

Cycle B – 15th Sunday Ordinary Time 2012

This year my annual trip to St Germaine, Wisconsin was a bit different. For the first time it was just my youngest son and myself. I noticed it right from the start because we had so much room in the car we thought we were forgetting stuff. My son and I packed all of our fishing clothes, casual clothes even a set of church clothes all in one suitcase. We didn't have a case for toiletries, make-up, extra shoes or for souvenirs we may or may not buy. We did forget the bug spray and sunscreen but we were able to buy that stuff up there. For our six hour journey in the car we had our little cooler with drinks and treats between us so we didn't have to stop so often.

I thought we were travelling light with everything in one suitcase but compared to the Apostles it might look a somewhat excessive. I'm not really sure what the normal travel preparation would have been for people in Jesus' time but I'm pretty sure it was more than the clothes on your back and a staff.

Can you imagine actually being sent out in that manner? No food for the journey, no lodging accommodations and no money to get what they might need. They didn't have iPods, iPads, laptops, books or anything else to entertain themselves along the way. There were no billboards to play the alphabet game and I doubt the camels had any tags so you could just forget about the license plate game.

It was just the two of them and they walked. Jesus didn't let them bring their phones to text one another so they actually had to speak with each other. Can you imagine actually having to verbally communicate? They definitely had it tough.

What Jesus was doing was asking them to participate in the mission he had already started and explained to them. They were to be fishers of men and women. If you remember from our previous Gospels, the first task of an apostle was to "be with Jesus", the second, is to be. Can you imagine the fear and anxiety that it must have caused them? They were to do the same thing as Jesus had been doing, teaching through parables, curing the sick, driving out demons, raising the dead. The faith it must have took to just go out without anything let alone the list of ministering they were expected to perform.

There is always a purpose in the way Jesus does things and in this case, scripture does say Jesus BEGAN to send them out which means He probably didn't just call them in and say: "Okay, today's the day. Here's your tunic, here's your staff, there's the door go out and do what I have been doing." It sounds more like that he was preparing them in pairs, and when he thought they were ready, He sent them out.

So why two by two? He sent them out in twos because their goal was to develop small Christian communities, so they need to be in a community themselves. Churches learned long ago never to send out a lone missionary because they need the encouragement and support of one another so they can fight discouragement and temptations together. They needed to be accountable so the mission didn't get tainted.

The next question would be: What is the purpose of Jesus sending them out without anything? If we saw them roaming around today we would probably classify them as homeless or indigent doing everything to avoid them and turn a deaf ear to what they had to say. The only thing we might notice is when they shook the dust from their sandals on the edge of town.

Jesus sends his apostles out in poverty because their mind must be on the mission, not on their daily needs. They were to have sandals on their feet to allow them to travel distances, they had a staff which was a symbol of authority (one of the reasons Bishops today carry staffs) and that's it. Since they had nothing, they were to rely on God completely, and stay free of distractions. It also meant people would have to be hospitable to them and by having nothing everyone could see they were **not** doing it for their own personal gain. Their job was to bring the message. Success was in God's hands, not theirs.

For us, this Gospel story is not about travel accommodations but of the importance of community. It shows us how we are meant to pray together, support each other and grow together. I think through the years especially here at this parish we may have lost this aspect of community. I think we all may be guilty at times of becoming the Sunday Christian who comes to Mass, prays and goes home. We have to be careful we don't turn in to that person who makes that silly statement that "I don't need a building to pray". When we fall into that trap we fail to grow closer to each other and to God. Growing closer to God and each other is each persons' responsibility and it's only achieved only through a community that is alive and well.

Jesus wants us to be a community, one that's alive and well. That means doing things together – two by two – supporting one another, grieving with one another, sharing our joys and sorrows, praying together, listening and discussing what God is saying to us. Only then will we be prepared, as Jesus prepared his apostles, to go outside of our immediate community and get others to join us.