

# 15<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## St. Mark 6:7-13

The verb “to send” comes from the Greek word *αποστολος* (apostolos) which is why the Twelve sent by Our Lord are called “Apostles.” They were given a share in the authority of Our Lord to continue His mission.

By virtue of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation all those baptised and confirmed share in the mission of Christ. That share in the mission, however, is not the same share as a Deacon or a Priest or a Bishop, but a particular means of participation. It is not copying or taking over from the mission of the Priest or even standing in the place of the Priest but recognising the unique role of the laity in the Church. This is what is called “hierarchy”, which properly understood means the sacred ordering of things.

At the Second Vatican Council the Council Fathers spoke regularly on the role of the laity in the mission of the Church. The most specific document is called the “Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.” The Council Fathers wrote that as peoples around the world have become more autonomous they have distanced themselves from the Church and from the true foundations of humanity. It is the role of the laity, then, to reach out to those whom they meet daily in their families, in their friends, in their schools and in their workplaces and to draw them back to the true source of life and the true orientation of every man and woman. Whereas those who are ordained Deacons and Priests and Bishops minister the grace of God to the faithful and stand at the altar for the sacrifice which is the source and the summit of all devotion, the laity, imbued with such great grace, take what they have received from the source out to the world and then draw others back to the summit.

The reality is, however, that whether one is ordained or is laity, there can be great fear in practising our faith publicly. We all have fear of rejection or of

being ridiculed or misunderstood. It is understandable that we have this fear because at the very heart of the human person is a desire to be accepted. Our Lord knew of this fear and He tried to prepare the Apostles for the rejection that they would face when He says to them: "If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust from under your feet as a sign to them" (*Mk. 6:10-11*). The prophets of the Old Testament, as is seen in the prophet Amos in the first reading, suffered rejection but this made them no less prophets.

Truth is not a matter of popular opinion or of democracy. We do not believe that something is true simply because it is widely accepted or because we have taken a vote and decided that such-and-such a thing is true. Truth lies in God because God is truth and that truth has been revealed to us in Christ and is made known to all men and women by the grace of the Holy Spirit. To profess the truth, especially when we know that we will be rejected, demands courage. It is why Our Lord said to the Apostles to take nothing with them except a staff or walking stick to help them to stand upright and to continue to forge ahead when they were weakened. And you will feel weak when you have to make a stand for the faith: when you are at a restaurant and you feel embarrassed to pray grace before meals, when you are at school or work and others are gossiping or bad-mouthing someone or telling vulgar jokes and you feel self-conscious if you do not join in, when others smoke or drink or take drugs or are involved in behaviour which undermines the dignity of the human person and you risk a lack of acceptance unless you join in or at least agree with what others do.

So, as is so often the case, we do have a choice to make. We have a choice to fear the world or to fear God. To fear the world will cripple us and lead us further into a mire of self-destruction. To fear God will orient us to the fullness of our humanity. As the psalm said: "His help is near for those who fear Him

and His glory will dwell in our land" (*Ps.* 84).

Vatican II closed its decree on the Laity with these words: "The most holy council, then, earnestly entreats all the laity in the Lord to answer gladly, nobly, and promptly the more urgent invitation of Christ in this hour and the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Through this holy synod, the Lord renews His invitation to all the laity to come closer to Him every day, recognising that what is His is also their own, to associate themselves with Him in His saving mission... Ever productive as they should be in the work of the Lord, they know that their labour in Him is not in vain" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 33).