

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's project of salvation for the world and the mission of the church. In order to understand the importance of this mission, we have to remember what God did for Israel as he chose them as his own among all the nations of the earth.

In spite of all the good things done to them, Israel often rebelled against God. As a result of the disobedience, the people found themselves in exile and in slavery in foreign lands. However, God did not abandon them. Time and time again, he showed them his mercy and rescued them through the work of his prophets.

The text of Isaiah we have today recalls the consolation God is about to bring to his people by assuring them of protection and salvation. All the children of Israel will go back to their land. They will rejoice and be glad in Jerusalem. They will be prosperous and wealthy. As a mother comforts her children, God will comfort them. 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.

It is that project of God to give salvation to the world that was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All that helps understand, as we heard in the letter to the Galatians, why for St. Paul the cross of Jesus plays a big role. It is the cross that brings us salvation and not the Jewish heritage. The cross is an instrument with which God has established peace with the world through the blood of his Son. The cross 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 our pride for us Christians; it makes us a new creation in Jesus Christ.

The fact that God wanted to give salvation to the world is the reason why Jesus founded the Church. When Jesus sends his disciples in today's Gospel, it is in order to continue that mission of bringing salvation to the world.

The first thing that strikes in the Gospel is that the mission is given to the seventy-two disciples and not only to the twelve apostles. The number seventy-two, in fact, represents all the nations existing in the world, as stated in Genesis 10. In other words, the Gospel is not a privilege of the people of Israel alone, but it is given to all the peoples and nations. To us and all who believe in Jesus is given the mission of spreading the good news all over the world.

The second thing that strikes is the requirement of Jesus that the disciples pray. What is prayer? Prayer is the opening of our hearts and minds to God so that our action may start with him, be guided by him, and find its end in him. In fact, without being rooted in prayer, we run the risk of failing in our mission. Prayer is important because the mission 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 into his field.

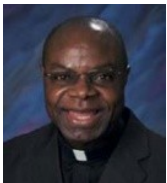
This statement should temper our pessimism when dealing with the problem of the scarcity of religious vocations. That the injunction of praying for vocations comes from Jesus shows that the problem of shortage of vocations is older than we think, that even in his time things were not better than they 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 already have 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 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. They should give priority to the mission out of love for Christ and not for personal gains. They have to be witnesses of God's providence by relying on the hospitality of the members of the community and by living very simple lives.

Another characteristic of mission is its discretion which can be exercised in being welcomed for the good news without being ashamed of receiving some appreciation in turn. However, the disciple should not be the seeker after luxury. For that, Jesus says, 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 heaven.

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 business, but also the Gospel should not be left to the individual imagination. Whoever speaks in the name of Christ should be in communion with his brothers and sisters and the Church as a whole.

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