

JULY 3, 2022

In today's Gospel from chapter 10 of St. Luke, the Lord Jesus sends out 70 Disciples on mission. In chapter 9, He sent out the 12 Apostles on mission. This second wave of missionaries is found only in St. Luke's Gospel, and is worth a close look.

1. The Lord Jesus sends out 70 Disciples. One rule for reading the New Testament is that numbers are never given without a reason. Some numbers, like the age of the Lord Jesus during His Ministry and at the time of His Death and Resurrection, are never given to us, simply because they would only be points of data, with no deeper meaning. Nothing is written in the New Testament without some deeper meaning. Often that meaning is rooted in the Old Testament, and so it is here. In chapter 11 of Numbers, Moses complained to the Lord that, as he got older and Israel got bigger, the tasks of teaching the People the Lord's Law, and judging their disputes, were simply too much for him. The Lord, in response, told him to choose 70 Elders, who would share the task with him. Moses would only be the public preacher for solemn occasions, and would only judge the more severe disputes. Because of this passage, Jerusalem in New Testament times, enjoying home rule under Roman supervision, was governed by a Sanhedrin, consisting of the High Priest and 70 Elders. In St. Luke, the Lord Jesus, True God and True Man, but never flaunting the powers of Divinity - even His miracles are subtle, almost quiet, and unaccompanied by dramatic effects - chooses to share His mission with men. He alone would be the Revealer of God's Truth, but He would send men, Disciples, to bring that Truth to other men. He alone would be the final Judge of the living and the dead, but He would send men, Disciples, to help other men prepare for that judgment.

Further, in chapter 10 of Genesis the venerable text listed the 70 nations of the world known to the ancient Hebrew authors. Here in chapter 10, St. Luke gets the attentive reader prepared for Jesus' command in chapter 24 of Luke, verse 47: "Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem". From chapter 10 of Genesis, the number 70 stands for all the nations of the world. The Disciples of the Lord Jesus were to bring the good news that, as Archbishop Sheen famously put it, Life is Worth Living, to every nation of the human race. Life is worth living, because there is forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. Life is worth living because in Jesus Christ there is knowledge of what a truly worthy human life looks like.

2. The Lord Jesus sends the 70 Disciples out as harvesters. Salvation is described as a harvest in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. A harvest, however, does not gather itself. The crop may be ready, but the work of harvesting must be done. The crop is ready. People know that they have guilt. They have no idea what to do with that guilt, so they try either to drown it, or to transfer it. People try to drown their guilt in alcohol, entertainment, or simply being busy. It never works. One of my brothers worked for a while in the 90s as a bartender in Manhattan. Many people, once they got a fair amount of liquor in them, would start to tell them their regrets. My brother used to say, only half jokingly, that the Archdiocese of New York should attach a confessional

chapel to bars, so that the bartender could say “I can’t do anything to help, but if you’re Catholic there’s someone next door who can do something for you” Sin can’t be drowned in alcohol, but it can be drowned in the Holy Spirit. In St. John’s Gospel, the consistent image of the Holy Spirit is Water. In Baptism, sin is wrestled under the water and drowned (which is why, even if immersion is impossible, I use a lot of water in Baptisms). In the Sacrament of Penance, Baptism is renewed. The Confession of sins is going under the water, and the Absolution is being lifted up again into newness of life. The work of harvesting people for salvation is the work of all the Church, but in a particular way it is the work of priests. “The harvest is abundant, but laborers are few”, says the Lord. One rule of harvests in the ancient and medieval worlds was that everybody helped, the task of gathering in the harvest being a matter of life and death. Every member of the Church has his or her part to play in the great Harvest of souls, but the role of priests is particularly important. Anyone can hear someone’s confession of guilt and regret, but only a priest can touch that guilt and regret with the power of Jesus’ Christ’s Death and Resurrection, calling down the Holy Spirit given to the Disciples in chapter 20 of St. John for the forgiveness of sins, so that confessing of sin becomes actual drowning of sin, and the sinner can be born again into newness of life. Right now we simply don’t have enough priests. The newest priest ordained for our Diocese, Seth Hoestettler, is a good man, called by the Lord right out of the Air Force Academy to enter seminary and become a “Lead Harvester”, so to speak, in the Great Harvest. We simply need more like him. I don’t know our youngest seminarian, but I do know an excellent Annapolis midshipman who has been his friend for years and speaks of him with great praise, so I am confident he is a good man. We simply need more like him. As a born, raised, and returned Wyomingite, I find it humiliating that our Diocese has only three seminarians. That simply is unacceptable. The Harvest of souls ready for salvation here is abundant, but laborers are absurdly few. So, as the Lord Jesus directs, “ask the Master of the Harvest to send out laborers for His Harvest”; and, if you are eligible, ask yourself if the Lord means for you yourself to become one of the “Lead Harvesters”, an Elder of the New Testament, a Priest of the Church.

3. The Lord Jesus sends the 70 Disciples on mission, with a command to be mobile, traveling light and unencumbered. Every member of the Church should ask himself if he or she has become too entangled with worldly good to do the Lord’s work. In the marvelously energetic 13th Century, the various groups of Friars, Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian, and Carmelite, electrified the Christian world by committing themselves to live out this passage as literally as possible, with neither true homes, nor property, nor money. Maximum mobility for mission remains the charism of Friars. This is not the charism of Monks, nor is it the charism of Diocesan Priests. Friars are to be as mobile as possible, while Monks are to be as embedded as possible. Diocesan Priests, it seems to me, are exactly halfway between these two. Diocesan Priests have to be mobile enough to serve the needs of the regional Church, the Diocese of Archdiocese (in our case, the Diocese of Cheyenne, taking in the State of Wyoming). At the same time, part of the charism of Diocesan Priests is being embedded in a local community Church, the Parish. Being mobile and being embedded are in tension with each other,

since being embedded is a matter of relationships, and relationships take time. The balance between being mobile and being embedded is delicate, calling for constant adjustments. How much time is needed for a diocesan priest to become embedded in a local community? I know a fine Catholic man who, for several years when he was much younger, was a pastor for a certain Evangelical Protestant denomination. In his denomination, they talked about the rule of 3-7-12: it takes three years for people to be comfortable enough to start to open up to a pastor, it takes seven years for people to start to reveal to him their deep wounds, and it takes twelve years for them to trust him unqualifiedly. I suspect there is something to this. If there is, the modern Roman Catholic approach to pastorates is possibly a mistake; but that is only a personal doubt and, as they say, way above my paygrade. My duty is to be mobile enough to respond to the Bishop's request to come to work on the Harvest here in Powell. Now, I liked Lander, and I am confident that I will like Powell. I did good work in Lander, despite some mistakes. I am aware that I will make some mistakes in Powell, but I am also confident that I will do good work. Like anyone, I am better at some things than others. I trust that, the Lord helping, there will be people to assist me with those things I'm not so good at, and that together we can be thankful for those things I am quite good at. I trust that you will be satisfied with my work since, in the end, you are the people who pay me. I know that I will work hard, and trust that I will merit the Lord's words "The laborer deserves his payment"

Since high school days, I have been a Lord of the Rings fan. I have to say that Powell reminds me a little of the Shire. Unfortunately, I don't remind myself at all of a Hobbit. I know less than I should about plants and all growing things (and I certainly don't have hair on my feet) I have a Dwarf's stout legs, and an Elf's fondness for music, history, and stories. Whatever we are, all of us together face an enemy, the enemy about whom we are warned about in chapter five of 1 Peter, a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. As we see in today's Gospel passage, however, as the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and His power made present, the devil and his minions get beat up, and have to retreat. Another good Catholic man I know, also a Protestant minister in his younger days, recalls his series of sermons on the Book of Revelation, sermons that he summarized in two words: Jesus wins. So he does. And therefore we rejoice today, because the victor over sin and death has written our names in Heaven.