

Homily  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
June 18, 2017

In the Name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, Amen

Today, in Matthew's Gospel, we hear Jesus giving his disciples instructions to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

Matthew also takes this opportunity to give us a list of the 12, calling them for the first time Apostles, that is, being who are sent out, as Jesus was now sending them, and would later send all those who witnessed His resurrection.

The number twelve is, of itself, of course, full of meaning, as anyone in Jesus' world would recognize; at the heart of what Jesus was up to was His belief that through His work, God was at last renewing and restoring Israel, which traditionally had been based on the twelve tribes.

But now the twelve were not to be just a sign that God was restoring Israel; they were to be part of the means by which He was doing so.

The twelve had travelled with Him. They had seen His healing. They had witnessed Him casting demons out of people. He tutored them constantly as they followed Him day after day and night after night.

There is a well-known metaphor about this commissioning of the twelve. Up until the time of the instructions to the twelve apostles, Jesus' disciples had been passengers in the car and He had been doing the driving.

They had been astonished at what they had seen but He had made all the decisions, handled all the tricky moments, steered them through the towns and villages, and taken the criticisms.

And now He's telling them to go off and do it themselves. It doesn't take much imagination to see how it would feel. You want us to do it? By ourselves? How will I know the way? As intimidating as any new challenge, we face for the very first time - scary!

But they had been journeying with Him. They had His example to follow. Jesus was not the kind of person to stay in one place and have the people come to Him. His love led Him to others; He was constantly on the move.

His instructions were to go to the people of Israel. After His resurrection, He reverses these instructions and sends the disciples

out to all the nations. However, at this point there was a more immediate task before the wider mission could be built in the program. Tom Wright, an Anglican theologian, tells us that if He and His followers had started taking their message to the *Gentile* world at this stage, no self-respecting Jew would have paid them any more attention. It would have confirmed his enemies' taunts: "He was in league with the devil." But He isn't. He has not come to destroy but to fulfil. The way He will do that is by fulfilling His promises to Israel. That is, Jesus' particular focus and concern, as the later Church recognized.

The time for the *Gentiles* will come soon enough. For the moment, every effort must be made to tell the chosen people that their great moment, the fulfillment of their dreams has arrived.

That's why Jesus' challenge, to the disciples themselves and, through them, to the Israel of His day, had to be so sharp - and often has to be as sharp today where people still naturally prefer comfort to challenge.

But the challenge of Jesus' sayings is matched by the remarkable promises He makes to those who accept them and live by them. He will "own" us before His father in heaven. Those who lose their lives will find them.

Jesus commissions His disciples to perform the very works that He does, calling them to advance beyond Him into new and emergent contexts.

Whether with Jesus or commissioned by Jesus, the authentic proclamation of God's realm is marked by healing and liberation. For Jesus not only preached to the people, He healed them as well. Those who were blind, paralyzed, sick, He made whole. He gave them back their abilities.

In some ways, we may envy the twelve for the clarity of their call. The message was clear and they did as they were told. But we know they did not have a clear understanding of who Christ really was until after His resurrection. But when they were called and sent, He did not require perfect understanding. He only asked that they take the first steps in following Him.

It is no different today for us. It is a challenge to have a strong and clear sense of what God wants us to do in life. To take even small steps requires struggle, persistence, courage in the face of obstacles.

However, at the end of the day, Jesus does the same with us all. Only the details are different. As well, we have the benefit of the examples of so many generations of faithful people who have gone on

before us. Awakened and aware, they went where people were suffering, excluded, expelled, marginalized and abused. They were non-exclusionary and bridge-builders. And there they found God.

And so, we too, today, find Him in others, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, nationality, appearance or social class. We too, by how we live out our lives, by our openness to God and others, proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to others.

May we always be filled with the grace of the One who calls us, teaches us, and loves us, now and to the end of our days. Thanks be to God, Amen.