

Sunday, July 7, 2013

14th Sunday of the Year (C)

The Kingdom of God is at Hand

Conventual Mass

The Gospels of the 12th, 13th and 14th Sunday form a unit on the following of Christ. On the 12th Sunday Jesus asked each one of us, “Who do you say I am?” and Peter replied for all the disciples of Christ down through the ages. Immediately following on this, Jesus made the prediction of his passion and proclaimed to his disciples then and now that “Whoever wishes to be my disciple must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps.” In Last Sunday’s Gospel Jesus emphasized the total commitment to Christ that must distinguish the Christian. “Nothing must be preferred to Christ (RB 4:21) and the Kingdom of God.

The readings in today’s liturgy express great joy, joy in God’s promise fulfilled. It begins with a jubilant Isaiah proclaiming the end of the exile: “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her...exult, exult with her, all you who were mourning over her.” It continues through our responsorial psalm with its refrain: “Shout joyfully to God, all the earth” and St. Paul’s exclamation in our second reading: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me.” And it finds its fulfillment as Jesus continues his ministry through the agency of his disciples: “The seventy-two returned rejoicing (from their mission), and said “Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name.” Jesus rejoiced with them saying: “I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky... Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

In Mathew and Mark it is only the twelve who are sent on this primitive mission. In Luke it is seventy-two disciples. It is not only the small original group that is concerned. Even though there are missionaries called to a special vocation of bringing the Good News to the ends of the earth, today’s Gospel emphasizes the obligation of all Christ’s disciples to share in Christ’s mission.

Jesus’ mission includes not only the positive ministry of proclaiming the Good News. Its other aspect is the combat we endure singly and as community with the powers of darkness wherever they may appear and with Christ to bring about an end to Satan’s rule. Jesus always confronted evil wherever the enemy of the human race was at work and crushed it.

There are many levels in the human person. There are the levels in which we feel pain and sorrow. The level out of which these missionary disciples operated when they cured the sick, cast out demons and successfully preached the coming of the kingdom was the level in which they were connected with God and so became channels for divine life and healing.. This is the real reason for their success. They should not rejoice because they have new powers but because they are cooperating with God’s ongoing creation, helping to bring in the kingdom, and so become part of the kingdom themselves.¹

There is an immediacy to the coming of the Kingdom that urges Jesus on to his

goal, an urgency which runs through all the Gospels. I am afraid that as a people we have lost much of this urgency that characterized the early Church and gave it a particular dynamism. The Lord's coming was expected immediately and all the world needed to be gotten ready for his coming. Two thousand years have made us a little too comfortable, perhaps, because we count time by our own life span rather than seeing it from God's perspective. Jesus will come soon, and if not for the world in my generation, then at least when he calls for me individually.

This message is so urgent that the disciples are not to be hindered by any baggage. They are on an emergency mission and to carry only what they must. Food and housing are to be supplied by God. What a witness to our affluent, consumerist society! We must get rid of anything, even thoughts and attitudes that are so much baggage that hinder not only us on our journey to Christ, but because they also hurt the mission on which Christ sends us. The message is so urgent that the disciples are not even to waste time in pleasantries; their whole focus should be on their mission. Nothing should interfere with carrying out the will of God for them and for the world.

The only valuable is peace, which the disciples are to offer generously. This "peace" is a sign of the messianic times, a work of the Spirit. It is especially associated with Christ and is one of the beautiful fruits of the Easter victory.² This peace arises from a restored relationship with God. Destroyed by sin, peace and harmony between God and us are restored in Christ. A blessing, like a curse, has a force of its own once uttered. It will eventually come to rest at some point, even if that means returning to the one who utters the blessing.³

It falls to all Christians, to fulfill the mission given to each of us, knowing that we are working toward the victory of Christ that has already begun. It is also the source of our joy, since in working with Christ for the sake of the Kingdom; we cannot but grow in union with Christ.⁴ Jesus tell us in the Last Supper discourse: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and who ever receives me receives the one who sent me" (Jhn 13:20). The disciples became Jesus to such an extent that the degree to which the people received the disciples and their message was the degree to which they received Jesus and the One who sent him.⁵

We are called by our baptism to continue Christ's ministry to the world. We are all called to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. Our mission is to bring the peace of Christ wherever we go and to all we meet. In a time when many are confused and disillusioned and searching for meaning in money, pleasure, drugs and shallow relationships we can carry Jesus to them by our love and respect.⁶

Preaching is only one way of spreading the good news. The most effective one is by the example of our lives in all the things that make up our daily lives. Many were converted to Christianity by the heroic witness of the martyrs but many were also converted by the love the Christians showed one another, Jesus, the lover of the human race, was filled with joy when his disciples reported back to him all that took place. And then he whispered into their ears and the ears of all the people who would continue his

mission until the end of time. “Rejoice, Your names are written in heaven.”⁷

Endnotes

¹ John Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers, Year C* (Collegeville, Minn., Liturgical Press, 2006) 191

² *Days of the Lord: The Liturgical Year, v.6 (Ordinary Time, Year C)* (Collegeville, Minn., Liturgical Press, 1991) 117

³ Roland J. Faley, *Footprints on the Mountain* (N.Y., Paulist Press, 1994) 469

⁴ *Days of the Lord*, 118

⁵ John Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers*, 1186

⁶ Desmond Knowles, *Voicing a Thought on Sunday* (Dublin, Columba Press, 1991) 338

⁷ John Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers*, 193