

15th SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B - 2006
“Go ... to love and serve the Lord!”

The disciples didn't realize it, but Jesus was about to turn their lives upside down. As far as they were concerned, Jesus was just asking them to help him with his work, and that must have made them feel so proud. He gave these simple, uneducated men, authority to preach, cast out devils and even cure the sick. I can just imagine them coming back home at the end of a long day and sharing their stories. They must have been in awe of their power, their importance. They got to help Jesus with his work. Who wouldn't step up and help? From “nobodies,” they immediately became “somebody's.” But this isn't what I meant when I said Jesus would turn their lives upside down. They didn't get it at the time, but Jesus was really showing them that their lives were no longer to be about themselves, but about others. And that the source of their strength and influence would not be from themselves, either, but from God, the source of all.

They wouldn't get it until after they had been scandalized by the cross and had seen the empty tomb. And Jesus knew that his followers wouldn't get it till later, also. But he wanted them to taste what it was like to reach out to others, to bring them hope and a sense of worth. He knew that they would mistakenly think this meant that they were very important, maybe even better than others, when, in reality, Jesus was revealing to them just how important the people were who heard their preaching, felt healing from their hands and freedom in their hearts when they rebuked the demons in them. The disciples thought that Jesus was gathering them close to him to satisfy their hopes and desires for power and fame. That's why James and John would vie to sit one on Jesus' right and one on his left when he came into his kingdom. They had no idea!

In fact, Jesus was teaching all of us that religion is not just about satisfying our needs, but about reaching out to others to help satisfy their needs as well. Think about it. How much of Christianity is about me, my salvation, my health, my security, my comfort, my happiness? As one writer puts it,

“It’s like falling in love: if I love a girl because she satisfies my needs, that’s not, at the end of the day, a mature love. That person is just a function of my little self-centered world. I learn what love is when I let her be the center of the world and not myself.”

How many times have I said that we are on this earth to learn how to love? Well, Jesus was introducing his disciples into the way of love. It wasn’t the authority he gave them to preach, heal or cast out demons that was so important, but the love behind that authority. Remember what we have also said before,

*“Power without love is tyranny.
Love without power is sentimentality.
But love and power together is leadership.”
(Love and strength together are also the building blocks of sanctity.)*

So, by empowering the disciples to go out two by two to continue the work of Jesus, Jesus was introducing them to a way of life that would become the hallmark of his true followers. They would become men and women who would give of themselves in love to others so others could live. (You’ve heard me say that before, too.) But Jesus is revealing something equally, and maybe even more important than this. Jesus is revealing the very heart of God.

By now, we should know that to say “*I believe in God*” is not enough. There are some people out there who say they believe in God and want to blow to smithereens those who don’t believe in God their way. I can

understand why a lot of people say they don't believe in God when the word "God" is used to cover every understanding and misunderstandings of God there is, as if those understandings and misunderstandings don't make any difference. In fact, to ask someone if they believe in God is the wrong question. It gets us nowhere. The better question is, "*What gives meaning to your life?*" And the way we answer that question will reveal the God or gods in whom we believe.

Many people seem to be searching for meaning but don't realize it. They need to be constantly on the go, doing things, anything; or they may try to escape reality by succumbing to the addiction of their choice. Maybe a tummy tuck here and an implant there will give their lives meaning, or if they make a lot of money, or if they can climb to the top of the social ladder. And when they get to the top of the ladder, they realize they put their ladder up against the wrong wall. They're still not fulfilled. They still look for more. Some have rejected what they assume is the Christian understanding of God because they have been hurt by what a priest said years ago, or can't live by some rules of the Church, or they judge the church to be intolerant of them because they are different. Let's face it, many of us Catholics still believe in God as a policeman, who is constantly checking up on us to see if we break any of the rules. We have litmus tests of who is worthy and unworthy.

That is why a simple gospel like we have today is so important to hear once again. It calls us to see the goodness of others and to love them as Jesus did. It calls us to remember that the God we believe in is a God of compassion. That is the heart of God! And that compassionate God asks us, calls us, empowers us by our baptism to bring his love to the world. By now, we should know that it is in the giving of ourselves in love to others

that we image the God revealed to us in Jesus. That is the God we believe in. And in that God alone will we find our deepest meaning.

“Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,” is not just the way we end Mass. (Some never hear these words, of course.) By these words, Jesus, through the Body of Christ, commissions us to continue his work by the love we show to others. Who wouldn't want to do that?