

**11<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – A; June 18<sup>th</sup> 2023**  
**Exodus 19: 2-6; Romans 5: 6-11; Matthew 9: 36-10: 8**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

If we want to summarize the Old Testament in the shortest possible verse, we can do it in a few words; **the unfailing love and compassion of God for Israel and the ever failing fidelity of Israel on the other side.**” The Book of Exodus alone testifies the unconditional love and kindness of God. God worked mighty miracles to save his people from the bondage in Egypt and brought them out in his palms. Just two verses in today’s first reading alone are witness to the greatness of God. God says through Moses, **“I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and holy nations. Therefore, if you hearken my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people.”** (Ex. 19:4-5). God showed the same love and compassion to Israel even when they left Him and went after foreign gods and worship. **In the Old Testament the word love occurs 714 times and the word compassion appears over 100 times.** Most of the times, they are mentioned as the attributes of God. When God chose Israel as a special possession, God also had a great purpose in mind that Israel should be the role model to gentiles and thus they should glorify the name of God.

Though God tried through great Prophets to bring His people back to fidelity, the people didn’t keep God’s covenant at all. Finally God sent his only Son to Israel to restore them back to faith. Jesus started his mission single handed and in course of time he formed a small group of men whom he named the apostles. In today’s gospel reading we see for the first time the names of those 12 men and their first mission. It is amazing to notice how Jesus made a kingdom and holy nation for God through this small group. They acted as salt and light of the world and today the kingdom, the Church, they built is bigger than any other material kingdoms on earth.

In today’s gospel we see the first commissioning of the apostles for evangelization work. Before Jesus introduces them to the great task of evangelization he looks at the great crowd around him with love and compassion, at the same time laments over their helplessness. Matthew says, **“At the sight of the crowds, Jesus’ heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.”** The reason was that the religious leaders of that time never had time for the ordinary people and they were not good shepherds. So people were abandoned and Jesus sends his 12 men among these people to bring them back to the sheepfold. Jesus conferred his priesthood upon them. According to Matthew during the time of Jesus the apostles got only one such chance to preach and we don’t know how successful the

mission was. But after the Pentecost the entire situation changes and we know how fast the kingdom started growing. But the evangelization work was not an easy task due to the persecution which started first in Palestine and then it became severe and widespread in Rome. We may wonder what the secret of the strong growth of Christianity was, despite among such cruel torture of three centuries. Of course, the work of the Holy Spirit was with the early Church. At the same time we notice the great role of the ordinary people or the laity during that time. In other words, every Christian was an evangelizer no matter, where he/she lived. People lived in one heart and mind to preach the gospel which helped the steady growth of the Church.

In the beginning of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century there were only Presbyters who had limited authority in priesthood. Soon the Bishops were introduced in the Church with full power of priesthood. As the volume of faithful was growing fast the ministerial priesthood was instituted by ordaining good men. The ministerial priesthood was a big help for the pastoral and spiritual care of the people. During that time the missionaries also came up in great numbers travelling all over the world evangelizing the people. In a way we can say that the first 1700 years were the golden era of evangelization. At the same time the evangelization work suffered a setback behind the curtain. In other words, the lay people who were active evangelizers became inactive and became totally passive in the Church. They have almost forgotten the fact that they were the partakers of the priesthood of Christ. May be in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the missionary flow became very slow and the numbers of priests started diminishing. The inactiveness of the laity together with the shortage of priests and missionaries made the evangelization a standstill.

Today the lamentation of Jesus became once again absolutely true. **“The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.”** Take the example of our Diocese. Seventy years ago there were more than 150 active diocesan priests working here. Today that number is reduced to less than 36. Today 16 priests who are working here are from Africa and India. Remember, for centuries the missionaries from Europe and America went to African countries for missionary work. So the situation is not very promising. To the great extent the laity is active in the ministry today. But they should be more active in the evangelization work. It is from the families the priests come up. We need good Christian families with children and they should be encouraged to priesthood. The bishop cannot keep the churches open unless the families give him priests. So you need to promote the priesthood as well as pray very ardently for vocations. If one parish can provide at least one candidate for priesthood, our churches will remain open. I am happy that our parish has given three priests to the service.