

HOMILY ORDINARY SUNDAY 11 – A

“Disciples Authorized and Sent”

(Exodus 19:1-6a; Psalm 100; Romans 5:6-11; Matthew 9:36-10:8)

When do you think heaven begins?

The good news is that the disciples of Jesus live in the kingdom now!

There is a hint of this amazing new reality in the Old Testament reading. Through Moses, there is a special call or election of the Hebrew people in the desert. They are told by God that if they obey the voice of God, they will be God’s treasured possession, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation, a people set apart – the chosen people. Unfortunately, they were never fully able to live up to this exalted calling – they always fell short of the life that God wanted them to live.

The gospel, on the other hand, brings us right into this new reality through faith in Jesus and an intimate loving relationship with him. Through him the kingdom of heaven has come near.

Jesus hints at this kingdom through the many parables and elsewhere in the scriptures describes the kingdom of God as the peace, joy and justice of the Holy Spirit. Peace and joy are far beyond emotions that come and go. Genuine peace and joy are gifts of the Holy Spirit, meant to be our habitual way of being in the world. Jesus experienced peace even on the cross, despite all contrary obstacles, because he knew he was accomplishing the will of God.

Justice really means a right relationship with God, with others, with our selves, and with all of creation. This concept of justice happens especially through forgiveness, reconciliation and a holistic personal transformation that is integral to the kingdom; that is part and parcel of being a disciple of Jesus.

There is a typology of Moses in this gospel passage. Just as Num 27:17 is concerned with the transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua, so also here Jesus confers authority on the disciples. The response to the prayer for laborers is the mission of the disciples, who in this context are depicted as the expression of the divine compassion for the needy people of God. The disciples’ mission is not voluntary activity initiated by them; rather, they are chosen, authorized and sent by God through Christ.

At this point Jesus gives the twelve disciples part of his work - exorcisms and healing diseases. They are to be the leaders of the New Israel, the new people of God. That is why they are sent first to the house of Israel. Jesus has the authority to teach and forgive sins which he passes on to his disciples. Jesus was sent and given authority by God the Father to proclaim the kingdom by his teaching, preaching and healing, and now he sends others to do the same.

The Jewish leaders at the time of Jesus, like their ancestors in the desert, offered a religion that was a handicap and not a support. Christianity exists not to burden but to encourage, not to weigh down but to lift up. The Pharisees in their pride saw the common people as trash to be destroyed; Jesus saw them as a harvest to be reaped and saved by his love and salvific death. Every Christian should pray, and also be a reaper.

Discipleship contains within it three essential elements – prayer, proclamation and witness. We are first of all asked by the Lord to pray for vocations, for laborers for the kingdom. Then we are to proclaim the Good News, to evangelize others and to catechize or teach them about this kingdom of God. Finally, we are mandated to live the Good News ourselves through our own on-going healing journeys and our selfless ministry and service to others for the sake of the kingdom.

Lillian Yonkers was president of Oblate College in San Antonio, Texas. The group of priests and sisters who had completed a renewal program at Ministry to Ministers in San Antonio were told that she would be coming to their closing banquet. Indeed, there was an extra place set at the table for her. However, the banquet started without her. The participants were somewhat bemused, wondering why she had not come, when suddenly she appeared out of the kitchen, dressed with an apron. She had come, not as the guest of honour, but as one who would serve their table. The participants were surprised and delighted, yet also humbled – the president of the college was serving them. What an example of discipleship – truly following the teachings of Jesus!

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is part of the Good News that the kingdom of God is here. Jesus left us this sacramental encounter with him – we receive him in the bread and wine, and are empowered to go out and proclaim the kingdom and be wounded healers

So be a disciple: Spread the Good News and live within the Kingdom of God