

Homily for July 16, 2006
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B cycle)

By Father Charles Bowes

Amos 7:12–15
Psalm 85:9–14
Ephesians 1:3–14
Mark 6:7–13

Like the first disciples, we share our faith in ways beyond our understanding.

The other day I received a call to visit a parishioner who was in the hospital. And so, before making the trip, I phoned just to make sure the person was still there...since these days hospitals are famous for keeping folks but a short time.

With assurance that my parishioner was still there, I made the journey to the hospital, stopping by the front desk again to confirm the room number...only to discover upon reaching the floor that the person had been discharged earlier that day and that the information had not yet been relayed to the receptionist's desk. All that way, all that energy and time and expense, and seemingly nothing to show for it.

Now there was a time when I would have seen my journey as a fruitless waste of time and grumbled and been upset. Now maybe it's age, maybe it's wisdom, but when faced with such a failed meeting of the person I intended to visit, I was able to recall the folks I did meet along the way – the hospital phone operator, the receptionist, the nurses and doctors on the floor, the folks I said “hi” to casually as I journeyed through the hospital and parking lot, the parking lot attendant with whom I exchanged pleasantries. “What parish are you from?” he asked. “Have a Blessed day,” he said as we

parted. And then there was the day itself – a chance to be outside, to be part of a larger world.

The experience made me recall a story that is told of a young friar asking St. Francis of Assisi if he could preach with him. Francis said, “Yes, follow me to town.” The two walked to town, through town and out again on the road home. “Brother Francis, when are we going to preach?” the young friar asked. “We have,” Francis responded. The axiom is: “Preach always. Use words when necessary.”

In Mark chapter 6, Jesus invites his disciples to share in his mission of preaching and healing. Just as God sent the prophet Amos to preach repentance to ancient Israel, so Jesus sends his followers forth to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom and to bring healing to those who need it most. While the instructions in Mark 6 have as their original historical setting the rural conditions of first-century Palestine, the privilege of sharing in Jesus' mission is offered to all Christians in every circumstance and is the greatest blessing of all.

We know from the Gospel accounts, as we know from our own lives, that taking the message to the world is never easy. I know I find myself quite self-conscious in public wearing clerical garb, easily identified as to who I am and what I do. It's a burden and a blessing. When we speak or act in an openly

religious way, any of us risk rejection. We risk ridicule.
We risk misunderstanding.

We have all experienced the “lambs in the midst of wolves” syndrome. Maybe we’ve even heard the humorous sentiment that the reason Jesus said to take no purse, no walking staff, and no bag or sandals was to emphasize that when the disciples met with great opposition, they could run faster to get out of harm’s way. (The more probable interpretation is that this was to be a sign of poverty as a witness to living the Gospel.)

The God who called us to be holy before the foundation of the world calls us today. God invites us to the altar to feed us with God’s own life. Strengthened by God’s Spirit, God sends us forth to preach, to touch the world in a healing and wholesome fashion in ways larger than we plan or understand.

Let us pray: I do not know why you chose me, Holy One, and hardly why I respond. But may your love and wisdom be with me and with all those who hear me this week. May we, together, grow in confidence, in generosity, and in compassion through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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