

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

July 11, 2021

Amos 7:12–15 • Ephesians 1:3–14 • Mark 6:7–13

I.

I consider it one of the honors I've received in the priesthood.

When I was at Sacred Heart parish in Danville,
a parishioner asked me to attend her graduation from the local community college,
as she received her certification as a nursing assistant.

She didn't have any family in the area,
so she asked me to be on hand,
along with some of her friends and other members of the parish staff.

It was a delight to be there.

After the ceremony,
we took a picture together and she thanked me profusely for having come.

It was a beautiful moment because God was an important part of her life,
and she was an active member of the parish.

She wanted the Church, represented by the parish priest,
to be close to her at that important moment.

And she wanted the Church to be with her as she embarked on her new career.

For me,
that experience captures what the Church is,
and the different roles within it.

She was as much a member of the Church as I am.

I have a role as a shepherd; I was her priest.

She lives out her faith in the world,
in all of the circumstances of ordinary life.

She wanted the support of her shepherd to live out her faith.

II.

Today's Gospel narrates an important moment in Jesus' public ministry, when his disciples—specifically the twelve apostles—begin their career as missionaries:

“Jesus summoned the Twelve
and began to send them out two by two
and gave them authority over unclean spirits. ...
The Twelve drove out many demons,
and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.”

The apostles carry out, and carry on, Jesus' saving work.

Each Sunday, we profess in the Creed that the Church is “apostolic.”

The word apostle means, “someone who is sent.”

The term “apostolic” means three things, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 857):

1. Christ founded the Church on the apostles, who were with him, and who witnessed his resurrection from the dead.
2. The Church hands on the teaching of the apostles and celebrates the sacraments that Christ gave them.
3. The Church continues to be taught, guided, and made holy by the apostles through their successors, who are bishops and priests.

Lay people participate in handing on the teaching of the apostles by giving witness to their faith in ordinary life.

That's an important point.

Lay people are not just anonymous members of a large organization that is the Catholic Church.

No, lay men and women have a specific calling and mission—an “apostolate.”

This was one of the achievements of the Second Vatican Council, which met from 1962 to 1965.

The council elaborated the lay apostolate as part of its goal of renewing the Church for the sake of evangelizing the modern world.

This is what the council taught about the lay apostolate, which echoes today's Gospel reading:

“The laity, by their very vocation,
 seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs
 and by ordering them according to the plan of God.
 They live in the world... in each and in all of the secular professions...
 They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life...
They are called there by God
 that... they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.
 In this way they may make Christ known to others”
 (*Lumen gentium*, no. 31).

Your calling is to do extraordinary things in ordinary life—
 that's where you are sent.

You are ambassadors of Christ and missionaries of the Church;
 and the mission field is the world.

You might say,
 “Well, I'm just so-and-so—a husband, a wife, father, a mother,
 someone who get home tired from work.”

That's precisely who you need to be in order to be a missionary!

In the First Reading,
 the prophet Amos realizes that he is a “nobody”—
 in the sense it was God who called him to be a prophet:

“I was no prophet,
 nor have I belonged to a company of prophets;
 I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores.
 The LORD took me from following the flock, and said to me,
 Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”

All members of the Church participate in its apostolic mission; this privilege and obligation flow from Baptism.

An experience of discipleship leads to mission, as we see in the Gospel.

I often ask myself:

How can I get more people to recognize and fulfill their baptismal call?

I think that, practically speaking, my work as a priest is to put people in touch with Christ, and then allow him to take it from there.

Like St. Andrew, who brought his brother Simon Peter to Christ, telling him, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41).

I like to be specific and practical, so here are some concrete recommendations for encountering Christ more deeply, so that you can be strengthened as disciples and equipped for your mission as lay men and women:

1. Participate in Mass each Sunday and holy day of obligation.
2. Don't just attend Mass—pray the Mass by fully participating: listening, singing, making the responses, and so forth.
3. Experience the mercy of God firsthand by confessing your sins in the Sacrament of Penance.
4. Pray for at least five to ten minutes each day.
5. Each day, read and reflect on the Gospel for Sunday Mass.
6. Take part in the parish's monthly service project.

This month's project is a food drive for Sacred Heart Center in Southside.

7. Attend the monthly holy hour that includes exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The next holy hour will be on Tuesday, July 27.

8. Participate in parish educational activity, such as a Bible study, to strengthen your faith.

The next Bible study will begin in September.

III.

“So they went off and preached repentance.”

Each celebration of Mass is an experience of discipleship and mission.

In this regard, the term “Mass” is instructive.

“Mass” is derived from the Latin *missa*, which takes its name from the penultimate words of the celebration, the dismissal.

In Latin, the phrase is *Ite, missa est*.

Originally, it had a simple and straightforward meaning:

“Go, it is finished.”

The fact that this simple formula came to designate the whole Eucharistic celebration is interesting.

Over time,

the formula of dismissal has come to be understood in the sense of mission:

“Go, you are sent”

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1332).

Go, you are sent to live out your faith.

Go, you are sent to give witness to Christ.