

11th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 9:36-10:8

Here St. Matthew presents the mission of Christ and His apostles; in fact, the mission of all of us who profess to follow the Lord. In the past weeks we have heard of Our Lord's power and today we hear what that power truly means. Israel, the lost sheep, "harassed and dejected", need a shepherd and that shepherd is Our Lord, who "seeing the crowds... felt sympathy". But "sympathy" does not do justice to the word used in the Greek in which the Gospel was written. Really, it is better to say that Our Lord, seeing the crowds—that is the men and women throughout all time longing to be restored to God—felt as though his guts were turning inside out. That is the depth of His compassion, of His pity; He felt it within in his very stomach, and it was that desire, that passion that He shared with the twelve Apostles, "the labourers of the harvest," who were to continue the mission of Christ, sent with His power "to heal every disease and infirmity."

It is Israel which is the field of mission of Our Lord and the twelve Apostles. But we, too, are Israel, the chosen people of God, who, "harassed and torn," are "scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd"; "scattered," as though in exile, because, as the prophet Ezekiel said, "scattered because there was no shepherd" (Ez. 34:5), are sent Jesus the Good Shepherd to prepare us for the harvest, the end of time, and in turn, are sent the twelve Apostles, who today are succeeded by the bishops, to carry on and extend Our Lord's mission, so that, as it says in the book of Numbers, "the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep without a shepherd" (Num. 27:17).

The twelve Apostles called by Our Lord us are the new twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve tribes of Israel are what constituted the nation of Israel, and, at one time, each man and woman would claim their ancestry from Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob and the founders of the tribes; either Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Gad, Asher, Dan, or Naphtali. But by the time of Our Lord, the tribes had lost much of their meaning and the people had lost much of their sense of identity. The restoration of the twelve tribes in the twelve Apostles signified the restoration of Israel and the reclamation of what it meant to be the chosen ones of God, and what God calls in Exodus “my treasured possession... my priestly kingdom... my holy nation” (Ex. 19:5).

With the images of the sheep without a shepherd and the twelve Apostles, the Gospel prepares us for Our Lord’s instructions regarding the mission to Israel. For Him, Israel is “harassed and dejected”, a claim we might make of ourselves. The unity of the Church prayed for by Our Lord is fractured into 33,000 denominations. But the mission begun in Christ and to which He assigned the twelve Apostles to lead continues unbroken today in the bishops and the Pope and it is by this unbroken line of succession that the Church is commissioned to forge on today. That is, by Our Lord the preacher and healer, the Good Shepherd, the twelve Apostles carried on His mission, and we, by virtue of our Baptism and the grace of the Eucharist and the Sacraments, share in Our Lord’s mission to restore Israel, the chosen people of God.

And that restoration entrusted to us—in union with the Pope and the Bishops—means that we must go out to those hurt by the sins of the world to lend our minds and our hearts to them so that by our patience and our love, they may see again the unrelenting love that God has for all His people. And we must show to others, to our families, and to ourselves the love of Our Lord that does not ever forsake us or leave us alone.

Pray today that our minds and hearts will be restored to God so that we, the workers of the harvest, may at the end of time present ourselves whole to the Lord and so that He may say to us, “well done, good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:23).

