

Repair the world: preach Gospel, cast out devil and heal the sick

Fifteenth Sunday, July 16th, 2006—Amos 7:12-15; Eph. 1:3-14; Mk. 6:7-13

By Father Jose Uppani

While commissioning the apostles in today's Gospel, Jesus gives them, and all of us, a preview of the mission of His Church after the resurrection. The Catechism teaches: "Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth" (CCC 900). Hence, today's gospel message is a practical agenda in our mission as a Christian.

"He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits" (Mk. 6:7). In this sentence St. Mark sums up the whole mission Christ has entrusted His Church. An earlier reference of St. Mark to this statement makes its meaning more clear: *"He went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted and they came to him. He appointed ... that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mk. 3:13-15).* They show without doubt that the mission of the Church, the mission of each one of us is to preach the Gospel. When the Church begins to preach the Gospel, the devil receives his orders to get lost, for he can't stand the truth. This is what the Scripture says about Jesus' preaching: *"When it was evening, they brought him many who were possessed by demons, and he drove out the spirits by a word and cured all the sick" (Mt. 8: 16).* The Apostles' did the same: *"Thus Philip went down to (the) city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them.. Unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice, came out of many possessed people, and many paralyzed and crippled people were cured" (Acts. 8:5-7).* Interestingly enough, in today's gospel, St. Mark sums up the whole substance of Apostolic preaching thus *"He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits" (Mk. 6:7).*

Yes, the first Apostles and all of us, the modern apostles, are being sent to fight a ceaseless battle against the unclean spirits. We are being sent to repair the world devastated by Satan through sin. We are being sent to retrieve all the territories that were handed over to Satan and place them under the reign of God, to restore the world thereby to its original glory. It is in fact the very essence of Christ's mission: *"The Son of God has come to destroy the works of the devil" (I Jn. 3 8).* In the Rite of Baptism the Celebrant prays thus: *'Almighty God you sent your only Son into the world to cast out the power Satan, the spirit of evil to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness and bring us into the splendor of your kingdom of Light...'* The Church being the body of Christ, its Mission is the completion of Christ's mission. Therefore, St. Paul wrote: *"We are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies—the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world" (Eph. 6: 12).* The Scripture tells us how badly the world is in need of it: *"the whole world is under the power of the evil one" ."* (I Jn. 5:19). Yes, the Church's mission is to defeat Satan and his works and save the world from his tyranny

This is the reason why Jesus gave his Twelve disciples some very strange instructions with regard to the "things" they were to carry on their preaching trip: *"Take nothing for the journey but a walking stick--no food, no sack, no money in their belts... not a second tunic.* Jesus' instructions to the Twelve echo those of God to the twelve tribes of Israel on the eve of

their exodus from Egypt. The Israelites likewise were sent out with nothing to eat, with only one set of clothes, a pair of sandals and a staff (see Exodus 12:11; Deuteronomy 8:2-4). The mission of the Church, is to lead a new exodus - delivering people from their arch-Enemy and bringing them to the promised land, the kingdom of heaven. For this heavenly battle like the Israelites, the apostles too were to rely solely on God's power.

Jesus' instruction not to take anything for the journey but a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in their belts, not a second tunic-- has another meaning. It is an indirect indication of the unique nature of the weapons for this particular battle. Since the Church's whole project is a battle against the world of evil, it is not human resources, but God's armor that we need to win the battle. St. Paul puts it very clearly: "*Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand safe against all strategies and tricks of Satan*" (Eph. 6: 11). And, it is also a very strong way of saying that the battle belongs to the Lord and hence the Lord himself will take care of every other needs of the soldiers in this battle.

By saying "take nothing for the journey but a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in their belts, not a second tunic" Jesus also meant that when we preach about the coming of God's Kingdom, our material life has to be simple. Giving focus on the comforts of this life really contradict the message of the 'coming of God's Kingdom. The preachers' life is the people's looking-glass at which they dress themselves. Forgoing material things for the sake of the Kingdom of God is a powerful way of waging war against Satan because the very first temptation through which Satan defeated the first man, Adam, was the temptation to possess the fruit of the tree of knowledge at the peril of disobeying God. Inordinate love of created things was the cause of all disaster. Hence, when the Redeemer of the world came, he entered into the world in a manger and lived in absolute poverty. Imitating him, the first soldiers of the battle, the early Christians, "*would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need*" (Acts. 2:44-45). Because of their detachment from the things of the world they could destroy the power of Satan whose strategy is to instigate people to put the creation first and the Creator next.

"*Whatever places does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them*" (v. 11). This is a warning of our Lord against all who do not accept and follow the Teachings of the Church in its fullness. Through this statement He also reveals that there will be great opposition and resistance to the Churches' Teaching. The parallel text in Mathew's gospel deals with this aspect very elaborately: "*Beware of people, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues...Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name... If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household*".(Mt. 10:17, 21, 24-25). It is natural to ask 'why so much opposition to the preaching? An exact answer is given in today's gospel: "They went out and preached **repentance**". Preaching about sin and repentance will offend. "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Accepting correction and giving up sin will cost us much. Yes, preaching the gospel without diluting its real challenge is always directed against our selfishness. It is a challenge to do justice—to give God His due and our neighbor his due. That will lead to our losing many unjust possessions. That is why honest and true preaching invites enmity. Hence the conscious avoidance of the opportunities to hear the Teachings of the Church,

and even disagreement and revolt from our part. This explains why St. Peter was crucified, Paul was beheaded, other Apostles were burned alive or eaten up alive by the wild animals. According to the Church statistician David Barrett, some forty million Christians have been martyred since the time of Christ, even though the Church knows the names of only 15,000.

Dear brothers and sisters, can we evade this obligation, saying that it is the duty of the priest and after all we are not professional preachers? Like Amos in today's First Reading, the apostles were not "professionals," who earn their bread by prophesying. Like Amos, they were simply men (see Acts 14:15) summoned from their ordinary jobs and sent by God to be shepherds of their brothers and sisters. This word of truth, this gospel of salvation, is addressed to each of us, personally, as Paul proclaims in today's Epistle. In the mystery of God's will, we have been chosen even before the foundation of the world - to be His sons and daughters, to live for the praise of His glory, to preach the gospel!

Let us, then, preach the gospel in proportion to the spiritual blessings God has bestowed upon us. How can we do it? First of all, by living our day today life according to the gospel values and the Teachings of the Church. We should see to it that the worldly values and styles do not influence us or our family, especially our children in any way. Secondly, by proclaiming the gospel and Teachings of the Church to others without any fear of what others may think. It is our basic duty to our spouse, to our children, to our family, to our friends, to all with whom we have some contact. To ignore preaching the gospel to the spouse and children is in fact a grave sin of omission. Any neglect on our part to teach the children about sin & virtuous life and to train them in strict Gospel values and Teachings of the Church is a serious failure in parenting. Closing our eyes to their anti-gospel style is a grave offence done against them because then you are acting against truth for the gospel is the only truth. Remember Jesus' words "I am the Truth"! It is to be remembered that constant training in gospel values will have great effect on your children in the long run, even though it is not welcomed enough now. On the contrary, letting them go in their own way, with the excuse of respecting their freedom will only make them slaves of their whims and caprices. Bear in mind that telling the Truth—Gospel—in love will change lives!