

## **FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

*Gospel: Mark 6:7-13*

He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

### **REFLECTION 1:**

### **OTHER CHRISTS**

In today's Gospel (Mark 6: 7-13) when Jesus sends the disciples out two by two, he orders them to take nothing for their journey – no bread, no bag and no money in their belts. This 'no bag' restriction reminds me of the instructions for a Ryanair flight – if you exceed the specified weight, one could be charged steeply for the extras! But perhaps Jesus is speaking of a heavier kind of baggage that we need to leave behind if we are going to follow him – and that heavy bag is fear. The fear of feeling unqualified, of not being able to perform, of not knowing what to say or do, fear of being rejected and the humiliation of failure. We must leave that heavy bag of fear and 'fly' free.

To the doorsteps of the people the disciples were to bring God's message, it was not their own opinions they were to air, but God's truth. Like the prophets of old, who championed the freedom of God, they always began with the words, 'Thus says the Lord...' so, whoever receives an effective message, must first receive it from God and Jesus' message was that people must repent. Clearly, that was a disturbing message, because repent, 'metanoia' means to change, to change one's mind and to fit one's actions to that change. One thinks of a minister of the environment urging us to reduce our carbon emissions so as to avert global warming. A change of heart, a change of action and that's bound to hurt because it involves the realisation that the way we were living was wrong. It involves a reversal of life and that is why it is so hard to repent as most of us hate to be disturbed.

But to the people, the disciples also brought the King's mercy, the balm of healing. They brought liberation to poor demon-possessed men and women, the elimination of evil. From the beginning Christianity has sought to bring health of body as well as of soul, not only a hand to lift from moral wreckage, but also a support to lift from physical pain and suffering.

Today's Gospel tells us that the disciples anointed with oil (olive oil). In the world of Jesus' day oil was regarded as a cure-all. The Good Samaritan poured wine and oil onto the wounds of the mugged victim on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The Greek Dr. Galen wrote of oil as 'the best of all for healing diseased bodies'. And now in the hands of the servants of God, the old cures acquire a new virtue – the power of God becoming available in ordinary things like oil and water to enhance the faith of humanity – the love of God coming to us through symbols.

By the call and power of God the disciples did what Jesus had been doing up to this – preaching repentance, casting out evil spirits and curing sick people. From this the disciples would have a foretaste of later spirit-filled days when the mission of Jesus was to become the mission of the Church. The Second Vatican Council has increased our awareness that the entire Church, and that's us, is now missionary and the work of evangelisation is not the special reserve of priests and religious. In this battlefield, the frontline troops are the People of God, the lay faithful.

