

JULY 4, 2010 : IV SUNDAY HOMILY ON LUKE 10: 1-12, 17-20

Today's gospel describes how Jesus sent his disciples out to towns and villages to prepare for his visit by giving them "travel tips" for their missionary journey. This reminds us that announcing the good news of the kingdom is not the task of only a few, but is rather a task for all. Following the model of Jesus, the Church rejoices in the triumphs and accomplishments of her children. She constantly nourishes them, directs them, consoles them and gives them strength. In the first reading, Isaiah sees the city of Jerusalem as the prototype of the rejoicing Church—the Church who comforts her children, "as a mother comforts her baby son." He assures his listeners that they live in the certainty of Yahweh's promises of love, protection, prosperity and salvation. Today's gospel according to Luke describes the fulfillment of the prophetic promise made by Isaiah in Jesus' commissioning of 72 disciples to preach the gospel in towns and villages in preparation for Jesus' visit. The 1.5 billion Christians in the world today have the same mission to preach the gospel of Christ to the other 4.5 billion non-Christians.

While all the synoptic Gospels mention a mission of the Twelve, only Luke adds a second mission of the 72. Just as Moses selected the seventy-two elders to guide and govern his people, so Luke presents Jesus as the "new Moses" in today's gospel. Jesus sends out his seventy-two disciples to towns and villages to announce his visit, thus giving a symbolic meaning to the number seventy-two. The Jews also believed that there were seventy-two nations in the whole world, and they had seventy-two members in the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of the Jews. In the Book of Genesis, seventy descendants of Jacob moved with him from Israel to Egypt to begin a new life. In the Book of Exodus, seventy two elders go up the Mountain of God along with Moses to learn about the new covenant with YHWH. The disciples received instructions as to how they were to carry out their mission. For example, they were to "carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals." There is also an ominous warning that they are sent as "lambs among wolves." Their guidelines were simple: go where they were received (verses 5-6); remain in one place (verse 7) and eat what was set before them (verse 8). The basic idea behind Jesus' instruction is that his disciples were sent as walking witnesses and hence they were not to depend on anything or anybody except on the Holy Spirit of God and on divine providence.

Acceptance and rejection: One of the reasons we prefer to delegate our Lord's evangelistic work to priests, religious and missionaries is that we fear rejection. When by our words and lifestyles we tell others about Jesus, we sometimes find ourselves labeled as "religious fanatics," "Bible-thumpers," or perhaps, simply as "old-fashioned." Many times we take the rejection personally. So Jesus consoles us: "Let your peace come back to you." This means, "Don't take it personally. You have done your part, so

don't worry about the outcome." He goes on, telling them, "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven" in the book of life! It is not up to us to force anyone to accept Jesus. Our mission is to prepare the way. If a person's heart is open, the Lord will enter in.

Just as Jesus in today's gospel gives instructions to the seventy-two missionaries, he also gives each one of us a mission to carry out. There were just a handful of followers in Jesus' day to preach the good news, but today there are over one billion Roman Catholics and about a half billion other Christians (in 30,000 denominations!) who accept Jesus as "Lord" and "Savior." So there are 1.5 billion missionaries in a world of six billion people. A recent survey asked the question, "Why do adults join the Catholic Church in spite of the scandals publicized in the media?" Seventy-five percent of the new adult converts to the Catholic Church reported that they were attracted by a personal invitation from a Catholic who had a lively relationship with Christ and his Church. As faithful Catholics, we will attract others to the Catholic Church—just as a rose attracts people by its beauty and fragrance. It's our job. It's our responsibility. We must not miss the current opportunities to be apostles in everyday life by our words and deeds.

We need to avoid counter-witnessing: The Church is founded on the rock of Peter, a humble, ignorant fisherman who died for the Lord he loved. Compare his faith and heroic witnessing with the "supermarket Catholicism" of our politicians who publicly proclaim their "Catholicism" and yet support abortion, gay marriage, human cloning and experimentation with human embryos. We should not be "Catholics for a Free Choice" who oppose anything proposed by the Church, including the most basic right to life. Nor should we be armchair Catholics, spiritual weekend warriors, "cafeteria Catholics" or "barely-make-it-to-Mass" members of the Church, who bear counter-witness to Christ. Instead of giving counter-witness, let us become heralds of the Kingdom in our own homes by treating each other with profound respect. When spouses respect each other, the children and our neighbors will experience the Kingdom in our families because the kingdom of God is God's rule in our hearts enabling us to do His will.

JOKES OF THE WEEK (on the preaching mission).

The definition of a good sermon: It should have a good beginning and a good ending and they should be as close together as possible. A sermon should be modeled as a woman's dress: long enough to cover the subject, but short enough to keep it interesting. A rule of thumb for

preachers: If after ten minutes you haven't struck oil, stop boring! A pastor was greeting folks at the door after the service. A woman said, "Father, that was a very good sermon." The pastor says, "Oh, I have to give the credit to the Holy Spirit." "It wasn't THAT good!" she says. A priest, whose sermons were very long and boring, announced in the church on a Sunday that he had been transferred to another church and that it was Jesus' wish that he leave that week. The congregation in the church got up and sang: "What a Friend we have in Jesus!"