

11th Sunday of the Year A

*Proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.
Cure the sick, raise the dead,
cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. (Mt 10:7-8)*



First Reading

Exodus 19:2-6

From Rephidim the Israelites set out again; and when they reached the wilderness of Sinai, there in the wilderness they pitched their camp; there facing the mountain Israel pitched camp.

Moses then went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Say this to the House of Jacob, declare this to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen what I did with the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. From this you know that now, if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my very own for all the earth is mine. I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation.'"

Second Reading

Romans 5:6-11

We were still helpless when at his appointed moment Christ died for sinful men. It is not easy to die even for a good man – though of course for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die – but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Having died to make us righteous, is it likely that he would now fail to save us from God's anger? When we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, we were still enemies; now that we have been reconciled, surely we may count on being saved by the life of his Son? Not merely because we have been reconciled but because we are filled with joyful trust in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have already gained our reconciliation.

When Jesus saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest."

He summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: "Do not turn your steps to pagan territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge."

Meditation

Jesus is enlisting support. His heart is touched by the crowds he encounters: the tired, the abused, the sad and those abandoned by their shepherds. Alone, he will never be able to accomplish the task of ministry. He needs help. He enlists twelve apostles, for the twelve tribes of Israel, for the whole world. The enormity of this work seems out of proportion to the resources at hand: a few fishermen, tax collector, a freedom fighter, a traitor-in-waiting, and a few about whom we know nothing. Their only source of unity was the person of Jesus.

To beg the harvest-master is the first necessity. The disciples are called to continue the Lord's work, not their own. Without prayer, it is impossible to give ourselves to the mission. We risk preaching ourselves rather than Christ, making the apostolate our own rather than the kingdom's, being engaged in the harvest for our own profit.

The apostles are commissioned to "go after the lost sheep of the house of Israel" because of the urgency of their distress. The universal mission will come later. Both in Israel and beyond, the fundamental command is to seek the lost. Compassion is at the heart of every pastoral strategy. It reaches the most inaccessible places where the flock has wandered. At that frontier, Jesus struggles side by side with his disciples to heal, to liberate and to forgive. To cast our lot with the most deprived is already to show them their beginning and their end: the one kingdom prepared by the tenderness of a God who freely gives all.