

Homily for July 13, 2003
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Father Charles Bowes

Amos 7:12-15
Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:7-13

Ordinary people do extraordinary things.

Today's readings reveal once again that God chooses ordinary people and confers on them extraordinary responsibility. Amos was a simple shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees, yet he was sent to challenge the official priest at the shrine of Bethel. Many of the apostles were common fishermen, yet they were sent first to various villages in Galilee and then to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Paul was an ordinary tent maker, yet he stood before kings and magistrates.

Our chapter 6 of Saint Mark's gospel probably originates in the practices of the early Christian community when folks went forth as missionaries. Basic instructions were given to provide for the needs of the missionaries and for the communities to protect themselves from charlatans. Hence, the instructions were pretty basic: travel in pairs, take a minimum of equipment, stay in one lodging in any one place, heal the sick, deliver the message, and shake off the dust of your feet if rejected.

These rules simply reflect the times in which those people lived. Traveling in pairs was done for

safety. The rule about staying in one place was to guard against the temptation to look for more attractive quarters. As pious Jews would shake off the pagan dust upon returning to their homeland, so the missionaries would shake off the dust of those who rejected their message. Begging bag, staff and sandals were standard equipment for the wandering philosophers called cynics. Staff and sandals were obviously used for protection. Thus the lack of staff, begging bag, money and food served to distinguish these Christian missionaries from those itinerant philosophers called cynics.

In specifying to the missionaries how to go about without protection, without reserves of money and food, the reason is that poverty, dependence on hospitality and urgency are the marks of the earliest Christian enterprise. Missionaries were to be vulnerable, dependant totally upon God.

Christians today are mechanics and clerks, teachers and engineers, doctors and housekeepers. Few of us Christians are asked to leave our ordinary trades or professions, for it is precisely within the workday world that we fulfill our calling. We touch minds and hearts and souls with the tenderness of God, and we heal them – we really do – you and I – whether it's family or neighbors or people at work or strangers we

meet. We instruct and comfort people in need, and we help to drive out the demons that still have a strangle hold on them. In very ordinary ways, we ordinary, simple, faithful people participate in the extraordinary establishment in the reign of God.

You and I, we are the missionaries to the world we touch. Perhaps our unease with thinking of ourselves that way stems from a mistaken idea that we cannot do what is required or that we cannot leave the lives we now live. But we can do it because we have been “blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens,” says Saint Paul in Ephesians chapter 1. And most of us do not have to leave the lives we live. We need only live them as best we can. We need only discover ways in our lives to proclaim the Good News of salvation, to help people release themselves from their addictions and to touch them with the healing power of God’s tenderness. Who? Me? - Who else?

Remember Francis, the son of a wealthy merchant who became known as the poor man of Assisi – he serves as an example of the Christian who responded to God’s call: “Repair my Church.” Asking another friar to accompany him to preach to the townspeople, the two walked together through the streets and returned home without ever uttering a word. Questioned by the friar as to when they would begin to preach, Francis replied, “We just did.”

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