

## **Fourteenth Sunday of the Year (C) – July 7, 2019**

One of the things I think our airlines will eventually change again is the amount and size of baggage items we will be allowed to bring onto a flight. I know it is already limited but, looking at what people are bringing onto planes, I think those rules of limitation are generally being overlooked. It's very rare that I carry my bag onto the plane itself - I nearly always check it despite the cost. It relieves hassle! You see people doing everything they can to fit their bag into the overhead locker, they push and shove, move other people's bags in the process, get into shouting matches with fellow passengers, they sweat, pout, get angry and frustrated, and hold other passengers up in the process! Baggage seems to be a stumbling block in forming human relationships! Jesus in today's Gospel is telling the seventy-two disciples to take nothing with them, to travel empty handed, to carry no baggage, wear no sandals, go empty handed, give and you will receive. And nobody argues with Jesus. No one says that they will need a change of clothes, something on their feet to protect them, a staff to lovingly keep stray animals at bay. He just sends them as they are. Perhaps they will only be gone a few hours, in the daylight, so they don't really need too much. Who knows! Jesus does not want anything to distract them from the mission in hand, just go and proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, and keep it simple. And none of them come back complaining of sore feet or a smelly companion, they simply rejoice in what God has done through them, and Jesus affirms them by assuring them that their names, their precious names, are written in heaven. What more do we need to know, we have done the Lord's work and are names are written in heaven. What more could we ask for!

We may say that human life is much more complicated than it was over two thousand years ago in Palestine. Maybe more complicated because we have become more complicated. Human issues and behavior seem to be very similar: tension, hatred, polarization, evidenced in last Sunday's Gospel between Jews and Samaritans; the injustice of an occupying power (the Romans); prejudice and discrimination against certain groups of people considered by some to be beyond redemption. Yes, human issues and behavior similar to our own time but now seen, experienced and witnessed on a much larger scale. Still the same world so loved by God, and still the same mission but now entrusted into our hands. Jesus does not want the seventy-two to be distracted by anything, he just wants them to keep their hearts and eyes focused on the job, the mission, in hand. That will keep them occupied enough. However, I would hazard a guess and declare that today's world is more distracted than it was two thousand years ago in Palestine!

We can't even concentrate on each other, our focus, even when we are out with family and friends, is so often the phone, the little computer, we carry in our hands. Even as we converse it demands our attention, and I am as guilty as the next person.

The next time you are out having a drink, or in a restaurant, just look around to see how many people are engaged more with their phone than those at table. I was in a restaurant with friends a week or so ago, and the young couple next to us never said a word to each other because they had obviously taken their phones out to dinner and not each other, perhaps they were talking to each other through text, who knows! Yes, we can engage with each other across the world thanks to today's technology, we can evangelize in new ways thanks to today's technology, but nothing can ever replace, particularly when it comes to Christian evangelization, human interaction. Jesus sends the disciples out in twos, not on their own. Our faith is about relationship, this is what Jesus is making clear by sending the disciples out together, in relationship with each other. Our faith is about companionship, encounter, dialogue, witness. If you remember last Sunday's Gospel it spoke about Jesus inviting people to follow him but each of them had a reason why they could not, one had to bury a dead relative, another had to say goodbye to family members. We have all probably heard someone say that you can be a Christian without the Church. Well actually you can't, because to be an authentic Christian, an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ, means connection to a community, means being in relationship with others who also declare Christ to be their Lord and Savior! We don't go it alone, we evangelize together, and draw strength from each other, as we do from Christ when we gather together around His Table.

Today's first reading from Isaiah refers to the city of Jerusalem as a 'Mother', the place where you come to be nourished, refreshed and renewed. We refer to the Church as 'Mother Church', the place where we know we are loved, welcomed, forgiven, challenged and sent. Whenever I go to Mass, as I did last Sunday when I was away, I always try to put myself in the shoes of someone who has never been in a Catholic Church before. And I ask myself what do I see and experience? The Church I went to last week, which will remain nameless, did not welcome me. Most people were looking for a pew that kept them at a distant from others, rather than displaying that they were in communion with each other. At the sign of peace a warning must have been given that I did not hear, because everyone was obviously carrying some kind of disease as no one reached out their hand to anyone else, or made eye contact or bowed with a loving reverence, yet we all claim to honor the sanctity of human life! It was not witnessed to me.

And I must have missed the cry 'Fire, Get Out Quick' while receiving Christ in Holy Communion, because by the time I walked back to my pew, there was no one else around me. Was it my after shave or the weekly meeting of the Judas Club taking place in another building? I saw people struggling before Mass began to get into a pew because one person had to occupy the end of it, and became a blockage to anyone else who wanted to sit in it. Even though the priest celebrated the Mass with reverence and preached well, I would have looked for another Church that would truly be a 'Mother' to me.

No matter where we are we are always on mission, we must always be the disciples Christ expects us to be. Whatever house you go into, including God's house, greet people, don't miss a chance to offer them peace, God's peace. Peace is the very gift most people need, if you don't have peace your life is obviously in some kind of turmoil. We all need peace, God's peace. And be instruments of healing, there is so much polarization and heated debate, we need disciples who heal and listen, and who don't jump to judgments and conclusions. And when Jesus says shake the dust off your feet from those who reject you, he is asking us not to carry the rejection with us, but just to let it go, otherwise the rejection will fester in our hearts, build resentment, and then we can't heal or bring peace. Yes, we are on mission in Church and outside Church, because we must always be true to who we say we are, and if we are we can be certain that our names too are written in heaven! Amen!