

15th July 2018 (15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 84(85):9-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13.

They set off to preach repentance.

The rejection at Nazareth we read last week, did not stop Jesus; his mission was to preach repentance for the kingdom of God (Mk 1:15).

Moreover, Jesus' mission does not stop with him. The twelve close associates he had gathered around him also share in this ministry (Mk 1:16-20; 2:14; 3:13-19.) In today's gospel we read about Jesus sending the twelve to start their own mission, preaching repentance. As we reflect on this gospel reading, we are invited to place ourselves among the twelve. We too have been called through our baptism, and sent out to be witnesses to the world around us.

Preaching the good news of the kingdom, preaching repentance and witnessing to Christ, is not an easy mission. The first reading, from the book of the prophet Amos, shows how the prophet was rejected because he had been challenging the people of the northern kingdom of Israel to turn away from their pagan idols and return to the worship of the one true God. Instead of listening to his preaching, Amos was told to return to his home and to leave the people alone. Amos was aware that it was God himself who had called him to this mission, and he could not turn his back on the word of God.

In the gospel Jesus gives his twelve disciples a clear set of instructions: they are to travel lightly. The good news of the kingdom was to be their only concern; not property, money or any other kind of wealth or status. The apostles are told to carry with them a walking stick, to ward off wild animals and robbers, and sandals. Like Jesus, they are to be always on a journey; they are instructed not to settle down in one place for too long, not to get comfortable. Unencumbered by luggage is much easier to be constantly on the move; but it also means the disciples are vulnerable to hospitality. Without money they could not choose which motel to stay in and had to accept the hosts' generosity. They are also told to stay in the same house, and not to look around for better accommodation. Poverty and humility are key messages of the coming kingdom of God!

Today, two thousand years later, I wonder whether our Christian message has become too 'wealthy.' Do we still witness to the gospel without expecting anything in return? Are we open to receive the message and share it in all its simplicity? Do we witness in poverty and humility? It is very unfortunate that along the centuries the Church has managed to marry its message to certain characteristics that belonged to the cultures and political situations it has lived through. At times we still use titles inherited from the European feudal system. Part of our job is to make sure that our witness and message is faithful, 'clean' and simple so it can be easily accepted by people from different cultures.

When we face rejection, we are invited to remove the dust from under our feet and move on. It is certainly not healthy to carry the painful rejection with us; it is better to leave it behind. When we carry the rejection with us we become bitter and can influence the way we witness to the good news! Therefore let God be the judge of those who reject the message. Our job is only to give witness.

Fr Mario