

FIFTEENTH Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel Reading

15th July 2018

Mark 6: 7-13

Jesus instructs his disciples and sends them to preach repentance.

Background on the Gospel Reading

This week's Gospel and the one for next week describe how Jesus sent the disciples to minister in his name and the disciples' return to Jesus afterward. These two passages, however, are not presented together in Mark's Gospel. Inserted between the two is the report of Herod's fears that Jesus is John the Baptist back from the dead. I

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' ministry is presented in connection with the teaching of John the Baptist. Jesus' public ministry begins after John is arrested. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, who preached the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

While we do not read these details about John the Baptist in our Gospel this week or next week, our Lectionary sequence stays consistent with Mark's theme. Recall that last week we heard how Jesus was rejected in his hometown of Nazareth. The insertion of the reminder about John the Baptist's ministry and his death at the hands of Herod in Mark's Gospel makes a similar point.

Mark reminds his readers about this dangerous context for Jesus' ministry and that of his disciples. Preaching repentance and the Kingdom of God is dangerous business for Jesus and for his disciples. Mark wants his readers to remember that we, too, may find resistance as we choose to be disciples of Jesus.

Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus sent out the Twelve. These twelve were selected from among Jesus' disciples and named by Mark in chapter 3. Mark notes that these twelve are also called "apostles." The word *apostle* means "one who is sent." The number twelve is also a symbolic number, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. By naming twelve apostles, Jesus shows his mission to be in continuity with the mission of God's people, Israel.

Jesus' instructions to the apostles are very specific. He repeats the mission that they are sent to preach and to share his authority to heal and to drive out demons. Jesus sends them in pairs, establishing his mission as a

communal endeavor. Jesus also instructs them to travel lightly, without the customary food, money, and extra set of clothes. These instructions mean that the Twelve will be dependent on the hospitality of others, just as Jesus depended on others to provide for his needs.

Jesus continues to send us into the world as his disciples. But like the first disciples, we are not sent alone. Jesus has given us the community of the Church, which strengthens our life of discipleship.

The Christian message can only authentically be proclaimed in and through the community of faith that is the Church. In our work with others, we build this community of faith and can invite others to share in it.

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