

Gospel: Luke 10:1-12

Jesus appointed seventy-two other disciples  
whom he sent ahead of him in pairs  
to every town and place he intended to visit.  
He said to them,  
"The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few;  
so ask the master of the harvest  
to send out laborers for his harvest.  
Go on your way;  
behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves.  
Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals;  
and greet no one along the way.  
Into whatever house you enter, first say,  
'Peace to this household.'  
If a peaceful person lives there,  
your peace will rest on him;  
but if not, it will return to you.  
Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you,  
for the laborer deserves his payment.  
Do not move about from one house to another.  
Whatever town you enter and they welcome you,  
eat what is set before you,  
cure the sick in it and say to them,  
'The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.'  
Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you,  
go out into the streets and say,  
'The dust of your town that clings to our feet,  
even that we shake off against you.'  
Yet know this: the Kingdom of God is at hand.  
I tell you,  
it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town."

Homily: We Are Sent Out by Jesus

So we hear today from the 10th chapter of Luke's Gospel with Jesus sending out the 72 disciples in pairs. 36 pairs, not going out alone, but going out with another on this ministry of evangelization. *The harvest is rich, but laborers are few, so I'm sending you out.*

We are both recipients of the Gospel, as well as carriers of the Gospel. We're called to hear the Good News from one another, to be strengthened, to learn. But we're also called to carry that Good News out into a hungry, broken world. If we're able to be receptive, then we're able to be sent and we're continuously formed and reformed by the Word of God; by listening and praying and meditating on what the Lord would have us hear.

In our first reading today, the prophet Ezra, after the people have returned from the Babylonian exile, stands and he proclaims the Word of God to the people—the scribe Ezra proclaims the word to the people, and the people are so touched, so moved, that they're brought to tears, because it's many years since they were able to publicly gather and profess their faith and hear this Word of God. As the priests say, this is a day of rejoicing. Let those not be sad tears, but tears of rejoicing to hear God's Word, which encourages us, instructs us, and corrects us.

A retreat can be such a time for renewal. That moment when Ezra read the words was a peak experience for the people. Retreats can be peak experiences, but we know as the stories in the Scriptures go on, that even though they had that peak experience, they got distracted and returned to their old ways. No matter how powerful any retreat is, even if it is a mountaintop experience, we cannot live on a mountaintop. We have to return to our everyday world. We return renewed and enlightened by what we have heard, by what we've prayed about, by what we received. We have to put into practice the Spiritual Exercises, otherwise our souls will simply get flabby. Through daily prayer, through reading of God's words, through a daily Examen, to being fed by the Sacraments, by applying St. Ignatius' rules for discernment in our everyday life.

If we're too busy to pray, then we're simply too busy. If we're too busy to pray then we're not living according to God's dream for us, which is to become the people that God wants us to be. We won't be able to hear that quiet whisper, guiding us and directing us in all the decisions we face within our lives. In the course of this retreat, one of your fellow retreatants came to me and said, "Fr Michael, I came in with all kinds of decisions but what I'm really hearing the Lord saying is: 'Will you decide to turn your life over to me?'" And I said, "You've been listening very well."

That's the fundamental question, that's the fundamental decision that underlies all other decisions. Will we daily turn our lives over, submit our will to the divine will and listen to be able to be guided by that? When we make that decision day, after day, after day—and it's a daily decision; it's not a once for all...that decision needs to be made and remade daily—when we do that, we begin to realize that our lives are really not about us. It's about God living and working in and through us so that we become God's hands, we become God's eyes, we become God's mouth, we become God's heart of compassion for a broken and needy world.

I know of no greater joy in this life than to be used as an instrument of God's grace; an instrument of God's peace. It simply doesn't get any better than that because that's the deep soul joy: to become instruments of His peace.

We hear a lot about the 12 disciples; they figure so prominently in the gospel, but today's Gospel is about the 72; the other folks, the ordinary folks. We don't even know their names, but we know that they were loved and chosen by God and sent out to carry the Good News into a world that was hungry and desperate for Good News.

We are a missionary church. Every Pope since the second Vatican Council—starting with Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and now Pope Francis—has called us to the new evangelization. And quite frankly our Protestant brothers and sisters accept that mission, I think, much better than we Catholics. Many of us Catholics are still caught up in what Thomas Merton

called "our personal salvation project." It's about me and Jesus and you know, I care about my spouse and I care about my kids, but this is a personal salvation project. The Pope said, "Wrong!" It's about carrying it out to the world. How are we saved ourselves? We are saved by reaching out to others. It's in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned, in carrying the Good News that we're convicted and inspired by that very Good News, in sharing that gift, we receive.

The word Mass, you probably know, comes from the Latin word *missa* which means *sent*. Go! No, you can't live here at Bellarmine. This is a home where you can come and you can take refuge but then you are sent out into your homes, into your communities...to carry forth the work of God in a culture that is becoming increasingly antithetical to the Gospel, increasingly secularized, increasingly insulated...to the state of Illinois where we've just signed into law taxpayer-funded abortions...into the United States of America where Congress will soon be debating whether a physician assisted suicide can be legalize...into the United States of America where increasingly more and more people are checking "None" as their religion—that's not "nun" that's "none." Your religion: none—where we are increasingly resistant to God's grace.

We are sent out. Think of ourselves as those 72, sent out like lambs among wolves, sent out not alone because none of us can do it alone, we need that support.

We need companionship along the way.  
We need prayer groups.  
We need parishes that are alive.  
We need prayer partners.  
We need marriages that are reinvigorated.  
We need families there that are sanctuaries of holiness.  
We need more places that are cenacles of grace.  
We can't do it alone.  
We are called to evangelize.

I like to think of it as a three-part plan. It begins with prayer and fasting. Second, it's a ministry of invitation. It's not demand, it's not judgment. Nobody likes to be judged and nobody likes to be coerced, but life has a way of beating us up. Look for those windows of opportunity, even within your family, within your friends, within your workplace. Look for those windows of opportunity where they might be open to an invitation.

Would you like to come on a retreat?  
I got a CD here that might be helpful to you.  
This is a book that was really helpful to me.  
Here's a daily inspiration that I find really helpful.  
Would you like to come to my parish?  
You look really down right now; would you like to take a few moments and just pray?

The ministry of invitation...and they may turn you down 9 times, 10 times, 99 times, but on the hundredth time, they say, "Yes."

The third aspect that I think is most critical for the new evangelization is the witness of our lives. If they look at us and they see a joy, if they see an interior freedom, if they see a peace and serenity, they're going to start wondering: *What does she have that I don't have? What does he have that I don't have? Because I want some of that; whatever they got that's what I want.* But unfortunately, many of us give negative witnesses. Boy, if that's what religion does for her, I sure don't want to be part of that. If that's what faith does to him, thank you, I don't need any of that.

A three-part plan of prayer and fasting; a ministry of invitation; a witness with the daily actions of our lives. We might pray very simply, as wind through the trees, as waves through the sea:

*Come Spirit of God. Come, live within me.*

With our family, with our friends, with those who have heard the Good News, we are called to re-energize this world. We are called to let the Holy Spirit guide us as wind through the trees, as waves through the sea:

*Come Spirit of God. Come live and move and dance within me.*

Amen. (Amen.)