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14TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIMES —C

Mission of the 72

(Isaiah 66:10-14c; Psalms 66; Gal 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20)

A young boy was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. He replied he wanted to become a minister so he could stand up in Church and yell.

What is a missionary? Do you see yourself as one? Today's liturgy invites us to proclaim the kingdom of God as a missionary disciple and as a missionary Church.

Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* #120, says this: "In virtue of their baptism, all members of the People of God have become *missionary disciples*. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization. We must go out like the disciples, the Samaritan woman and St Paul after encountering Jesus.

To be baptized, to be a member of the Church, is to be missionary, to reach out, to spread the Good News. Yet in a world of secularity, pluralism, multi-culturalism, political correctness and tolerance, how does one evangelize and carry out this missionary task?

Some years back the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate held a series of symposiums in North America on this very topic – *Mission to the Developed World*. Fr. William Steckling, superior general of the Oblates, in his opening address at the symposium in Edmonton, called North America and Europe the most difficult missions in the world.

The gospel today provides us with some helpful criteria for mission. First of all, Jesus sends out his disciples on a mission to prepare the way for his coming. That is the first fact: disciples are sent to prepare the way for the Lord.

The fact that Jesus sends out 72 perhaps implies that Jesus sends out all his disciples – we are all meant to go out as missionaries. This is not an option but a basic understanding of being a disciple. We are all to be missionaries.

Secondly, we are sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Jesus came to initiate the reign of God here in this world, right here and now. St Paul described the Kingdom of God as the peace, joy and justice of the Holy Spirit. Peace and joy are not just passing emotions, but ways of being, gifts of the Spirit. They are our legacy as followers of

Jesus. The disciples' joy is flows from the promise of eternal life. That which Israel hoped for in the future is now being realized not by the proud scribes who studied the Word of God with arrogance, but by the humble who are prepared to receive it.

Justice is a right relationship with God, all others, ourselves and all of creation. There should be no one in the world that I have not forgiven. There should be no one in the world of whom I have not asked for forgiveness if need be. When we are reconciled and in a harmonious relationship with all of God's creation, then the Kingdom of God has begun here on earth. Jesus and his disciples are experiencing the active presence of God (Satan overcome, the excluded reconciled, the Good News proclaimed to the poor – all that was to happen at the end of time made present in Jesus' preaching and ministry) making present the salvation of God. Our task as missionaries is to live in the Kingdom of God, and to proclaim that Kingdom by our very lives.

Some years ago the Church celebrated the 50th anniversary of the founding of Fidei Donum priests. This movement stressed the key points of mission as it is understood in the Church today: everyone is a missionary by baptism; every priest is ordained for the world, not just one diocese; every parish is missionary, and mission is of the essence of the Church - these are but some of the teachings of this conference.

A bishop attending the charismatic conference in Toronto called *Lift Jesus Higher* noticed that most of the participants were there for the first time. When he asked one of the organizers how that came about, he was told that some years back the organizers realized their annual conference was made up of the same people year after year. They reflected on that fact and realized that was not good, so they asked each participant to bring along a new person the next year, and that transformed the gathering. They became more missionary, reaching out to the un-churched and the unbelievers. They were evangelizing.

What about us? Mission for us means starting right here, right now, at home, school, office or workplace. We are all to proclaim and help realize the Kingdom of God in our own environment. Three instructions are given regarding the conduct of the mission in each village: 1) Eat what is provided, 2) heal the sick, and 3) announce the Kingdom. These three facets of the mission encompass the creation of community (table fellowship), care of physical needs, and proclamation of the kingdom. The disciples, therefore, were charged to continue the three facets of Jesus' work in Galilee. The disciples declare the kingdom has come near to those who receive them because of Jesus' works and the disciples preaching. In their presence, the kingdom has come near. Let us make this a reality that we also will carry out.

The Eucharist ends in Latin with the words *Ite missa est* which means *Go the Mass is Ended*. We don't just leave the Church, we are sent out, mandated to go out and be missionaries - bread that is broken for the world.

So, let us be missionary disciples and proclaim the kingdom of God as a missionary Church.

Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI

CHEAP GRACE

There's a tension among Christians today between those who would extend God's mercy everywhere, seemingly without any conditions, and those who are more reticent and discriminating in dispensing it. The tension comes out most clearly in our debates concerning who may receive the sacraments: Who should be allowed to receive the Eucharist? Who should be allowed to marry inside a church? Who should be allowed a Christian burial? When should a priest withhold absolution in confession?

However, this tension is about a lot more than who should be allowed to receive certain sacraments. Ultimately, it's about how we understand God's grace and mercy. A clear example of this today is the growing opposition we see in some sectors to the person and approach of Pope Francis. To his critics, Francis is soft and compromising. To them, he is dispensing cheap grace, making God and His mercy as accessible as the nearest water tap. God's embrace to all. No conditions asked. No prior repentance called for. No demand that there first be a change in the person's life. Grace for all. No cost.

What's to be said about this? If we dispense God grace and mercy so indiscriminately doesn't this strip Christianity of much of its salt and leaven? May we simply embrace and bless everyone without any moral conditions? Isn't the Gospel meant to confront?

Well, the very phrase cheap grace is an oxymoron. There's no such a thing as cheap grace. All grace, by definition, is unmerited just as all grace, by definition, doesn't ask for certain preconditions to be met in order for it to be offered and received. The very essence of grace is that it is a gift, free, undeserved. And, though by its very nature grace often does evoke a response of love and a change of heart, it does not of itself demand them.

There's no more powerful example of this than Jesus' parable of the prodigal son and how it illustrates how grace meets waywardness. We know the story. The prodigal son abandons and rejects his father, takes his unearned inheritance, goes off to a foreign land (a place away from his father) and squanders the money in the pursuit of pleasure. When he has wasted everything, he decides to return to his father, not because he suddenly has a renewed love for him, but, selfish still, because he is hungry. And, we know what happens. When he is still a long way from his father's house, his father (no doubt longing for his return) runs out to meet him and, before his son even has an opportunity to apologize, embraces him unconditionally, takes him back



into his house and prepares a special celebration for him. Talk about cheap grace!

Notice to whom this parable was spoken. It was addressed to a group of sincere religious persons who were upset precisely because they felt that by embracing and eating with sinners (without first demanding some moral preconditions) Jesus was cheapening grace, making God's love and mercy too accessible, hence less precious. Notice as well the reaction of many of Jesus' contemporaries when they saw him dining with sinners. For example, when he dined with Zacchaeus, the tax collector, the Gospels tell us, "All who saw it began to grumble." Interesting how that discontent persists.

Why? Why this anxiety? What undergirds our "grumbling"? Concern for true religion? Not really. The deeper root of this anxiety is not religious but grounded rather in our nature and in our wounds. Our resistance to naked gift, to raw gratuity, to unconditional love, undeserved grace, stems rather from something inside our instinctual DNA that is hardened by our wounds. A combination of nature and wound imprints in us the belief that any gift, not least love and forgiveness, needs to be merited. In this life, no free meal! In religion, no free grace! A conspiracy between our nature and our wounds keeps forever reminding us that we are unlovable and that love must be merited; it cannot be free because we are unworthy .

Overcoming that inner voice that is perpetually reminding us that we are unlovable is, I believe, the ultimate struggle (psychological and spiritual) in our lives. Moreover, don't be fooled by protests to the contrary. People who glibly radiate how lovable they are and make protests to that effect are mostly trying to keep that fear at bay.

Saint Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans as his dying message. He devotes its first seven chapters to simply affirming over and over again that we cannot get our lives right. We are morally incapable. However, his repeated emphasis that we cannot get our lives right is really a set-up for what he really wants to leave with us, namely, we don't have to get our lives right. We are loved in spite of our sin, and we are given everything freely, gratuitously, irrespective of any merit on our part.

Our uneasiness with unmerited grace is rooted more in a human insecurity than in any genuine religious concern.

By Ron Rolheiser



SINLENCE AND SEEDBEDS

“The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few”. As a seminarian, one question I hear quite often surrounds the apparent lack of vocations and the shortage of priests in the church. “Where are all the vocations? Isn’t God calling people to serve him anymore?”, many ask.

At times, it can definitely feel like God has stopped calling people to the priesthood and religious life. After all, if he was still calling them, surely there would be more vocations, right? Where are the 70 that Jesus sent ahead of him in the gospel today?

As is often the case, the problem lies not with God, but with ourselves. God is still calling people to serve him; we are the ones not listening. For many people today, God is simply not on their radar. With so many other things to occupy their time, it’s no wonder people aren’t hearing God anymore.



Without getting too much into it, think of how rare it actually is to find yourself in a moment of silence. Music, the radio, social media, our phones – all these things, while not bad in and of themselves, can distract us from the things that truly matter: relationships with others. And what relationship matters more than the one we have with our Creator? When was the last time you found yourself in a moment of silence without trying to fill it? Or what

about the last time you went on a silent retreat?

In our high production, instant gratification, super-consumer society, these things tend to fall to the wayside. I recall the passage in 1 Kings where God has Elijah go to Mt. Horeb to await his arrival. As Elijah is waiting, he experiences a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire, yet God was in none of these. Instead, Elijah encounters God in “a sound of sheer silence” (v. 12). This is particularly telling: silence is the seedbed of vocations.

As we begin this new week, let us spend some time in silence, actively trying to reorient ourselves to our Creator. Let us “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” and in the silence of our hearts, let us pray for the courage to follow where he leads us.

Let us rediscover the value of sacred silence: in the car, in the liturgy, in every moment, let us listen for God in the sound of sheer silence.

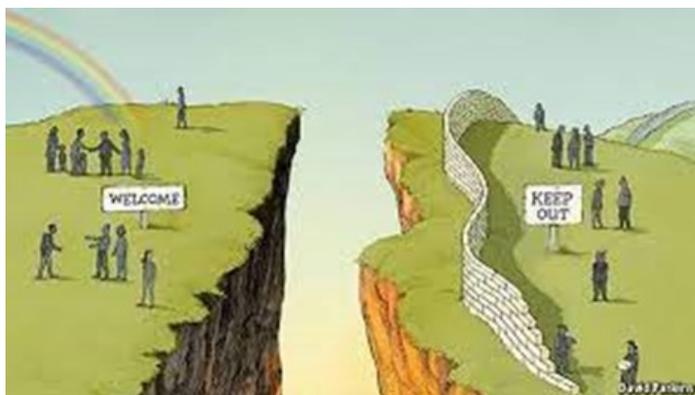
By Jake Mullin, Seminarian for the Archdiocese of Edmonton

NOT LOCKING OUR DOORS

As human persons we are constitutively social.

That means we're built in such a way that while we're always individual, private, and idiosyncratic at the same time we're always social, communitarian, and interdependent. We're built to be with others and there's no ultimate meaning or fulfillment to be found alone.

This needs to be highlighted today because both in society and in our churches too many of us are locking a select number of our doors in ways that are both destructive and genuinely unchristian. We are struggling today in our families, communities, countries, and churches with a demon of a different sort, that is, with doors locked in bitterness.



Politically, in many of our countries we're now so polarized that the various sides are unable to even have a respectful, civil conversation with each other. This is true too inside our families where conversation at the Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner must carefully avoid all references to what's going on in the country and we can only be at the same table with each other if we keep our political views locked away.

Sadly, this is now mirrored in our churches where different visions of theology, ecclesiology, and morality have led to a polarization of such intensity that each theological and ecclesial group now stays behind its own solidly locked door. There's no openness to what's other and all real dialogue has been replaced by mutual demonization.

It's interesting how evil works. The Gospels give us two separate words for the evil one. Sometimes the evil one is called "the devil" (Diabolos) and sometimes the evil one is called "satan" (Satanas).

Both describe the evil power that works against God, goodness, and love within a community. The "Devil" works by dividing us, one from another, breaking down community through jealousy, pride, and false freedom; whereas "Satan" works in the reverse way. Satan unites us in sick ways so as to have us, as groups, demonize each other, carry out crucifixions, and cling to each other feverishly through sick kinds of hysteria and ideologies that make for scapegoating, racism, sexism, and group-hatred of every kind.

Either way, whether it's Satan or the devil, we end up behind locked doors.

By Ron Rolheiser OMI

READINGS FOR THE 14TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIMES

FIRST READING

A reading from the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 66.10-14)

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,
all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her —that you may nurse and be satisfied
from her consoling breast;
that you may drink deeply with delight
from her glorious bosom.

For thus says the Lord:

“I will extend prosperity to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;
and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees.
As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice;
your bodies shall flourish like the grass;
and it shall be known
that the hand of the Lord is with his servants.”

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Psalm 66)

Response: Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise. Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!” **R.**

“All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.” Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among the children of Adam. **R.**

He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him, who rules by his might forever. **R.**

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me. **R. .**

SECOND READING

A reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians (Galatians 6.14-18)

Brothers and sisters: May I never boast of anything except the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!

As for those who will follow this rule — peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Thanks be to God

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Alleluia.

Let the peace of Christ control your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Alleluia.

GOSPEL READING

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke (Luke 10.1-9)

The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.

"Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if someone of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves his wage. Do not move about from house to house.

"Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

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