

THE EMMAUS SERIES

14th Sunday Year C

Isaiah 66:10-14

Galatians 6:14-18

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

The harvest is rich but the labourers are few

In Luke's account of the life of Jesus, we are at a turning point. Jesus is beginning his journey to Jerusalem to meet his fate; and he is instructing the followers who must carry on his mission. He has already sent his chosen twelve out on mission. Now he sends out 'seventy two others'. The numbers are symbolic. The mission of the apostles is to the twelve tribes of Israel – since the immediate concern of Jesus was to call the nation back to faithfulness. Seventy two was the number of the pagan nations, according to the traditions of the Old Testament – ultimately the mission of Jesus is universal. The 'seventy two others' represent all of us, his followers in every age, called to share in his mission to bring the Good News of God to all people. 'Evangelisation', being bearers of the Good News, is a basic theme in the Church's teaching today. 'The labourers are few', Jesus tells us, and we tend to think he is referring to the 'professionals', clergy and religious. But today's gospel tells us that it is that not only those who carry on a leadership role like that of the apostles, but all followers of Jesus who are called to carry forward the Church's mission in the name of Christ.

The Lord's instructions to the seventy two are for us too. He invites us to learn what it is to be an evangeliser. The first requirement is that we have truly found joy in the meaning faith gives to our lives. These disciples 'came back rejoicing'; and today's liturgy, in its choice of the reading from Isaiah, underlines this first characteristic of authentic bearers of the gospel message – with its expressions of boundless joy in the blessings of God. True evangelisers must have a faith commitment that is strong: the disciples are told that they must be single-minded – their greatest treasure should be the message they bear; it will be this personal conviction that leads others to share in what they have found. True evangelisers are bearers of peace: the disciples are told to be aware of the healing and reconciliation their message should bring to their hearers. Jesus sends the disciples out 'two by two': because the example of a community that lives by Christ's teaching is an essential part of authentic evangelisation. And finally, Jesus warns against the spirit of self-importance that can spoil the work of the evangelist: all that should matter is their own relationship with God.

Clearly, it is not clever presentation, or anything of that order, that will make us good evangelisers, but the quality of our own response to the call of Jesus, to share in all that he stands for – especially in the ordinary situations of our lives, in the midst of our families and our ordinary life relationships.

Scholars who have studied Luke's mind tell us that the program he sets out here is realised in the life of the early Church as he describes it in the Acts of the Apostles. And today's reading from Paul to the Galatians reminds us of that great evangeliser, whose labours, as he spread the Good News, are a magnificent illustration of the message of today's gospel.

John Thornhill sm