

Homily of Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

At the time of Isaiah's prophecy in the first reading, the Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity to a devastated homeland. They were desolate. Isaiah gave them this prophesy to strengthen their trust in God who had declared that he would not forsake them. Despite the situation of Jerusalem, Isaiah encouraged the people, "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, ... all you who were mourning over her!"

Through Isaiah, God presented an image of himself as a caring and comforting nursing mother: "Oh, that you may suck fully of the milk of her comfort, that you may nurse with delight at her abundant breasts! ... As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; in Jerusalem you will find your comfort."

The image above is explained in the following words in the first reading, "Lo, I will spread prosperity over Jerusalem like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent. ...When you see this, your heart shall rejoice and your bodies flourish like the grass; the Lord's power shall be known to his servants."

These words of God address persons who, for any reason, are feeling devastated and those who are mourning. God wants you to surrender and confidently entrust yourself to him as a child does in his or her mother's arms. God will comfort you and nurse you back to life. You will flourish again. The Lord's power shall be made known to you. There are people who become very disillusioned by their situation that they become deaf to God's loving invitation. Such people are like difficult and restless children who refuse to be nursed and suckled. They slip off from God's arms and run all over the place, leaving God to chase after them. God says in Psalm 46:11, "Be still and know that I am God."

In the first reading, God appointed Isaiah to prophesy to the Jews. In the second reading, God appointed Paul to preach to the Gentiles. And in the Gospel, Jesus appointed seventy-two disciples to go and preach the good news. In the same way, as Christians, we have been appointed as laborers in the Lord's field. Some are appointed to labor as priests and religious. Some are appointed to labor in various other capacities in the Church. The Church is essentially missionary. The Second Vatican Council states, "The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit" (*Ad Gentes*, 2).

Indeed, the harvest is abundant. This means that there is urgent need for more laborers. We pray for increase in priestly and religious vocation; that the master of the harvest sends out more of those who labor as priests and religious for his harvest. We pray that they are men and women who have the missionary spirit, zeal and disposition as specified by Jesus in today's Gospel: "Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way..." It was with this missionary spirit, zeal and disposition that the early missionaries and evangelizers took the Good News to every corner of the world. The present day missionaries and evangelizers need rekindle the missionary spirit, zeal and disposition of the early missionaries and evangelizers.

The missionary mandate of the Church has become possible due to generous men and women who pray constantly and those who make financial sacrifices towards the Church's missionary activities throughout the world. May God bless and reward such men and women of good will.

Every Christian, like Paul, bears the mark of Jesus on his or her body, and therefore need to boast in the Cross of Jesus Christ and witness him. Although the world is increasingly hostile to Christian beliefs and practices, we will continue to preach good news of God's kingdom and witness Christ whether welcomed or unwelcomed, and whether the message is accepted or not. We are covered by the divine assurance of Jesus, "Behold, I have given you the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you." Amen.

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