

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our readings this weekend continue the theme of discipleship. You might recall that last week our Gospel reading was about Jesus being resolutely determined to travel to Jerusalem. (Lk 9) Jesus knew that His mission would culminate in His suffering and death on the cross. Nevertheless, He was still determined to go to Jerusalem. There was nothing that was going to get in His way of completing His mission. As disciples of Christ we are expected to be as determined as Jesus. There should be nothing that gets in the way of our faithfully following Jesus.

Jesus obviously had a big following as He walked about the countryside of Israel. In our Gospel reading today we hear how Jesus “appointed 72 others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit.” (Lk 10:1-12, 17-20) Jesus sent them out to proclaim the Gospel and to heal the sick. This sending out in pairs ahead of Him to proclaim the Gospel and heal the sick was to prepare the people for when Jesus would arrive in their midst. Much like John the Baptist was the precursor of the Lord and was to prepare the way for Him. As we also heard in the Gospel the disciples were to say, “Peace to this household.” The Gospel message is not to be forced upon people. The disciples were to come in peace. If the people accepted their message then that was great for everyone involved. If the message was not accepted then they were to leave and go somewhere else.

This is an important message for all of us. God’s message of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ is a message that is brought in peace. It is not a message that is meant to be forced on us. If we look at the history of the Church we will see that sometimes the message was forced on people. This was an error that was corrected over time. Even Pope St. John Paul II apologized in the Jubilee year 2000 for many errors that the Church had made. We realize that God wins hearts through love, mercy, and truth. True love can never be forced. If love is forced it can easily turn to resentment, perhaps even turn to something worse such as hatred. Love has to be freely offered, freely accepted, and freely returned. This is the response that God is hoping for – someone to freely accept His offer of love and then to freely return love back to God.

This offer of love, mercy, and truth is very attractive. All that we have to do is look at the large crowds surrounding Jesus. Yes, there were some people that were attracted to getting a free meal, such as when Jesus fed the thousands with the multiplication of loaves and fish. (see Lk 9:10-17) Yes, there were some people that were attracted to the many miracles that Jesus performed. However, it was His word, His message of love that moved the hearts of people so that they would want to follow Him. And it was love that I am sure motivated His disciples to want to go out in pairs to prepare the way for Jesus.

On June 7th at his Mass of reception, our new coadjutor Archbishop Paul Etienne said in his homily, “Loving Christ is at the heart of our service to others. Loving Christ is the first step without which we cannot keep his greatest command, to love one another. When we dedicate our lives to loving Christ, we become his missionaries of mercy for the world today. Christ is as relevant today as any date and time, as is his truth and love and mercy.” Loving Christ is the first step.

St. Paul was probably one of the greatest and most well-known missionaries in history. He traveled extensively throughout the middle east and the Mediterranean area bringing the Gospel to various peoples. If we read the various epistles of St. Paul in the Bible he often says that it is the love of Jesus that impels him (see 2 Cor 5:14). He only wants to know Jesus, and Him crucified (see 1 Cor 2:2). As we heard in the second reading today, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal 6:14) It was the love of Jesus that enflamed his heart and motivated him to go out and share this good news with others. St. Paul realized that it was out of love for us that Jesus was willing to die on the cross – the innocent for the guilty, the Just One for the unjust. St. Paul must have reasoned, “If Jesus was willing to do this out of love for me, then I have to do everything I can for Jesus out of my love for Him. How can I do anything less for Jesus?”

*How can **we** do anything less for Jesus?* Our attitude should be the same as St. Paul's. It should be an attitude of loving Jesus first of all, and then wanting to do whatever we can for Him. Because of the love of Jesus in our hearts we should feel a great desire to share this good news with others. As Archbishop Etienne said, "When we dedicate our lives to loving Christ, we become his missionaries of mercy for the world today." Sharing that good news will lead others to Jesus, and we will make a positive difference in the world. And hopefully we will get to hear Jesus tell each one of us some day, "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Our names will be written in the book of life, that is eternal life. Now, this is definitely something to rejoice about.