

THE EMMAUS SERIES

15th Sunday Year B

Amos 7:12-15

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:7-1

Jesus began to send them out

Today's gospel reading from Mark recalls a development in the mission of Jesus that concerns us all. He makes his disciples sharers in his mission. In Mark's telling of the story of Jesus this comes immediately after his own townspeople have rejected him at the end of his Galilean ministry. If, during his earthly life, he is not to fulfil the great mission he has received from his Father in person, he will do so through his disciples. Initially he will employ the twelve collaborators who symbolise the New Israel through whose life the Saviour will be present in every age.

We who take part in this liturgy have all been called to share in Christ's great mission to the whole world. As we ponder this we should recall that God's call is mysterious, originating in the eternal designs of the Father – as Paul writes, 'Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ'. God's call does not match our human expectations. Amos, the 8th century prophet, was a farmer who found himself charged with the daunting task of challenging the hypocrisy evident in the worship of the northern shrine of Bethel. The Twelve Apostles called by Jesus were an unlikely group, with backgrounds as varied as fishing, tax collecting and terrorism. Jesus sends them out with instructions that make very clear the seriousness of the task he is sharing with them: absolute reliance upon the 'authority' they have received from him, and an unselfishness and single-mindedness that will commend them to their listeners. Their mission reflects the mission Jesus has been engaged in: the call to a 'repentance' which is open to what God is about to do, 'casting out devils' and healing the sick. (The modern reader should not be distracted by the gospels' frequent references to exorcism. The culture of the society in which Jesus lived assumed – as many cultures do, even today – that ills and maladies, physical and psychological, are due to the influence of evil spirits. Jesus' mission to triumph over all evil was inevitably seen as a conflict with evil powers.)

It is enlightening to compare the second reading's summary of key themes of Paul's thought with the themes the Twelve took with them on the missions on which Jesus 'began to send them'. What Jesus promised as he announced the coming of God's Kingdom was far from clear to them. They were sustained by their admiration of Jesus and the authority with which he had inaugurated his mission. The Christians for whom the letter to the Ephesians was written knew the fulfilment of all that Jesus had promised. The blessings brought by the Paschal Mystery were beyond imagining for the Twelve as they told their hearers of the coming of God's Kingdom. Paul, on the other hand, can tell the world of the 'mystery', God's design from all eternity, as he 'chose us in Christ', and determined to bring the whole of creation 'together under Christ'. In our text are many of the great themes with which our faith gives expression to the blessings brought by the Paschal Mystery: 'grace', 'freedom', 'adoption', 'inheritance' and 'the seal of the Spirit'.

John Thornhill sm