take nothing but a walking stick.” The tall slender staff of travelers is like a shepherd’s staff used to direct, defend, and comfort the flock. It was a sign of authority for Moses and Aaronⁱⁱ. Likewise for the Apostles. We live in an increasingly violent society. Nations assemble armies against one another. Terrorists use weapons to threaten, coerce, and intimidate. Madmen fire into crowds indiscriminately. Gangs wage warfare on one another. And yet Jesus, instructs, “Take nothing but a walking stick.” Liberation, true freedom from sin comes by following Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for our salvation despite the intimidating and violent crucifixion which sought to silence him.

Take no food, no sack, no money. We are a self-reliant people. Jesus wants us to rely on him. With affluence one can be lulled into a certain sense of pride. With poverty, like Jesus who humbled himself in becoming human, we may have a greater sense of the poverty of others and a willingness to reach out and help our neighbors.

Wear sandals. The rich and the poor wore sandals in biblical times. It is in that sense a common bond. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ, equal in the eyes of God. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). “Sandals were customarily removed when one entered a home. The one exception was at the Passover meal,” as everyone was dressed for travel.ⁱⁱⁱ Pope Francis reminds us that every Christian is a missionary disciple. Figuratively, we are all to wear sandals ready to bring the Good News to the world. “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Pt 3:15).

Do not wear a second tunic. “A tunic is symbolic of a person’s identity, in this context, the one tunic spoke of their life as witnesses committed to Jesus and the Kingdom of God. That is why they were not to have a second tunic, which might have indicated a divided allegiance. Nothing was to render their witness ambiguous.”^{iv} “Every Catholic ... must choose who they will follow – Jesus Christ and his Church, or the false gods of power, influence and the world’s acclaim. May we all respond to this choice as Jesus did when Satan tempted him in the desert, ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve’ (Lk4:8).”^v

“Take nothing for the journey but a walking stick— no food, no sack, no money in their belts.” Nor a second tunic. Like the Apostles of old, Jesus is instructing us. By traveling lightly, Jesus invites us to be truly free from all of the attachments in this world that can hold us back. At

the end of the Mass, we are reminded of the great commission, “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.” Jesus wants you to go out to the world and share the liberating power of the Good News.

ⁱ LaVerdiere, Eugene. *The Beginning of the Gospel of Mark*, pg. 155.

ⁱⁱ Hahn, Scott. *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, pg. 779.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hahn, Pg. 813.

^{iv} LaVerdiere, pg. 155.

^v Archbishop Samuel Aquila