

HOMILY SUNDAY 14 – C (Homily 02)

“Sent Out to Heal and Proclaim”

(Isaiah 66:10-14; Psalm 66; Galatians 6:14-18; Lk 10:1-12; 17-20)

Recently, two of the elderly priests in the archdiocese of Keewatin-The Pas, both still in very active ministry, were suddenly taken ill and unable to continue the ministry they were doing, one in a fly-in community. That sudden shortage provides urgency to the gospel today about the 72 disciples, and the need to heed Jesus’ advice to pray for laborers in the harvest.

Today’s gospel is very clear: we need to pray for laborers who will carry out Jesus’ mission to heal and proclaim the reign of God among us.

This mission is first of all a universal mission. Jesus is not in the normal Jewish chain of human transmission of the Law (Moses, Joshua, prophets and humanity). Rather, everything has been given to him directly by God his Father, a personal relationship that he shares with his disciples.

Jesus and his disciples are experiencing the active presence of God (Satan overcome, the excluded reconciled, the Good News proclaimed to the poor – all that was to happen at the end of time made present in Jesus’ preaching and ministry) making present the salvation of God for all humanity.

Reflecting this universality, one commentator claims that the number 70 refers back to Gn 10:2-3. That passage describes the descendants of Noah, who was to be the founder of a renewed humanity after the flood. We know that this vision never materialized, as the sinfulness of the fall infected the descendants of Noah too.

Jesus has now inaugurated the final, truly genuine reign of God here on earth. The instruction by Jesus to his disciples not to greet anyone underscores the need for urgency and singleness of purpose of this new mission to spread that reign of God.

The empire of evil is now replaced by the kingdom of God. The disciples now have a power that comes from Jesus himself to overcome difficulties, illustrated by the serpents and scorpions, the first mortal perils that faced Israel during the Exodus.

Their joy flows from the promise of eternal life. That which Israel hoped for in the future is now being realized not by the proud scribes who studied the Word of God with arrogance, but by the humble who are prepared to receive it.

Three instructions are given regarding the conduct of the mission in each village: 1) Eat what is provided, 2) heal the sick, and 3) announce the Kingdom. These three facets of the mission encompass the creation of community (table fellowship), care of physical, emotional and personal needs, and proclamation of the kingdom. The disciples, therefore, were charged to continue the three facets of Jesus' work in Galilee.

The disciples declare that the kingdom has come near to those who receive them because of Jesus' works and the disciples preaching. In their presence, the kingdom has come near. Can we say that in our presence and our ministry, the reign of God has also come near?

The sending out of the seventy or seventy two, particular to Luke, reminds us that Jesus sent out not just the Twelve, but perhaps all of his followers. Though the Church cannot recreate the itinerary of earlier days, it must be faithful to announce the Kingdom and devote itself to kingdom tasks.

Serpents and scorpions appear as images for the power of evil in prophetic and apocalyptic writings. By casting out demons, the disciples had demonstrated their power over Satan; they had trodden on serpents and scorpions. Vanquishing the enemies of God's people was another of the apocalyptic hopes. The proper response to the coming of God's kingdom is joy, not only for the defeat of evil and the vanquishing of demonic powers, but also for the experience of life rightly ordered in God's fellowship.

As an archdiocese we have taken seriously Jesus' command to heal as an integral part of the coming of the reign of God. We are putting a good deal of time, energy and resources into programs like Healing Soul Pain and Returning To Spirit. These programs help participants heal past hurts, as well as be reconciled with those who have hurt them and others.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today calls us to discipleship. We are forgiven, healed by the love of God present in Jesus' Word and Body and Blood. We are then missioned, sent out to be his disciples in the world, sent to heal and to proclaim the reign of God already begun here on earth.

Let us therefore heed the gospel call to pray for laborers who will carry out Jesus' mission to heal and proclaim the reign of God among us. Let us also see ourselves as disciples sent out on that same God-given mission.