

B 15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B/2006

The Bible is full of names and individuals who have been called by God and given a special mission for his people. But, what makes such a mission to be special? What are its conditions of success? How does God come to choose some people and draw them to him? How shall they perform their mission? All of today's readings give us some keys of interpretation for better understanding of the origin of mission, its content and the demands.

As circumstances and situations through which God calls people vary from one another, so are different vocations and missions. All, however, have something in common the fact they find their origin and their end in God. This is what St Paul tries to describe in the 2nd reading, when he says that God has chosen us since the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish in his presence. For St Paul, to be an apostle or a disciple of Christ is not something accidental, an arbitrary choice, but part of the realization of God's wonderful and mysterious plan of salvation he has prepared from all eternity.

It follows that it is not chance, but God's providence that guides and leads us to the fulfillment of Redemption in Jesus Christ. God's purpose, then, is to give new hope to a world divided by barriers of race, color, culture, and political divisions, to make possible a unity among mankind in Jesus Christ so that all become one family, the people of God. In this context, the mission of the apostle, which is at the same time the mission of the Church, as a community of the believers, is twofold: primarily, to praise God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for having bestowed on us such blessings and, secondly, to make known to the whole world the wonderful plan of salvation he has for each one of his beloved children.

To be in charge of such a mission does not mean to be an extraordinary human being or to be endowed with special gifts. It means only that the chosen is a servant of God and his mission is to announce God to the world and not his own glory. This is what Amos tries to say in his conflict and opposition to the priest Amaziah, the official chaplain of the sanctuary of the King. As we heard in the 1st reading, the prophet recognizes his modest origin and the fact he was an ordinary man. He was a prophet, not by his own choice or study or through inheritance, but through the personal intervention of God in his life.

By giving credit to God who has chosen him instead of seeking his personal interest, Amos reminds Amaziah, the priest, that they are both at the service of the same Lord and aim at the same cause, namely the salvation of the people of God. If so, it serves no purpose to compete and it is dangerous to put personal interests above the spiritual good of God's people for whom they work. The attitude of Amos teaches not only the humility that should accompany those who are at the service of the Lord, but also the sincerity of recognizing that all that we have and are, is thanks to God. It is he who has called us to be his servants and not we who have chosen ourselves in order to be at his service.

The Gospel abounds also in the same sense as Jesus sends his apostles in mission. First of all, Jesus sends them two by two and not individually. This shows that those who are at the service of the Gospel should work in solidarity and complementarity. They should rely on each other and live in community, for it is when people are united that they are strong. It means also that Christian practice is not a private business; it engages the individual before the community, which is the Church.

In other words, Christians are not people who practice their religion in private, but together with their brothers and sisters, as a community. And it is a shame to hear some people saying that they are Christians, but they do not go to Church, that they worship God in their home and that suffices. In the same way, evangelization cannot be done on the basis of everyone relying on him and only on his personal inspiration. Evangelization is a work of group, of listening to one another, of listening to the community, and wherever this is overlooked, it ends up in conflict that can destroy the Church.

Another fact to highlight is that Jesus sends the apostles, that is, asks them to go out and to seek people, to look for disciples and not to wait for people to come to them. What a challenge for our Church and for us who like it when people come to us and tell us that they want to join the Church or to become catholic!

Jesus also gave authority to the apostles. Such an authority is not that of giving orders or commanding people, but a power over unclean spirits. Unclean spirits stand for negative forces of evil that destroy every possibility of acquiring our salvation and push people far from the Lord. The disciples should confront all these forces in order to free people from any type of oppression.

The disciples himself should be a free man who is freed from any material attachment that would prevent him from performing rightly his duty. That is the reason why Jesus asks them not to take food, sack, money or clothes. This verse has a huge consequence for the understanding of the efficacy of mission. It means that without the solidarity of the community, without its willingness to take care of the disciple, the latter runs the risk of being involved in countless business and issues that could prevent him from consecrating his time to the work of the Lord.

All that helps us understand why Jesus insists that the disciple stay where he is welcomed and eat what he is given until the end of his apostolate. If, on the contrary, the disciple has to shake the dust off his feet, it is not in order to curse those who have not accepted his message nor is it a sign of disgust or contempt. It is an invitation to not keep insisting on until he antagonizes someone, hurts their feelings, and drive them even farther away from the faith. In other words, the disciple must always behave with the greatest respect for the freedom of the person. He is sent to offer a proposal and not to force people to believe. The task of a missionary is not to convert people, but to proclaim the word of Christ as good news of salvation. If when he preaches, Christ is accepted, he should praise the Lord, if not he should pray for those who reject Christ. After all, whether the word is accepted or refused does not depend on him, but on those who listen. Let us pray for those who missionary among us, in various ministries in the Church in our community, that they enjoy the blessing of the Lord in their apostolate. May God bless you all!



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