

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

GOSPEL

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‘When Jesus saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.” He summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is 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 Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows:

“Do not turn your steps to pagan territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.”

(Matthew 9:36-10:8)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Pope Benedict XVI spoke of Jesus as ‘recapitulating’ the history of Israel in his own person: Jesus lives and fulfils in his own life, death and resurrection the vocation of Israel. Some of this is reflected in today’s Gospel.
- Jesus selects twelve men to be his apostles: symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- He sends them first to the House of Israel, reflecting the order of salvation history. Since God first appoints a special chosen people, it is right that they hear the gospel first. Later, Jesus will also send these apostles to make disciples of ‘all nations’ (Mt 28:18-20).

EXPLORING THE WORD

There is a lot going on in this passage. Although we might not realise it at first, we can see here the earliest connection between the apostolic office and the vocation of being a shepherd. We hear that Jesus felt compassion for the crowds because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus is the ultimate shepherd. That is his mission, to shepherd his people back to the Father. But what does he do? He sends out the apostles with his authority. The apostles are the first bishops, and even today (some two thousand years later) we retain the connection between the ministry of bishop and the ministry of the shepherd by the fact that the bishop carries a crozier, a crook. The successors to the apostles know that they have the same vocation, the same calling: to shepherd God’s people, to exercise their ministry with the authority Christ gave them.

- Discuss how bishops exercise their shepherding ministry through their three-fold office of governing, teaching and sanctifying (CCC 1554-1561).
- Discuss how ordained clergy (priests) are ‘co-workers’ with the bishop (CCC 1562-1568).

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Jesus called together a variety of different people to be his apostles. What sorts of conflicts do you imagine they would have experienced?
- How does this eclectic group of apostles reflected in the church today?
- Discuss apostolic succession and what it means.
- Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, priests and bishops share in the ‘universal dimensions of the mission Christ entrusted to the apostles’ (CCC 1565). Discuss what this means for those ordained to Holy Orders to be entrusted with the universal nature of the Gospel mission.
- Although the laity have a more restricted mission in the world, they are also called to be faithful disciples and witnesses in their own harvests. Explore how the laity can exercise their mission where they are in the world.
- ‘You received without charge, give without charge’: God gives his people a gift of infinite preciousness and eternal delight, without charge. How can we witness to this by giving without charge in our own lives?

