

First Mass Homily – Richard W. Ashburn

7/7/21

St. Helen's

Gen 41:55-57;42:5-7a, 17-24a. Mt 10:1-7.

We are all Apostles

This is an especially significant day for me, as at God's invitation and with the direction of Fr. Chris I am today delivering my first homily during the sacrament of the Mass. I've been blessed to be called to seek service in the Permanent Diaconate, and I am thankful for your prayers and encouragement over my four year formation journey. I pray that God will ordain me through the hands of Cardinal Sean on October 2nd of this year.

Having been invited last week by Fr. Chris to preach on today's readings, I shared the news of this invitation with a few close friends (some of whom are here today). I received both solicited and unsolicited advice, all of which was offered in the spirit of encouragement and love. The unsolicited advice came, of course, from my wife Christine. Some of you may not know this; she is an attorney, but I love her anyway. Last week, after enjoying a nice lunch with Chris and my sister at Tsang's restaurant, my wife gave me the fortune from her fortune cookie, stating "Here, Rick, this is clearly meant for you." The fortune read "Get to the point and keep it clear and simple." Unfortunately, although she very much desired to hear my first homily, Christine was unable to be here, as she is at home caring for my 90-year-old mother-in-law.

In today's Gospel, we hear of Jesus' **summoning** of His Twelve disciples and His **granting** them authority over unclean spirits and power in the curing of physical maladies. The **names** of the Twelve Apostles are provided us, and we learn that they are **sent**

forth after being provided instruction, which includes sharing the proclamation: **“The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

In these first seven verses from chapter 10 of Matthew’s Gospel, we see concisely presented the Love and Power of our Creator. Sacred Scripture teaches us that God knows us even before our earthly existence. He imprints His name on our hearts at the moment when we are conceived in our mothers’ wombs. He names us, providing each of us a unique identity. And He calls each of us to vocation and mission.

The Kingdom of heaven had its earthly origin at the time of the Incarnation, when the Father deigned to have His Son assume human flesh and emerge from eternity into time to establish the New Covenant and the holy Catholic Church. Jesus chose ordinary men and women to be His initial students, or disciples, and molded them into missionaries, apostles, to spread the glad tidings, the Good News about which Fr. Mark spoke yesterday. Indeed so powerful was the influence of the God-Man, the divine human we call Jesus, that the original apostles (with the exception of John) would after Jesus’ death and Resurrection journey over the entire known world proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus and offering their blood and lives in the hope and promise of eternal salvation purchased by His victory over sin and death.

As baptized Christians, we are taught by the Church that each of us shares in the *tria munera*, a Latin term for the three offices or tasks of Christ. Each one of us, be he or she a member of the clergy, a religious order, or the laity, shares in Christ’s office of priest, prophet, and king. In our priestly role, we are called to seek greater personal holiness each day, striving to become ever closer to our God, and assisting one another in attaining holiness. In our role as prophets, we are called to study and follow God’s Commandments and decrees, to study and heed the words of inspired Scripture, and to follow, imitate, and share Jesus, Who is

the Living Word. This encompasses Christ's desire that we be His evangelists, sharing and spreading His Good News. Lastly, we are called to share in Christ's kingly office by properly ordering and governing our lives according to God's will, promoting justice, love, and peace in our daily activities.

I'm grateful to God for having been summoned by Him to service in an additional vocation, that of permanent deacon. All of us gathered here this morning have been blessed with the gift of faith, and it is as a consequence of this gift that we can recognize and reflect God's Love, which is the greatest of His innumerable gifts. It is in loving and serving God that we will find our salvation in heaven, which is the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. During His same discourse to the Twelve recorded in Matthew's Gospel today, Jesus states "You have received without paying, so give without being paid." Clearly, then, service to God and to our fellow man is an expectation of our Lord. Not only are we assured of Christ's love and blessings in this fleeting and temporal earthly existence, but we also are assured by Christ "Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven." Let us remember then, brothers and sisters, that, like the original Twelve, we too are **disciples** and **apostles** *called, named, and sent* to do His will, for truly "**The kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" Amen!