



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



11TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

Fr. David Rosenberg

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...Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Matt 9:36

This gospel was one of the first I was to preach on following my ordination. I printed and cut out these three paragraphs and carried it in my pocket. I took it out and read it and pondered it daily. The more I read, the stronger it lived in me. These words were not haphazardly thrown together. They were written through the eyepiece of spiritual sight, tightly codified to pack a powerful punch. To be passed down orally from generation to generation. A spiritual message and meaning for all generations. Three paragraphs that sums up Christ's mission and lessons for us. Three directives: to be called, to be formed, and to be sent.

In the first paragraph he calls us to be "laborers for the harvest." It is up to us to decide to be one of the few laborers and to heed his call. To open our spiritual eyes as Jesus did to see the crowd of abandoned and confused souls.

In the second paragraph he calls his twelve apostles by name, clearly identifies the leader, and forms them into a spiritual community, giving them authority to drive out "unclean spirits" and to heal every disease and illness. And this he offers to us as well.

And finally, after calling them and forming them, he sends them out. Not to unknown "pagan" territory, but rather right in our community, to take care of our own back yard.

As I pondered these last verses, it occurred to me that its message was what St John Paul II was talking about writing on the New Evangelization. In John Paul's words, "... bring home the lost sheep from our own house." A great example of this is a story I was told by the father of seven children. Even though neither were college educated, they worked hard so they could send their kids not only to local Catholic schools but also paid for their college education.

Through all the years of sacrifice he never questioned his steadfast love and dedication, even though much of the time they only seemed to call when they needed something. But he was always there for them, his love unwavering. His youngest daughter was a successful doctor who decided to give back to the community through a variety of fund raising efforts. This year her fund raiser was an Easter Egg Hunt where she would dress up as the Easter bunny. She worked hard to get the word out to people and engaged a small army of people to get eggs stuffed with goodies and ready to hide. She rented an elaborate costume, and was to pick it up the evening before. But she found herself at a conference in Chicago and picking it up slipped her mind until it was too late. After a frazzled and hectic schedule her exhaustion overtook her. But in her darkest moment who was there to help her? Her father. She picked up the phone and called him. And he was there, like the laborer bringing in the harvest. Upon being asked to help her by driving into Detroit for the costumes, he of course said he could think of nothing he'd rather do than help his little girl.

At this point of the story, after relaying the part about only hearing from his kids when they needed him, he looked me in the eye and said, "You know. It occurred to me that the Lord must feel this way, how so many of us only call out in times of need. Yet he is always there. Always present. His love never fails. And sooner or later we get it. Over time we see that we are blessed and loved. And that's OK. I figured out that is exactly the way it is supposed to be." He learned the lesson that we all need to learn.

"Without cost we have received. Without cost we are to give." Matt 10:8

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

At the sight of the crowds, Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples,

*"The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few;
so ask the master of the harvest
to send out laborers for his harvest."*

Then he summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness.

The names of the twelve apostles are these:

first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew;
James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John;
Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector;
James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus;
Simon from Cana, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.

Jesus sent out these twelve after instructing them thus,

*"Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town.
Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'
Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.
Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give."*

The Gospel of the Lord