

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time C (Is 66:10-14; Gal 6:14-18; Lk 10:1-12, 17-20) By John H. Howard, C.J.M 6 PM 2016

In this Gospel Jesus gives clear instructions to his disciples how to reach out to the world in his name. He does so not only to the 12 but also to 72 more disciples. In today's Gospel Luke wrote: **"The Lord appointed 72 others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit"** (Lk 10:1). In other words he didn't send only the clergy, the 12 Apostles, to prepare the way for him but the lay people as well. The whole mission of the Church is to continue the ministry of Jesus and every Christian is called to share it.

Luke has a universal theme in his writings. In the Acts of the Apostles he quotes Jesus commanding his disciples to be his **"witnesses in Jerusalem, through out Judea and Samaria, yes even to the ends of the earth"** (Acts 1:8). The number 72 is very significant and symbolic in that regard. It refers to chapter 10 of the book of Genesis where the author numbers the nations of the earth as 70 or 72 in number so there is one for each nation of the world. This sending of the 72 is sort of a practice run for later on when the disciples will actually bring his message to all the nations.

Jesus says: **"The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest"** (Lk 10:2). This sentence is often quoted as a request to pray for priestly and religious vocations. A first reaction might be: **"Why would we need to ask God? He ought to know there are not enough priests and religious."** First of all, Jesus was not talking about priests and religious which didn't exist yet but all of us. We should all be instruments of God to invite others to know the Good News.

One of the most significant statements Jesus makes in this passage is: **"I am sending you like lambs among the wolves"** (Lk 10: 3). At first glance we might think he means they will be attacked and torn to pieces. Although he will later say his disciples will suffer as he did, here he is referring to Isaiah's famous passage about the reign of the Messiah: **"Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb"** (Is 11:6). In this case it does not refer to a lamb of sacrifice but as a symbol of peace. He does not send them as holy warriors to conquer but as peaceful lambs. The image of the soldier of Christ is not from the Gospel but more from medieval times. In an effort to tame the wild knights the Church made them defenders of the faith and protectors of the weak. What Jesus did was far from war like: **"Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.'" (Lk 10:5).** We still begin our celebration with **"Peace be with you"** and end with **"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."** Before Communion pay attention today how many times the word **"peace"** is repeated. The kingdom of God is a reign of peace, healing and forgiveness. That is the Good News. Whenever we divert from that message we divert from the mission of Christ. For the first four or five centuries

of Christianity Christians were even forbidden to serve in the military.

Christ brought a message that was totally non-violent. When accused he refused to defend himself. He preached the love of enemies and the returning of good for bad. Our world is very aggressive and non-aggression is not respected. To live such a message in our own world is still to be sent like lambs among wolves. It is amazing that so many people who proud themselves of being good Christians are so pro aggression.

Jesus also asked his disciples to trust totally in Providence: **"Carry no money bag, no sack, and no sandals"** (Lk 10:4). As so many of Jesus teachings it is counter cultural. It goes against the grain. It appears irresponsible to us not to plan ahead and take normal precautions. That is not exactly what Jesus is saying. Let me illustrate this with an incident a friend of mine told me about. Her sister had come to visit her with a group of very pious friends. They asked her if she would have the kindness to take them to Sea World. She agreed and took them but when they got to the ticket window no one was getting their money out. So my friend asked: **"Do you have any money?"** One of them said: **"No, but the good Lord will provide."** Not wanting to embarrass her sister she said: **"The Good Lord turned out to be my credit card."** These people were not trusting in God; they were pious con-artists.

Jesus does not teach us how to take advantage of others. He says that when we do his work, our first step should be to act not to measure our resources. Since we are doing his work we need to just go forward and count on his help. Anyone who has worked with charitable projects has had that experience. Whenever an urgent need comes up, inevitably someone would say, **"We don't have the money or the volunteers to do that."** The answer is always the same, **"Let's just start doing it, the Lord will provide."** One does not just stay there and expect the Lord to drop it from heaven. One needs to get to work: **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you shall find, knock, and it shall be open to you"** (Lk 11:9).

We read this same Gospel passage every three years. On other years we hear other Evangelists' versions of Jesus advice to his disciples. So when one of us says **"Why does the Church do more to reach out to people?"** Are we asking for a program from the institution called **"Church"**? The answer is **"You and me are the Church. Why don't you and me do more to reach out to our neighbor?"** Do I volunteer or just am a good witness of what the Gospel teaches? Am I a messenger of peace and forgiveness? Do I trust totally in Providence? Do I do all this without seeking personal gain? If so, like the 72 in today's Gospel, I will **"return rejoicing."** (Lk 10:17).