

Homily St Pius & St Anthony 14th Sunday Ordinary Year C1

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it.....”

Hearing Jesus today we may be tempted to think of His work as ‘mission impossible’. He does lay out a tough challenge: First, the laborers are few (Luke 10:2), so maybe there won’t be a lot of support staff to work with, and then He says we are sent like ‘lambs among wolves’ (Luke 10:3) and add to the challenge that they are to go with no supplies (security, weapons or extra cover) as He says ‘Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals’ (Lk 10:4), and to add one more tough condition to it, He implies that they can count on rejection by going ahead and counselling them to shake the dust and keep on moving whenever they are put down or put out anywhere (Lk 10:10-11).

Yet, I like Jesus ‘debriefing’ afterward and I view it as one more added detail after His initial command instructions (as if the operation itself wasn’t tough enough), He further directs them not to overly gloat about successful work or feats accomplished. When the apostles come back all excited and beside themselves, high-fiving each other about the successes of their mission, (They were saying, *‘Jesus, we cast out demons in your name’- Don’t they sound like children coming home from school- ‘Mom, we memorized our 7 & 8 multiplication tables today! Or how to reduce fractions’*), Jesus is quick to have them detach from results; not get caught up in only chasing fruit or making quotas. He tells them, *“Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven”* (Luke 10:20). It not the score that matters to Jesus. It is the team you are on. Simply being one of God’s own is pay enough, it is its own reward.

This reminds me of the story of the three deacons who were sitting in funeral home waiting for prayers at a wake of one of their classmates. One of them asked, “How do you guys want to be remembered when you die? What do you want people to say about you?” The first one jumped in “I want everyone to say that I could preach like the fiery prophets of the Old Testament”. The other one, not to be outdone by that, said, “I want everyone to remember the two soup kitchen-shelters that I founded.” All the while the third deacon kind of smiled, because his mind was altogether somewhere else. He said, “You know what I really want people to say, about me laying the casket? It’s this-I want them to say, “Look at his hand, he is moving.” I like this last response because it focuses completely, not on anything the deacon himself had done, but instead on what God does for him-through him! So, Jesus advises us not to celebrate that demons are subject to us, but simply to celebrate that your name is written in heaven-we are on his team! That fact that God is minding us is good enough. That single-minded focus on what God alone is doing through the disciples comes through in all of Jesus’ mission commands to them. So, let’s look at His commands: first, Jesus emphasizes the urgency and necessary attention needed by telling them to ‘not greet anyone people along the way’ (Jesus was

not being impersonal, of course, He wants courtesy from them that they should say Hi and be kind to people they meet; He was just saying the same thing my mom always told when she sent us to fetch a jar of pickles or eggs from the corner store, saying to us 'Don't dilly dally or piddle along the way'. Also, to not take extra baggage /supplies along with us, this ensures that disciples rely on Him to provide, not us using our own back-up resources. Here Jesus knows too, that we will likely get caught up having to do 'maintenance' on all our stuff dragged along- He knows that leads us to taking more care about the stuff we drag along, than the people and work that we get into on our different mission locations. This is behind the similar detail about not being the social butterflies and flitting from house to house, seeking gratifications from the frequent change of scenes. He wants His missionaries not to be the novelty 'flavor of the week' among the community, but to be a stable, consistently firm presence to the people that they are serving. And then finally, Jesus desired that His disciples be 'content' people. He didn't want disciples that were hard to please, particularly picky or complaining eaters, so He said 'Eat what is set before you'. He is saying that simple basic calories are not hard to come by on the road. Such an 'easy to get along with' helper in the community presenting in the Name of Jesus, that would make for some powerful missionary witness-their simple disposition along with such good work as healing the upset, praying over the sick and in general calming agitated spirits-that is so needed!

Yet, I am intrigued by their sparse 'speaking parts'. Did you hear what they were supposed to preach-their mission speeches? Not much at all, Jesus really only gives them **two** lines to repeat! Their spiel (their sales pitch) seems to be as simple as saying "The **Kingdom of God is at hand** for you (Lk 10:9)." And also, "Peace to this household" (Luke 10:5) It is simple enough, and it reminds me of the similar performative or demonstrative preaching of Jesus to His own hometown synagogue back in Luke chapter 4. Back then, Jesus had read from the prophet Isaiah, about what healing miracles God would work, and then Jesus just sat down and said "This is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Jesus is calling for a similar 'tell and show', emphasizing way more the 'show' part. He wants His disciples to embody and illustrate the Kingdom, and what true 'peace' looks like by how they live and interact with those they encounter. When they are to proclaim, "The kingdom of God is at hand", Jesus wants them to be saying, "Watch us, this is what the Kingdom looks like" Of course, they have to back it up with their actions, just like their opener statement, "Peace to this household" meant that they were there to show peace, share peace, to teach how we can all live without anxiety & anger, stress & strain. Jesus really will take care of us, He will take care of all of this. It takes strength to accept Jesus' mission; it's not easy to trust Him that much. We have to trust and lean on Him. Yet, that is where His comments about not boasting over exploits re-enters the picture for us. We need to maintain

humility about any adventure-it is not truly us, but God working it through us. So much depends upon the grace of God. Even our successes, only amount to us cooperating with God's will; it is all properly glory to Him. Recall that He sent them out in 'His Name'. He is saying 'represent Me to them'. They are meant to be an advance introduction of Jesus to others. And I like how this mission is universally given to all of us 'followers of Christ'. This Luke chapter 10 mission of the seventy-two was a second one after Jesus initially sent out the Twelve in chapter 9. The second round and increased number was Jesus' way of universalizing the call. We are all called to mission in His Name. Often we think of missions as 'Oh, do I have to go to Uganda, or Sudan?' But, no, Jesus was sending these seventy-two only ahead to a couple of towns down the road, a half-day or day's walk ahead of Him a little. Mission with Christ is within everyone's orbit. So what do we do? It starts with being clear about who we represent: Jesus-again it is His advance mission, assigned to us, as a way of introducing Him to others. Can people see that I am a Christian? Through my conduct and encounters with them, do people want to know more about this leader shepherd of mine, Jesus? Is my behavior different enough from the crowd's to distinguish it as really Christ-like. Recall that By sending us out in His Name, Jesus is telling us, "They will know me, by how you engage/interact with them." Our mission is to make the introduction of Jesus to them. To set up their meeting, by our very behavior shared with them. How we conduct ourselves and serve or live among them, is meant to raise interest in their later meeting Him themselves. Jesus calls all of us to this mission. So, by our witness and interaction, our teaching of the Kingdom through our actions, may we help lead others to Christ.