

4th Sunday after Pentecost Year C
July 7, 2019

A young adult Peace Corps volunteer told about being warmly welcomed into a village home and presented with the delicacy of mouse on a stick. She graciously nibbled, smiling all the while, beautifully illustrating the directive in this weekend's Gospel, "...eat what is set before you...." (Luke 10:8) 'Sounds like basic parental advice, doesn't it 😊? Be polite! Be grateful! Don't make work for the host! **Accept hospitality.** The point here is also prep for the disciples' mission to the Gentiles. There would be no kosher supermarkets where the early Jewish Christians would go to spread the Gospel. Along with Peter they would learn, "*What God has made clean, you must not call profane.*" (Acts 10:15b)

"Go on your way," says the Lord (Luke 8:3a). **Be ready to go way beyond your comfort zone**, and not just when it comes to cuisine. Here's the perennial reminder that evangelism isn't simply welcoming the people who find their way into our sanctuaries. It is about leaving the sanctuary and going into the highways and byways to meet, befriend, listen, serve, and perhaps only then invite to worship. Travel light to travel fast! (Luke 8:4) The mission is urgent! Lives are at stake, lives hanging in the balance between despair and hope, futility and a future. "[G]reet no one on the road" (Lk. 8:4b) is an expression of urgency, because of the involved nature of a 1st century "hello" in that corner of the world. We shouldn't mistake the advice as a command to skip the small talk, though. Proclamation needs to be personal. Ministry requires relationship. Every conversation needs to be 2 way.

"Go on your way" but don't go alone. Jesus sends the 70 out two by two, like animals on the ark. Why? Bible commentators say that 2 witnesses were necessary for testimony's acceptance in a court of law. They also remind us that travel was dicey and dangerous in those days, so going it alone was an invitation to be waylaid. I've got to believe that having a companion provided a good antidote to discouragement, too. After all, our epistle from Galatians (6:2) instructs us, "*Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*" Also, Ecclesiastes 4 says:

⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help... ¹²And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

The third part of the cord is God. Dual disciples become prayer partners on the road! The Lord Jesus says to **us** in the 21st century and not just to the **70** in the 1st century:

*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore **ask the Lord of the harvest** to send out laborers into his harvest. (Luke 8:2)*

Not many people who are involved in ministry, either rostered or lay, paid or volunteer, are going to disagree that the laborers are few.... We receive divine encouragement to be prayerful instead of despairing about the Kingdom work to be done and the number of workers available to do it. We are reminded **whose** harvest it is: God's, not ours.

There's a beautiful connection between our lectionary passages from Luke 8 and Galatians 6:

⁷...you reap whatever you sow... ⁹So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

Perhaps this would be a good week to request a little "audience participation" from the pulpit! Who comes to people's minds as inspiring, memorable examples of those who do not or have not given up?? The homily can become holy affirmation for those who labor lovingly in the vineyard in all seasons, and probably under less-than-optimal conditions. If the people mentioned are still present in the community, the reflections of their fellow parishioners becomes a verbal bouquet and a heartening message that their efforts are noticed and cherished. If the faithful ones are already part of the Church Triumphant, the stories let worshipers know that there is a long institutional memory and enduring gratitude to those who have served the Lord in your corner of the vineyard. (If inviting congregational conversation is outside your comfort zone: either remember the young woman who screwed up her courage to eat mouse-on-a-stick, gird up your loins, pray for courage, and forge ahead anyway, or compile a list of examples to include in your sermon.)

Allow me to share a possible sermon prep prayer: "Lord, what do you want Your people to hear?"

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