

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

(Amos 7:12-15 / Mark 6:7-13)

15.07.2018

Rules for the mission

Today our gospel reading is the account of a very important step in the history and development of Christianity. Christ calls the Twelve and gives them 2 rules for their missionary work.

Jesus is not making a suggestion that we are free to discard; he is not proposing rules that are simply optional. The Greek word used by St Mark would be better translated by: "He ordered them". Yet it is quite disconcerting to notice that throughout the long history of Christianity, many missionaries have not considered themselves bound by these rules.

Before going any further, it is important to say that these rules are not addressed only to those who set off on mission to far off lands. Jesus speaks to you and me about the way we are to relate to all men and women, and how we should live our Christian lives.

The first instruction is: "Take nothing for the journey". For the sake of the Gospel, we should not be encumbered by too many possessions. Whoever wants to travel far must travel light.

We undermine our credibility and the power of the Gospel when we claim that we believe in God, that we trust in him as the master of our lives and of the universe, when we preach Christ as the lover of the poor who came for those who are sick and needy and at the same time we are seen to place our security in material wealth, and are overly concerned with appearances and promoting individualism.

In the call to possess nothing there is a call for us to learn to be dependent on others for our needs. Jesus is aware that a self-sufficient missionary cannot bear witness to a Gospel which is about sharing, generosity, and inter-dependence.

Ultimately Jesus' call is not for us to be destitute but to be clear about where our priorities lie. The proclamation of the Gospel of love is fruitful when it comes from a loving heart, when it is rooted in a living experience of the Gospel, and when it fosters communion.

The second instruction is as challenging as the first: "If any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust from under your feet". The words are clear: there will always be people who are not ready for the Gospel, and if they reject us what we have to do is to move away.

Throughout the history of Christianity we have not always obeyed this order. There are many instances when we have imposed faith by force, when we have coerced individuals and nations into becoming Christians. Even in our families, many feel that Christianity was forced upon them, that they did not really choose it.

We may give ourselves good conscience by saying that what we did was done for their good. Why not?

If faith is not freely accepted then it is not really Christian faith. The reality is that we will never lead somebody to faith if that person is not ready for it. We may be able to put a kind of Christian varnish on somebody and on a society but let us be clear to bring people to faith, to help them enter into a living encounter with the Risen Lord is of another order, it cannot be the result of human coercion, it is a gift from God using human means.

We are told that the first content of the preaching of the Twelve was repentance, a call to enter into a dynamic and ongoing conversion by turning away from sin. It is certainly difficult for us to call others to repentance while, in our Christian communities, at a personal

and community level, we cling to attitudes which are sinful. Before going out to preach anything to others we have first to examine our own lives. Then even with our poverty, our limitations and the sin at work in us and in our communities, with the strength and the authority of the Gospel – not our own – we can go and humbly bear witness to the good news of Christ. He offers freedom and life to those who repent and turn away from sin.

In our families and communities, we all know men and women who have forgotten the grace of their baptism, people who wonder why they should go to church or commit themselves to a particular denomination, people who sincerely no longer see the point in being Christian.

In a world where loneliness and competition, greediness and fears are on the prowl, roaming abroad; in a world in need of meaning and purpose, it is our responsibility to be witnesses to Christ. Jesus asks us to be simple and humble, dependant upon others, to gently propose to them the Christian message, and to respect the freedom of those to whom we are sent. Today our preaching and the way we live our lives in the world, should be marked by a great spirit of humility and respect.

We could make our own the prayer of Bl. John Henry Newman: “O Jesus, make me preach without preaching – not by words, but by my example, by my visible resemblance to your saints and the evident fullness of the love which my heart bears to you.”

Love is all that we need for the ministry confided to all of us. Whether people agree with us or not, let us love, “where there is love, God is there” (*Ubi Caritas*) because “God is love” (1Jn 4:8).