

14th Sunday of the Year (C)

July 8, 2007

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 66:10-14

Psalms 66:1-7, 16, 20

Galatians 6:14-18

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

## *The discovery of God's peace tells us when to stay and when to leave.*

"Whenever you enter a town and they don't receive you, leave."

That's a paraphrase of what Jesus says to his traveling disciples today in Luke chapter 10.

Many years ago as a young priest, I found myself overwhelmed by a multitude of responsibilities and feeling quite depressed while working in a small diocese in the Southern United States, and so I left my work and returned to Cincinnati and have been here ever since. This gospel put me in mind of that "leaving" I did so long ago, leaving one work and taking up another. It wasn't that the folks there weren't kind and good, for they surely were, but that the work didn't suit me and there was no avenue to change that. The more I think about it, the more I see in me that there is a temptation to leave or run, maybe even a tendency to run. This run is not in the competitions of Smarty Jones, Dale Earnhart, Jr., or the senior track team star. No, we humans bear the inherent temptation to leave, to run; the tendency to run from the difficult situations in life; the proclivity to run from tedious routines, the propensity to run from locales where we are not well-received or that do not suit us.

No wonder Jesus sent the seventy-two disciples out two-by-two to every town and place he intended to visit. This sending was not simply a canary in the coal mine strategy. No, paired with the power of his message

those disciples were given strict instruction: if a peaceful person lives there, the disciples' own peace, really the peace of Christ, will rest on that person. If not, move on.

We know from the Gospel accounts, as we know from our own lives, that taking the message to the world is never easy. We 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.)

When do we know when to stay or move on? I know it took me a lot of soul searching to decide to remain here permanently and not return where I once was. It became no longer a matter of leaving something, but of embracing something new, of being called to something more. We begin to know when to move on when the future becomes a call we cannot ignore. No, running is not the answer. In a world that emphasizes temporary comfort and happiness, a world that suggests that commitment lasts as long as it feels good, the Gospel message challenges us to do more, and

be more.

And, yet, Jesus also teaches that there IS a time to move on, which is different than simply running away, or throwing in the towel. There are situations in life when, not only may we move on, but also we must. I've long admired an expression attributed to Martin Luther. He wrote: "God is that in whom our hearts find rest. If the resting is wrong, the God is wrong. But if the resting is right, the God is right." Perhaps Jesus was giving that sort of advice to his disciples in that the discovery of peaceful people, the experience of a restful heart, was the criterion for staying or leaving a given town.

Fr. Mychal Judge, the New York Fire Department chaplain killed in the attack on the World Trade Center, prayed this prayer that we can easily make our own today. Let us pray in his words: "Lord, take me where you want me to go, let me meet whom you want me to meet, tell me what you want me to say, and keep me out of your way."

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