

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (C) (2022)

A) PACKING

- I look forward very much to my holidays
- but there is one aspect of them which I dread, and that is packing, the night before
- I try to anticipate all the things I intend to do
- I think about the clothes and equipment I will need
- the bookings I need to make
- the alternative plans if the weather is bad
- the result is that I put off packing until the last minute,
- I take ages to do it
- I take twice as much stuff as I actually use,
- and, despite my best efforts, I usually forget to take something important

B) SHARING THE MISSION

- that scenario is perhaps a very familiar one to some of you
- but it is very different from the one today's Gospel presents
- for one thing, Jesus is not going on holiday
- he is concerned about preaching the Kingdom of God
- he knows he cannot do it all by himself, and time is running out
- so he decides to appoint seventy-two others to share in his work
- he needs help, and he has to accept the reality of the talents and the limitations of his helpers:
- he has to accept their preaching, their prayer, their ability to communicate, their halting understanding, their hesitant insights
- he also has to accept their misunderstandings, their confusion, their fragilities, their expectations, their unspoken fears.
- but he does not wait until all these issues are resolved or clarified
- he sends them out just as they are

C) TRAVELLING LIGHT

- for the disciples the mission is an adventure into the unknown
- they are never sure of the reception they will receive, acceptance or rejection
- Jesus warns them about the harshness of the landscape and the dangers they will face: I am sending you out like lambs among wolves
- they cannot rely on homely securities: carry no purse, no haversack, no sandals
- because of the urgency of their mission, there is no time to waste on casual conversation and social conventions: salute no-one on the road
- when they enter a house, they should bless it with peace,
- and if they are welcomed they should accept what they are offered, and not try to change the accommodation or fuss about the menu
- all of this takes time, and there is not much time left

D) NOT WELCOME

- but what if they are not welcomed?
- the disciples are being sent out to bring a message of peace
- they are proclaiming the Kingdom of God
- they are revealing its presence in the works of healing they perform
- if they are shown hospitality, it is a sign that their message is being accepted
- but if they are shown hostility, then it is the word of God himself that is being rejected
- Jesus himself was rejected by his own townspeople, and it seems, the same fate befell some of his closest disciples too
- but it is clear that that rejection will have serious consequences: I tell you that on that day it will not go as hard with Sodom as with that town.

E) A NOTE OF JOY

- on their return, the disciples are delighted that their mission has actually worked!
- they rejoice that people do welcome the word of God, and that this same word has power to cast the demons out
- so the true resource the disciples have is not their possessions or their abilities but the word of God itself
- but Jesus reminds them that they are not to rejoice in their newly-discovered power, or in the fact that their mission has succeeded
- they should rejoice because their names are written in heaven
- if they rejoice only when their mission has succeeded, what happens to their joy when their mission fails?
- they are to rejoice instead in the graciousness of God,
- in the knowledge that God holds their name as precious
- and that he loves them unconditionally
- nothing can change that or take it away
- and the same is true of us as well

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(with thanks to Fr Denis McBride CSSR,
"Seasons of the Word" - 1991, pp.254-255)