

## **14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time C/2007**

God wants us to live in peace in a world freed from anxieties, distress and suffering, a world in which consolation, comfort and joy are not only a dream, but a reality that people can experience in daily life. This project of peace has been the reason why, from the beginning of salvation history and now on, God sent the prophets to his people and Jesus Christ in the world to be our savior. All the readings of this Sunday talk about God's project as the main reason for the existence and the mission of the church.

The first reading tells us that God's project is so important that, when his people were in distress and doubt, God intervened in order to console them. The historical context of this text refers to the return from the exile of Babylon. At that time, the people who had just returned to their land realized quickly that gaining freedom is one thing while succeeding with a bright future as a nation is another.

The difficulties met in building the country led many not only to disappointment, but also to the questioning of their faith in God. At that moment God sent Isaiah to reassure them and let them know that he will comfort them and make Jerusalem prosperous. Their hearts will rejoice and their bodies flourish because, when the Lord's power is known to his servants, nothing can be as it was before.

If, in the Old Testament, that project was guaranteed by God's fidelity to his people, in the New Testament it was achieved through the death and the resurrection of Jesus. That is why for Saint Paul, the cross of Jesus plays a big role. It is an instrument with which God has established peace with his people through the blood of his Son. It is far better than the circumcision through which the Jews claimed their belonging to the holy people of God. As such, the cross is a motive of pride for Christians; they know its prize.

For Paul, Christians have to be recognized not by some external signs, but by the way they live in imitating Jesus. The more they give everything they can to reach out to their fellow humans, the more they resemble Jesus who gave up his life on the cross for us. Therefore, the sign that they are new creatures is not circumcision, but their capacity to give up their lives for others.

God's project of peace is the purpose of the mission Jesus gives to his disciples in today's Gospel. First of all, unlike in some episodes where the mission is given to the twelve apostles, in today's Gospel, it is given to the seventy-two disciples. The number seventy-two is representative of all the nations existing in the world, as stated in Genesis 10. In other words, the Gospel is not a privilege of only the people of Israel, but it is given to all the peoples and nations. To them belongs the mission of spreading the good news all over the world.

What are the demands for the church's mission? The first requirement is prayer, that is, the opening of our heart and mind to God so that our action may start with him, be guided by him, and find its end in him. Without being rooted in prayer, we run the risk of failing in our mission. Prayer is important because the mission in itself is difficult; it has to be fulfilled in a world totally hostile to Jesus' teaching. That is why Jesus says, "I am sending you like lambs among wolves".

Prayer is important because it is a recognition that the mission does not belong to us; we are only the instruments God uses to reach out to others. Where can we draw strength to strengthen others if we are not sustained by the Lord in our prayer? Prayer is equally important because it draws God's blessing on what we do for the glory of his name and the well being of our fellows. Moreover, given the abundance of the harvest and the few workers, it is our duty to continually ask the master in a sustaining prayer to send laborers in his field.

This statement should temper our pessimism when dealing with the problem of the scarcity of religious vocations. That the injunction of praying for vocations comes from Jesus shows that the problem of shortage of vocations is older than we think, that even in his time things were not better than they are today. It means also that we have to be optimistic about the future of the Church. If the church was a human business, it would have already died; but because it is the work of God, it will survive even the worst of its crises.

The mission is urgent, as well as it is demanding. It is all about bringing salvation to others right now and not tomorrow; it cannot be delayed without putting in danger the life of many who would have been saved through our evangelization. That is why Jesus enjoins the disciples not to let themselves be distracted by material possessions or human securities. The priority should be given only to the mission out of love of Christ and not for personal favors.

Another characteristic of mission is its discretion which can be exercised in being welcomed for the good news without being ashamed of receiving a show of appreciation in turn. However, the disciple should not be the seeker after luxury. For that, says Jesus, he should not be moving from one house to another. Instead, he should be happy with what he got in his ministry. After all, there is a compensation for the mission, not based on the success of the worker, but on the fact that his name is written in the book of life.

Finally, the mission is collegial, that is, it should be done in a group as a team or community. That is why Jesus sent the disciples two by two. That means, in other words, that not only is the church not a private or individual business, but also the Gospel should not be left to the private or individual imagination. Whoever speaks in the name of Christ should be in communion with his brothers and sisters. If Jesus sends the disciples two by two, it means also that they are complementary; they have to count on one another for the success of the mission. Whenever this reality is forgotten, it brings trouble in the life of the church. May God bless the apostolate of each one of us and everything we do as a community for the glory of his name!



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**Isaiah 66, 10-14c; Galatians 6, 14-18; Luke 10, 1-12. 10-20**