

HOMILY SUNDAY 15 – B (Homily 02)

“Called to be an Apostle”

(Amos 7:12-15; Eph 1:3-14; Mk 6:7-13)

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Before he died, the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate gave this advice to the members of his community: *Dare to leave no stone unturned.*

Today, the gospel invites us to dare to see ourselves as apostles.

Today’s gospel is the third call by Jesus of the apostles. In Chapter one, Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James and John from their fishing career to a new profession of discipleship and to a new family, with very little clarity.

The second call to the apostles in chapter three is more solemn. Jesus takes his disciples up a mountain where he designates twelve as apostles to be taught, given authority and finally sent out on mission.

The third call is in chapter 6, today’s gospel, where Jesus sends them out two by two; where they in reality begin their lives as apostles who are sent out, which is the meaning of the word *apostolos*.

Most commentaries would say that there are four common elements at play here. First, it is God’s work, not their own. They are authorized by Jesus and empowered by him. There is a danger that ministry can be exercised for selfish purposes, to gain attention to one’s self, to one’s work, to be tainted by a kind of personal pride. The harsh reality is that one can do one’s own will in God’s name.

There is a saying that is appropriate here: *To do the right thing for the wrong reason is the greatest kind of treason*. This can be the underlying reason for ministerial burn-out. The best anti-dote to this is to remember precisely that our ministry is God’s work and not our own.

Second, a disciple of Jesus is to travel light. What we must be carrying is the gospel, and as much as is humanly possible, only the gospel, unencumbered by personal or cultural baggage, or even wealth.

When Fr. Bill Stang OMI was missioned to Kenya, a temptation was to bring all kinds of money from North America to do things for and build

things for the people there. He had to remind some of the Oblates of the mistakes that were made in North America that created a regrettable dependency which affects the ministry here to this day.

The people of Pukatawagan in our archdiocese of Keewatin-The Pas surprised their pastor, Fr. Pietro Bignami OMI, with a new hardwood floor in the church. They raised the funds themselves and installed it themselves while he was away for two months.

Now they are very proud of the new floor they put into the church. When I was there for Easter this year, I was struck by the care they gave that floor. As soon as a service was over, the chairs were moved to the side, the floor swept and mopped within minutes, the chairs replaced and the church was ready for the next service. Father had travelled light and had challenged the people to take on more responsibility. They had responded and it showed in a healthy pride in what they had accomplished on their own.

A third element of being an apostle is to be ready for failure. Things may not work out as we had planned for a variety of reasons. That was the way it was for Jesus and we can hardly expect anything different. As Mother Theresa put it, we are called to be faithful, not successful. Sometimes failure is necessary to point out the road to success. And always, God will draw good out of apparent failure.

One young missionary went through a burn-out stage in his ministry, where he simply became exhausted, depressed and had to resign a position with his religious order. The subsequent months of therapy and recovery seemed like a complete failure, yet going through that dark night of the soul taught him lessons of humility and self awareness that in many ways enriched his ministry afterwards.

A last element of an apostolic life found in this gospel is the importance of community. Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs. There is great wisdom in this, especially in the present day when there are so many secular and counter-faith pressures put on all believers. This argues for shared leadership and team ministry wherever possible.

A good example in our own archdiocese is the presence of the Adrian Dominican sisters who have made a decision as a community to be more missionary and to live in community rather than alone. To facilitate this they

have created a mission fund out of which they draw their salaries and funds for sustenance, so as to not be a burden by living in community. That is a great blessing to our archdiocese.

This gospel also holds the key elements of a truly apostolic ministry. The apostles first of all proclaimed repentance. The reign of God breaking in on us is so new, so profound, so challenging that one cannot enter it without a transformation of one's narrow, culturally shaped notion of life. One cannot enter it without an inner journey into one's own truth which tends to be sinful and needing to be transformed. Repentance then becomes the key to experiencing the reign of God right here and now, in this life. And so repenting ourselves and proclaiming the need to repent is the task of the apostle. That puts the spotlight on personal examination of conscience, sorrow, a desire to change, confession of one's sins, prayer for healing and then going out to live a new way of life in the reign of God.

The 12 Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous has this worked into the Steps, especially Step four which calls for a searching and fearless moral inventory, and Step five in which members admit to God, to themselves and to one other human being the exact nature of their wrongs. That is genuine repentance.

The last element of a truly apostolic ministry is healing. The apostles ministered both physical healing (they anointed people with oil and cured them) as well as inner healing (they cast out many demons in the name of Jesus). That too is our task today, to pray for all kinds of healing, and to expect both personal inner healing as well as physical healing.

The inner healing happens especially when our emotions and attitudes are transformed. Dare I say that it happens most through forgiveness and acceptance? Most people are carrying life long burdens of anger and resentment, shock and shame, sadness and self pity, as well as guilt and fear. Only genuine forgiveness and heartfelt acceptance can lift that spiritual burden.

In the scriptures Jesus over and again teaches the importance of forgiveness. In Matthew 18:15 he shows us how to forgive by sharing our feelings of hurt with our abusers with love, rather than reacting in anger. This and this alone breaks the cycle of violence that is so rampant in our world, and brings about the inner healing that is so needed today.

Two programs being offered today that facilitate such healing are *Returning To Spirit* and *Healing Soul Pain*. Each in its own way seeks to bring about inner healing by helping people deal with their past hurts through forgiveness and acceptance.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is a meal of the apostles, begun by Jesus himself at the Last Supper, and continued in upper rooms and catacombs for centuries before developing into the liturgy that we celebrate today that leads to inner healing for all who participate with faith.

An important part of the Eucharist is the ending, the missioning, in which we are sent out to a wounded and unbelieving world, much as Jesus sent out the apostles in the gospel today.

May God bless us as we take up this apostolic task.

HOMILY SUNDAY 15 – B (Homily 01)

“Reach Out and Reach In”

(Amos 7:12-15; Eph 1:3-14; Mk 6:7-13)

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A young boy, after being baptised, was crying on his way home in the family car. His parents could not understand, as this should have been a happy occasion for them all. Finally they were able to get the reason he was crying from him when he blurted out, “The priest during the ceremony said that he wanted me to be brought up in a good Catholic Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys!”

Do you see yourself as both a disciple, and a missionary?

Live the two dynamics of being Church: Reach out, and Reach In.

The readings today invite us to first of all, be renewed within, to reach in, and then we can be sent out to evangelize, to reach out.

There are times when, inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul waxes poetic. Such is the case in the second reading today, when Paul is almost beside himself as he tries to put into words what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. God has destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ. God has freely bestowed on us his glorious grace in the Beloved. God has redeemed us through the blood of Jesus and has forgiven us all our trespasses. He has privileged us with insight into the mystery of his will, set forth in Christ. God has given us an inheritance of praise and hope in Christ. We have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Given all this spiritual richness so lavishly poured upon us, what is to be our response? I would suggest that it is two-fold: to reach inwards, and to reach out - to repent and be renewed interiorly, and then to go out and evangelize others.

It is St. Paul who highlights our need to “reach in” when he says in that same second reading that we have been chosen in Christ to be holy and blameless before him in love. Before we can go out to others, we must first be healed and renewed ourselves. We must first personally experience and receive that

forgiveness and healing of Christ through the power of the Spirit. Before we can preach repentance to others, we must first repent ourselves, reach deep within the darkest recesses of our own being, admit, name, confront and confess our sin. We must go even deeper and root out the source of that sin, our sinfulness (that which makes us sin), our defects of character, our shortcomings, and bring them into the light of the healing power of the Spirit of Jesus.

I once received a card in which a high school student had written “May the Lord shine his light into the darkest areas of your life.” I was amazed at her insight and her wisdom! That is exactly what must happen. This is true repentance, true sorrow, true conversion, true metanoia – letting Christ shine his forgiving and healing love into the darkest areas of our lives. And that happens best in the sacrament of reconciliation – something that we should do on a regular basis if we are to be true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Now the gospel mandate can kick in. After Jesus had spent time with his disciples, teaching them and forming them, he sent them out in pairs to continue his ministry. They do not do this on their own. They go with his authority and power – to preach repentance to others, and heal them. Having experienced the love of Christ, they could now go out to share that love with others.

Evangelization belongs to the very nature of the Church. To be a Catholic Christian is to be an evangelizer. Pope Paul VI expressed this so well in his groundbreaking encyclical, *Evangelization of the Modern World*, in 1975, and I quote:

*Let us therefore preserve our fervor of spirit. Let us preserve the delighting and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us - as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history - an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good news ... from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives to that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.*

One of the times that I felt most like an evangelizer was as chaplain of the Beauval Indian Residential High School. There was a student there who knew almost nothing of Jesus, other than that he had something to do with Christmas and gift giving. She took Christian Ethics, including a course on *Understanding the Bible*, and one called *Jesus and You*. She also got involved in the Search weekends, and became a believer in Jesus. She even gave a talk on a Deeper Search weekend in which she shared her experience of expressing her new found Christian faith through her own First Nations culture. What a life-giving moment that was for us as a team, and for me as a missionary among the First Nations people.

The Eucharist we celebrate today supports us in our gospel call to reach in, and then to reach out. We are first of all, personally and communally, washed clean in God's Word, strengthened within through this Sacrament, and then sent out to share the Good News with all other.

So remember, the whole Church is called to reach in, first of all, to be renewed, and then to reach out, to be missionary and share the Good News with others.

