

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Cycle A, June 13, 1999

By Father Charles Bowes

Exodus 19:2-6a  
Romans 5:6-11  
Matthew 9:36-10:8

## *We are the laborers sent to harvest what is so ripe.*

“Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give,” says Jesus in Matthew 10, commissioning his followers and encouraging them, “the harvest is abundant...”

What makes us hold back? What keeps us reluctant from proclaiming the Good News of Jesus as Lord? ...What makes us wait? We spend our lives waiting for the harvest – that moment when we will taste the fruit of our labor. The wait, however, seems endless.

Once we got to high school, we may have thought harvest time was close by, the time to be all we had wanted to be, to do all we had planned. Then, high school gone, we awaited the day of graduation from trade school or college...we waited for marriage or for religious profession. We jumped through hoops, passed exams, made promises, applied for jobs. Surely the time had come for bearing fruit and savoring it.

Finished with our schooling, unless we sought more preparation as pre-professionals or pre-professors, we thought that with marriage or some other commitment, we would finally be what we had been becoming – that harvest was near.

Marriageables married, pre-professionals professed, would-be religious become such. Yet “someday” still described the harvest.

Someday. Once I have kids. Once I make vows. Once I get hired. Once I have a final assignment. Then. Then I will do it. Then I will live. Then I will reap the harvest.

For those who marry, there may be further postponement. The harvest will come when children are born, when they are all in school, when they finally get out of school, when they are married or have jobs. Then the time for savoring will arrive.

If we are single or in community life, we begin to suspect that only with retirement will we reap the harvest.

Retirement comes. And what do we do? We do what we have learned and practiced. We wait. We postpone once again. What we have learned is how not to harvest; how not to proclaim God’s love; how not to savor the present moment.

Jesus, seeing us tired and exhausted, according to St. Matthew’s Gospel, was moved with pity. “The harvest is good, but laborers are scarce. Beg the harvester to send laborers to gather the harvest.”

It's all ready to be reaped, this life, this labor, the upshot of our plans and planting, this faith. It's all here. But we continue to work at postponement, not the reaping.

The task of healing wounds can begin right now. The walking dead – those who think there is no point, no promise, no possibility – they can be summoned from their tombs. Others, hidden like lepers of old, outcast and undesired not only in distant countries, but in our towns, our parishes, our homes, our neighborhoods, await our welcome.

The spells cast on our children, obsessed with trinkets and possessed by illusions are ready to be broken. Sly demons even today fear rebuke, dispersion, and disarmament.

How is it done? This harvesting? Not by postponement, but active loving, here and now. Each person before us is somehow our special care. Each moment is opportune. The love we harvest is not a non-renewable natural resource. It grows and flowers in our giving of it. It is like the gift of Jesus recalled in the letter to the Romans: unmerited yet freely offered in a life laid down for one's friends.

We yield love anytime; anyplace we labor at it. Life itself is but a field ripe with opportunity. The task we have as love's disciples is to harvest it as we proclaim that love of God to all we meet.

This holy food and fellowship we share gives us strength to harvest now.

In the motion picture, *The Dead Poet's Society*, Robin Williams portrays an English teacher in an upscale boarding school. He attempts to bring some life and vitality to the enterprise when one day he gathers a group of his charges about a trophy case displaying moments of past athletic grandeur belonging to former

students. "There is a Latin phrase," Williams says, "Carpe diem"...roughly translated it means, 'seize the day'.

That's what these students did years ago – they acted – they did what the spirit moved them to do – they didn't sit around and wait." As time went on a group of the students took Williams' words to heart and began to change the school and ultimately the community.

*Carpe diem*, seize the day, became their motto.

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