

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS***      15<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY (B)

Amos 7: 12-15   Psalm 85: 9-14   Ephesians 1: 3-14   Mark 6: 7-13

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Today's passage from Mark sounds more like the ending of a gospel than a passage only a third of the way through. It is as if we are at a farewell party and the reins of power and responsibility are being handed on to the next generation. But this is not the end of Mark, and the story is far from over. In fact, it's almost like a television serial, the story will continue and, in the next episode (next Sunday), the Twelve will return and make a report on "all they had done and taught" (6:30).

The Twelve and the rest of Jesus' followers are far from formed. They are still in the midst of their training program and have much to learn and experience with Jesus. Whatever they taught when they were sent out was preliminary and incomplete, because a key teaching in Mark's gospel centers on Jesus' suffering and the cross we must voluntarily pick up if we want to be his disciples. Yes, the disciples are still "trainees," but Jesus sends them out anyway to teach and to cure people. Remarkable, isn't it? Jesus trusted them to share what they had learned, so far, from him and to cure people – just as he had been doing.

So, what's our excuse for not talking with others about our faith? Is it that we feel our knowledge is inadequate? True, we may not be theologians, but we have what the disciples, at this point of the gospel, have received. They have learned from their experience with Jesus and, by being with him, have witnessed his power when he cured those in need. Dare we also speak out of our personal experience of Christ? Or, when asked about our faith in him, do we suggest people read a book, attend a class at church or, "go talk with Father, Sister or the Director of Religious Education?"

Jesus "summoned" the Twelve" – and that's what he does to us; he summons and sends us. Ephesians reminds us today that God has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens." Rather than emphasize what we lack, why not put more trust in what we have been given, "every spiritual blessing?" That should go a long way in helping us respond when someone asks, "What do you believe?" Or "Who is Jesus for you?"

Just to be sure that the Twelve would know that it wasn't what they could provide

for themselves that would win a hearing as they traveled, Jesus tells them they are to go in simplicity – no walking stick, food, sack or money. They would have to rely on the hospitality of others who would welcome them into their homes and feed them – simply because they were sent by Christ.

Who are the people who come into our lives with wisdom and a healing presence? It's not the car they drive or their designer labels that should catch our attention; but it's the spirit they have, which should prompt us to receive them with hospitality. Someone's importance comes not from what they have, but from who they are and Who sent them.

In our society we praise strong individuals who have gone it alone and impressed the rest of us. We look them up on YouTube to see their yachts and watch their fabulous lives. But Jesus' disciples are going to trust that they will receive welcome. We, as recipients, are reminded to offer hospitality to the ones who come to us, in Jesus' name, as guides and healers. Do you know then what will happen? Hospitality will form community, so that "where two or three are gathered" we will discover him in our midst – as we do today at this liturgical celebration. He is here still teaching and healing us through the ones he has "summoned" and sent to us. I wonder who they might be? Not only those in the sanctuary, but those around us in the pews, for haven't other believers come to us with just the right words and healing presence when we needed both? They were sent by Jesus, like the Twelve being sent in today's gospel.

Hospitality is a central virtue, not only in Jesus' teachings, but throughout the entire Bible. Making room for others in our lives, church, community and nation is a sign that God dwells in our midst. God welcomed us when we were strangers, and Jesus has made room for us at table today.

A lot of us don't like to be thrust into the spotlight. Look at poor Amos in our first reading, who tells the high priest that he never chose to be a prophet and would just as soon be back with his sheep and sycamores; not in the sanctuary in Bethel. He never attended prophet-training school, but was "summoned" and sent, as were the apostles. Amos is in a pretty prestigious place, the royal temple, doing what God told him to do. But that doesn't mean he is at home there and wouldn't rather be in his former life. Again, an ordinary person is plucked out of his day job by God and sent on mission. It might be different for us: perhaps we are chosen in the midst of our day jobs and told to stay right there as witnesses to our lives in Christ.

I met a college student recently who volunteered to lead a scripture sharing group at his campus chapel. I asked him what made him volunteer. “I don’t know,” he said, “I just felt called. So, I decided to take a chance and try it.” I doubt Jesus went to the dean’s office to check this student’s grade-point average. Instead, what Jesus found was a heart and mind willing to “take a chance and try it.” I know a grandmother who takes her two unchurched grandchildren to church and explains to them what is happening. A lawyer attends a lunchtime faith discussion group at work. A retired man writes to prison inmates and responds to their questions about his faith. Ordinary people who were “summoned” by the Lord and responded.

Did you catch a little detail in today’s gospel that’s not in the parallel stories in Matthew and Luke? When Jesus tells his missionaries, in Mark’s account, what NOT to take, unlike the other two gospels, he tells them to “wear sandals.” A small thing – but with sandals and a walking staff, it sounds like the news about Jesus is going to travel a long distance! It sounds risky to me. It also sounds exhausting, exciting, scary, uprooting and inspiring. Those being sent are going to have to venture into unfamiliar territory. All they will have with them is the belief that Jesus summoned and sent them. They will have their moments of doubt. They won’t have any special equipment or securities to fall back on. They will have to be the equipment! History tells us just how effective they were, simple travelers, with walking sticks and sandals – and faith in the one who sent them.

There’s lots in the news these days about the shrinking number of priests, brothers and sisters in our churches, schools and hospitals. In the past, we tended to let “the good fathers” and “the good sisters” do the outreach and education of inquirers of the faith. When we thought of missionaries and spreading the gospel, we thought of them. No more! The shortage of one type of vocation has been the occasion for others to be called – lay people have stepped forward to fill in the gaps. They have done inspiring ministry as: administrators, home visitors, lectors, eucharistic ministers, instructors in the faith, theological and biblical teachers, preachers, providers for the poor, etc.

But the fact that today we have so many proclaiming the Good News, in one way or another, doesn’t let the rest of us off the hook. In fact, through the example of so many servants we should be challenged to reflect on how the Lord may be “summoning” us into his service. The possibilities are innumerable. Remember, by the end of the gospel (16: 15), Jesus sent out ALL his disciples to preach and heal the sick?”

## READER'S RESPONSE

I was just reading your homily for Trinity Sunday, where you write: "Someone said once, "Anyone who talks of the Trinity, talks of the cross of Jesus and does not speculate about a heavenly riddle." (Sorry, I don't know the source for this quote.)

I did a little searching and found the following: There is a book entitled, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology*, by Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson. On page 182 of this book, you can read: "In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann seemed to deny any eternal triune life of God already constituted apart from the event of the cross: 'Anyone who really talks of the Trinity talks of the cross of Jesus and does not speculate in heavenly riddles.'"

-----Andrew P. Connolly, Our Lady of Fatima RC Church Manorhaven, NY  
11050-1628

## JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

**"Jesus ...began to send them out two by two"**

*(Mark 6:7)*

*"God calls people to lead holy lives within the ordinary circumstances in which they find themselves."*

(John Paul II, address to the Scottish bishops. Rome 2003)

Although today's Gospel refers to Jesus sending out his apostles, our most common image of people in pairs is likely our image of a married couple beginning life together. They join together to create a new family, a "domestic church".

### **The Home as the First Church**

In our modern world religious families are extremely important centers of living faith. They are "domestic churches" in which the parents are the first heralds of faith (Second Vatican Council). In the home, father, mother, and children exercise their baptismal priesthood in a privileged way. The home is the first school of the Christian life where all learn love, repeated forgiveness, and prayerful worship. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1655-1657)

### **Did you know?**

§ The Corporal Works of Mercy are seven practices of charity toward our neighbor, based on Christ's prophecy of the Last Judgment. Parents and family members practice them daily. Ask any mother or father. Most perform these actions without any awareness that they are holy things to do.

1. Feed the hungry

2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit those in prison
7. Bury the dead

· The Spiritual Works of Mercy are at the heart of living in any community and most certainly in our families. These seven actions occur daily in the rubbing together of our lives in family. These also are holy ways of relating to each other and they take practice.

1. Instruct the ignorant;
2. Counsel the doubtful;
3. Admonish sinners;
4. Bear wrongs patiently;
5. Forgive offences willingly;
6. Comfort the afflicted;
7. Pray for the living and the dead.

### **What can I do?**

- Think about the works of mercy and talk about them in your family. The next time you instinctively serve one of your family members, recognize that you are acting in a holy way.
- Pray for all families. Pray for your family.

Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

### **QUOTABLE**

Earth,  
 our home and mother,  
 the community of which we are a part,  
 the primary revelation of the divine,  
 is composed of  
 subjects  
 to be communed with, not  
 objects  
 to be exploited

—Thomas Berry, who died June 1, 2009

## FAITH BOOK

*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

### **From today's Gospel reading:**

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits.

### **Reflection:**

As Jesus "summoned" the Twelve, so he "summons" and sends us out in his name. Ephesians reminds us that God has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens." Those blessings should go a long way in helping us respond when someone asks, "What do you believe?" Or, "Who is Jesus for you?"

### **So, we ask ourselves:**

- In my daily life how am I responding to a "call" from Jesus?
- In my prayer, conversations, reading, etc., am I sensing a new call from the Lord?

## POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

*Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to:

- Henry L. Wallace            #0422350    (On death row since 1/29/97)
- Terrence Taylor            #053901    (2/18/97)
- Johnny S. Parker            #0311966    (3/24/97)

----Central Prison    1300 Western Blvd.    Raleigh, N.C.    27606

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

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