

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009

Many people are called by the Lord to minister to his Church. Some are priests or religious; some are catechists or teachers of the word; some others are simple Christians and witnesses of God's marvels in the midst of their brothers and sisters. To each God has given a particular mission according to the circumstances of life and the situation he wants to deal with. All the readings of this Sunday tell us something about the origin, the content and the demand of disciple's mission.

First of all, we have the writing of St Paul to the Ephesians. In this writing, St Paul reveals to us that behind each vocation, there is a mystery of the divine hand guiding those God calls to serve him. For St Paul, God has chosen us since the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his presence. To be an apostle or a disciple of Christ is not something accidental, an arbitrary choice, but a realization of God's wonderful plan of salvation he has prepared from all eternity.

If that is the case, it is not chance, but God's providence that guides us and leads us to the fulfillment of our Redemption in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we receive the forgiveness of our sins in accord with the riches of God's grace. God's purpose, then, is to give new hope to a divided world so that all come to unity in Jesus Christ, and therefore, form one family, the people of God.

In this context, the mission of the disciple, which is at the same time the mission of the whole church, is to praise God the Father for having bestowed upon us such a blessing. The mission is also to let the world know that God is our Father and, in Jesus Christ, he has made us his beloved children.

To be in charge of such a mission does not mean to be a superman or superwoman. It means only that, in spite of all our human weakness and sinfulness, God dared choose us to be his humble instrument of work for the salvation of our brothers and sisters. This is what the prophet Amos tries to tell the priest Amaziah, the official chaplain of the sanctuary of the King, who was in opposition against him.

As we heard in the first reading, Amos recognizes his modest origin and the fact that he was an ordinary man. He became a prophet, not by his own choice, 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 for the same cause, which is the salvation of the people of God. If so, it serves no purpose to compete and it is dangerous to put personal ambitions above the spiritual good of God's people for whom they work.

This recommendation is true today as it was yesterday. How much misery have we seen in some communities when people choose to compete instead of collaborating and supporting each other in the vineyard of the Lord! Amos teaches us not only the humility we should all have as we work for the Lord, but also the acknowledgement that everything we have and are, is God's grace. 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. Why do we, then, boast?

All of what we have said is exemplified in today's Gospel. It is Jesus who chose the disciples. He now sends them to continue the mission he has started. 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, complementarity, and mutual support of one another. 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 Christianity is not a private business; it engages the individual before the community, which is the Church.

One of the consequences of this truth is that the practice of our faith should make us aware of the importance of the community. We should never practice our individual faith at the margin of the universal Church. We are bound together as individuals and as a community. That is why it is a shame to hear some people saying that they are Christians, but they do not go to Church, or that they worship God in their home. In the same way, evangelization cannot be done on the basis of everyone relying on himself alone and on his personal inspiration. Evangelization is a work of a 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 thing Jesus does is to ask the apostles to go out and to look for disciples. He does not ask them to wait for people to come to them. This recommendation constitutes a challenge for our Church today 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!

The authority Jesus gives the apostles 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 any possibility of life. It is the negative forces of evil that turn people away from God. As disciples, we should confront all these forces in order to free people from any type of oppression.

The disciple, 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 the apostles 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 apostle, the latter runs the risk of being involved in countless business and worldly 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 stays where he is welcomed and eats what he is given until the end of his apostolate. The recommendation of shaking the dust off the feet is not an expression of a curse or contempt toward those who did not accept the message. It is an invitation to not keep insisting until the disciple antagonizes someone or hurts his feelings. On the contrary, the disciple must always behave with the greatest respect for the freedom of the person.

That is why we are not sent to force people to believe, but to proclaim the word of Christ as good news of salvation. If Christ is accepted when we preach, we should praise the Lord. If he is not, we should pray for those who reject him. After all, whether the word is accepted or refused does not depend on us, but on those who listen. As we are reminded of these truths, let us pray for those who work among us in various ministries that the Lord may bless their mission in our community. May God bless you all!

Amos 7, 12-15; Ephesians 1, 3-14; Mk 6, 7-13



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