

15th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; July 14th 2024
Amos 7:12-15; Eph. 1: 3-14; Mk 6: 7-13

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Our country is pretty close to another Presidential election. As usual, both candidates make a lot of promises to people, like strong economy, more job opportunities and better living. Suppose, one of them tells the truth and offers you more job cuts, high inflation rate and bad economy; then what will be your reaction? You will never vote for that one. But there were honest politicians in the past. For instance, Winston Churchill, the late Prime Minister of England, took the office while the country was in war. He offered his countrymen only- “blood, toil, sweat and tears.” We all like to hear the promises, though they will never be materialized.

One fine day Jesus of Nazareth emerged as a young rabbi, powerful in preaching and working miracles. Naturally, young men sought to be his disciples. To the surprise and shock of everybody, Jesus called the twelve men who were outcast and totally unfit in human point of view. On the other hand these men, who never enjoyed any social status, were excited to be chosen by a rabbi. When Jesus started preaching the Kingdom of God they misunderstood it as the re-establishment of the Kingdom of David. Naturally they expected high ranking positions in the new kingdom. But their expectations and dreams were shattered, when they heard him say, “*If any one wishes to follow me let him deny himself and take up his daily cross and follow me*” As the apostles expected, Jesus never promised them a soft cushioned office chair, staff around, rather **cross, persecution, blood and martyrdom**. According to Matthew when the apostles were sent out for the first time Jesus does not promise any sort of security arrangements, rather **he says: “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves.”** We may wonder, how the disciples could continue to stay with Jesus.

Thus the ones who expected to become secretaries of state; finance and defense had to go out into the villages proclaiming the gospel and even being rejected by people and persecuted. This simple trial run Jesus made with the apostles was the pre-figuration of the *giant leap* they would make later in their missionary endeavor.

In the very beginning Jesus made a set of rules or job description for his apostles as what should be their life style to bear witness to the gospel. As it was customary to the rabbis, the disciples were not supposed to carry a collection bag to make provisions for their life or a wallet with full of money. In other words, in order to proclaim the gospel they need to travel light and not to depend on material strength; rather in God’s providence and the hospitality of the people. Jesus knew right away that the more they

would trust in money and material things for their missionary work, the more they would get entangled by them. **For, the Gospel is to be preached based on one's personal faith; not by the strength of money.** If we go through the early history of the Church, we know that how little the material possession of the apostles and early Church was. The missionaries traveled all over the world very light. Bishop Baraga, our first Bishop, brought just only a small wooden box, filled with the basic things, when he came from Slovakia to America. That box is still seen among his artifacts displayed at St. Mary's Church, Sault Ste. Marie.

Unfortunately, in course of time the poor Church became rich with big structures and material possessions. As a result the method of preaching the Good News, dreamed by Jesus and implemented by the early Church suffered a setback. Many bishops and priests including missionaries started thinking that only with material strength and modern technology and media the evangelization is possible. On the other hand *evangelization is possible only when we are filled with faith and ready to share that faith with others personally. If we have couple million dollars in hand we can build a church. But only with faith we can build a community of believers.*

Remember, the day when we were baptized, we were called to be missionaries in different capacities. Living in your own life situations you can be great missionaries by sharing your gift of faith with others through your good life and deeds. You don't have to go to India or Africa for missionary work. Your own family will be the first place to start with. Your words can be rejected or ignored; you may not find any fruit of your effort. Don't worry about fruit; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. What we need to do is to sow the seeds of the gospel, wherever us possible; if they sprout in our time, that is good enough, and if not we should not get disappointed. But we should not step back from bearing witness to Jesus. Please listen to the words of Mother Theresa, **"You can do what I cannot do and I can do what you cannot do. Together we can do something beautiful for God."** *That something beautiful is nothing but sharing of our faith with others. During your entire life time, if you can bring a few individuals back to faith, you are called blessed by the Lord and you are considered to be great missionaries.* Unfortunately, even many practicing Catholics are reluctant to share their faith with a non-practicing member in their families or neighborhood. Thus we beat the purpose of our discipleship.