

15th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

Amos 7:12-15; Eph 1:3-14; Mk. 6:7-13
Excerpt from Pope Francis - 12 July 2015
by Father Charles Fillion
11 July 2021

Brothers and sisters, today's Psalm says: "The Lord will shower down blessings, and our land will yield its increase". This confidence or trust is born of faith, from knowing that we depend on grace, which will always transform and nourish our land. It is a confidence which is learned, which is taught. A trust nurtured within a community, in the life of a family. A confidence which radiates from the faces of all those people who encourage us to follow Jesus, to be disciples of the One who can never deceive. A disciple knows that he or she is called by Jesus to have this trust, to share his destiny, his very life.

The Gospel speaks to us of this kind of discipleship. Jesus calls his disciples and sends them out, giving them clear and precise instructions. He challenges them to take on a whole range of attitudes and ways of acting. Sometimes these can strike us as exaggerated or even absurd. But Jesus is quite precise, very clear. He doesn't tell them simply to do whatever they think they can. By going through these attitudes, all this might seem quite unrealistic today, or simply outdated.

But there is one key word which is at the heart of Christian spirituality, of our experience of discipleship: "welcome" or hospitality. Jesus sends them out to be welcomed, to experience hospitality. We might say that a Christian is someone who has learned to welcome others, who has learned to show hospitality. Jesus does not send them out as men of influence, managers, officials armed with rules and regulations. Instead, he makes them see that the Christian journey is simply about changing hearts. It is about learning to live differently. It is about turning from the path of selfishness, conflict, division and superiority, and taking instead the path of life, generosity and love. It is about passing from a mentality which bullies, dominates and manipulates to a mentality which welcomes, receives and cares.

These are two contrasting mentalities, two ways of approaching our life and our mission. How many times do we see mission in terms of plans and programs? How many times do we see evangelization as techniques, as if we could convert people on the basis of our own arguments? Today the Lord says to us quite clearly: in the logic of the Gospel, you do not convince people with arguments. You convince them by simply learning how to welcome them. The Church is a mother with an open heart. She knows how to welcome and to receive. The Church, as desired by Jesus, is the home of hospitality. And how much good we can do, if only we try to speak this language of hospitality, this language of receiving and welcoming.

How much pain can be soothed, how much despair can be relieved in a place where we feel welcomed, at home! This requires open doors, especially the doors of our heart. Welcoming those who do not think as we do, who do not have faith or who have lost it. And sometimes, we are to blame. Welcoming the different cultures, of which our earth is so richly blessed.

There is a bitter root which causes damage, and silently destroys so many lives. There is an evil which, bit by bit, finds a place in our hearts and eats away at our life: it is isolation. It's about what makes us turn our back on others, God, the community. It makes us closed in on ourselves. The real work of the Church should not be mainly about managing works and projects, but rather about learning to experience fraternity with others. A welcome-filled fraternity is the best witness that God is our Father. In this way, Jesus teaches us a new way of thinking. He opens before us a horizon brimming with life, beauty, truth and fulfillment.

God never closes off horizons; he is always concerned about the lives and sufferings of his children. God never allows himself to be outdone in generosity. He sends us his Son, he gives him to us, he hands him over, he shares him... so that we can learn the way of fraternity, of self-giving. In a definitive way, he opens up a new horizon; he is a new word which sheds light on so many situations of exclusion, division, loneliness and isolation.

And when we are weary or worn down by our efforts to evangelize, it is good to remember that the life which Jesus holds out to us responds to the deepest needs of people. One thing is sure: we cannot force anyone to receive us, to welcome us, to offer hospitality; this is itself part of our poverty and freedom. But neither can anyone force us not to be welcoming. How good it would be to think of our parishes, communities, churches, wherever there are Christians, with open doors, true centers of encounter between ourselves and God.

The Virgin Mary is our model of hospitality as she showed us how to be places of welcoming and to receive. Mary received the Word of God, welcomed Jesus in her womb and gave it to others. We too must provide a home, like the earth, in receiving the seed, nourishes it and makes it grow. That is how we want to be Christians, that is how we want to live the faith on this Canadian soil, receiving and welcoming God's life in confidence and with the certainty that "the Lord will shower down blessings, and our land will yield its increase".