

096 15th Sunday of the Year B (2024)

Travel light!

Today's Gospel passage marks a significant moment in the Gospel of Mark. Up to this stage, Jesus has been doing all the work himself, proclaiming the kingdom of God, healing the sick and driving out demons. His disciples were simply following him, listening to him and observing what he did.

But in today's Gospel passage, Jesus summons the Twelve and sends them out in pairs – without him – to continue his work. So, 'they set off to preach repentance; and they cast out many devils and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.'

And thus began the great missionary vocation of the followers of Jesus. By virtue of the grace of our baptism, we too are sent out to proclaim the good news of Jesus and be agents of healing in our world. And as we seek to fulfil our call to be modern day missionaries, we can learn much from the instructions that Jesus gave to the Twelve when he sent them out on mission.

Firstly, he spent very little time telling the Twelve what they must say but he goes into great detail about how they are to act while on mission: 'take nothing for the journey except a staff, no bread, no backpack, no money, or spare clothes. If you enter a house, stay there until you leave the district. If you are there for a few days and you meet some people who have a better house with a swimming pool, don't go and stay with them! Stay in the house where you are', and so on.

Why does Jesus place so much emphasis on how they are to act and behave? Because he knows that actions speak louder than words, that the way we live is the most eloquent and powerful witness to our faith in Jesus Christ. St Francis of Assisi once said, 'Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.' What he is saying is that the most powerful sermons are often unspoken. When we live with integrity, showing true care and concern for others, people notice.

And central to being a missionary of Jesus Christ is to 'travel light'. That's why Jesus tells the Twelve to take nothing for the journey. The less we carry the more easily we can go where the Spirit sends us, the more easily we can respond to the needs of others.

We can be weighed down by many things – material possessions, our need for a comfortable life, our desire for riches, and so on. And we can also be weighed down emotionally by past hurts, disappointments, rejections, insults and so on. We can be carrying these around with us and they weigh us down.

Jesus speaks about this in the Gospel. He says, 'if people refuse to listen to you and a town rejects you, shake the dust from your feet as you leave the town.' By that he means 'let it go' and keep moving. Don't let the disappointment of the rejection weigh you down like heavy mud that clings to your boots.

It is not easy to travel light. We have a natural tendency to gather up possessions and to hang on to hurts. It is difficult to have a light hold on what we have. In this Mass let us ask Jesus to help us deepen our faith and trust in him that we, like the 12 Apostles, can say 'yes' wholeheartedly when he calls us to mission.

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