

11th Sunday of Year A/2008

Many times we have read in the Bible how God chose Israel among all the nations of the earth to be his people. We have read how he did marvelous things for them by liberating them from Egypt and leading them to the Promised Land. But, why did God choose them? What was the purpose for which he chose them? All the readings of this Sunday try to answer these questions, each one in its own way, by showing us what was God's intention in choosing Israel and what it means for us today.

The first reading describes the spirit of the Covenant God concluded with Israel in the desert. In order to bring Israel to respect the Covenant, God reminds them what he did by liberating them from Egypt and how he took care of them as a father does for his children. At that time, God promised to take them as his personal possession, and make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But all this blessing had a price, namely that Israel ought to listen to the voice of the Lord and keep the Covenant.

As it appears, the reason why God chose Israel was to make them, in the middle of other nations, a people destined to the glory of his name and the bearers of his holiness. As such, the choice of Israel was intended to serve as an example to other nations so that they may see through Israel how God would like them to be, and what they ought to do in order to be in relationship with him.

Because of Israel's repeated sins, this goal was never achieved completely. That is why, when the times were accomplished, God sent his Son Jesus in the world to save us. By letting his Son die on the cross for our salvation, God proved how much he loves us. That is what St Paul explains in the Letter to the Romans.

For St Paul, indeed, God's love is not a sentimental love, but rather unselfish and gratuitous. The grandeur of this love is seen in the death of Jesus for our salvation. The argument St Paul develops here is very simple: It would be difficult enough to get someone to die for a just person. Perhaps, it can happen that someone may have the courage to die for a good person. But what is extraordinary with Jesus is that he died for us when we were still sinners and in a state of hostility with God.

For that particular reason, our status with God has changed. We are now justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled with God. Consequently, our sins will never be able to overpower the love of God. We might abandon God, but he will never abandon us. Thanks to Jesus, we are brought into a right and new relationship with God even when we are still sinners. If so, how grateful should we be to God for what he has done for us in Jesus! How appreciative of God's love should we be!

It is that love that moves the heart of Jesus in today's Gospel at the sight of people's misery. Jesus feels compassion for them, because nobody is taking care of them. Everybody is busy with his own business and interest without

asking any question about the fate of the remaining of the people. The people might be hungry, sick, oppressed and abused, but who cares?

Jesus saw the people and their misery as harvest to be reaped and saved. That is the reason he sent the disciples to go and minister. Wherever the same situation of people's misery is found today, Jesus feels the same compassion and wants us, his disciples, to act and put an end to it. Here we find one of the challenges of Christian life, namely that we are called to change the face of the earth, and to bring peace, joy and healing to those in distress.

It means also that the harvest will never be reaped unless there are reapers to reap it. Jesus wants the world to hear the good news of the Gospel and to be healed. But people will never hear it unless others tell them and commit to do it. Our duty as Christians is to become reapers of Christ for our fellow humans. Each one of us must become a reaper in order to bring people to God. For that, we have to pray, but at the same time we have to take concrete actions in order to fulfill this mission.

Who are these apostles that Jesus commissioned? They were very ordinary guys, but called to do extraordinary things. In fact, Jesus chose these men not only for what they were, but also for what they were capable of becoming under his guidance and power. In the same way, Jesus sees in each one of us not only what we are, but also what he can make of us. We should never think that we have nothing to offer Jesus, because Jesus can take what the most ordinary people offer and use it for greatness.

Before I finish, let me recall this recommendation of Jesus that the apostles have to give without cost since they have received without cost. What does this mean? It means that the servant of the Lord must never be overly concerned with material things. But, at the same time, the people of God must never fail in their duty to see that those who serve God receive reasonable support. This passage puts an obligation on teacher and on people as well.

Now I can finish by paying tribute to these wonderful persons who have always given the best of themselves without cost, namely our fathers. As a matter of fact, each one of us, we have become who we are today because our fathers did accept sacrifices for us. May God bless our fathers, living and dead, and fill them with countless blessings. May he give you all his strength so that you keep taking care of your children! May all the sacrifices you endure for your children be reaped in abundant harvest for your own well being and eternal life!

Exodus 19, 2-6; Romans 5, 6-11; Matthew 9, 36-10, 8



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