

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle C, 7.7.19

Isaiah 66:10-14/Galatians 6:14-18/

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

THE LABORERS AREN'T FEW ... THE LABORER IS YOU!

In the late 1800's a man from Italy by the name of Vilfredo Federico Pareto came up with a theory: *In cause and effect, the majority of effects can be attributed to the minority of the causes.* The principle for which he is best known is popularly dubbed the 'rule of 80/20.' Pareto showed that, on the average, 80 per cent of the results in a situation can be attributed to 20 percent of the possible cause. For example:

- 20% of the drivers
cause 80% of the accidents;
- 20% of the customers
produce 80% of the revenue;
- 20% of the population
produce 80% of the trouble;
- 20% of the supermarket's inventory
produces 80% of the profit.



The Pareto principle may have been articulated in the late 1800's, but the truth of it has been in operation for a long time. Today the gospel gives us a picture of the principle in action. A minority of seventy-two people volunteered to go on the road with Jesus' mission, while the bulk of the people who were attracted to Jesus probably hung back and didn't participate.

Of course, what Jesus was asking for from those who heard his word wasn't the easiest invitation. We can trace **three**

qualities that this group of volunteers needed in order to achieve success in their mission. **First**, the crowd of emissaries that was being sent out had to understand themselves as officially **commissioned** by God through Christ. That meant that they identified themselves with the One who sent them.



That's a great feeling, to be aligned with Christ and his message -- to be a spokesperson for the Good News of salvation. But it also meant accepting the flip side of being a disciple. If Jesus was rejected by many, well then, don't be surprised if you are rejected. *If you get shortchanged at times or aren't appreciated for the work you're doing -- tough luck!* Even in his own home town, relatives and neighbors tossed Jesus out and had no time for the message from the hometown boy. "Just who does he think he is?" they murmured under their breath and gossiped across their kitchen tables.

The **second** demand that made the invitation challenging to the volunteers was the fact that discipleship requires **energetic action**. No one wants to hear about work that requires effort in the middle of a summer weekend, but those who followed Jesus had to streamline their lives so they could get about their business without being bogged down. Jesus told them to *"Travel light! Don't burden yourself with excess baggage."* They were even instructed not to prolong the customary

greeting -- they had work to do. "Say Hi! and get on with your business!" They were to be agents on the move. And if a particular household or town didn't accept their message -- then get outta that town! There are more fish to be caught up the stream.

Thirdly, the volunteer crew of seventy-two who were dispatched found themselves **surprised** at the result of their efforts. They came back from their mission gloating. They boasted to Jesus: "*Master, even the demons are subject to us in your name!*" The disciples never anticipated that they would actually be successful in their meager efforts. Now they were filled with joy because they found out that Jesus was right. The challenge was great but so were the rewards. Occasional rejection was a hard pill to swallow, but the sweetness of seeing even one woman open herself to the Spirit of Jesus, even one child affirmed as a child of God, one man whose life was enriched because of the gift of faith made every step of the missionary journey worthwhile. While there exist forces of evil that can wreak havoc, such forces are no match for the capability and the power of the One God at work in our hearts.



In today's gospel Jesus offers the first prayer for vocations, for people who will share in his work: "*The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.*" That prayer is as

critical today as it was when Jesus began his ministry over two thousand years ago. You may have heard on the news about the agenda for an upcoming bishops' meeting at the Vatican in Rome this October. One of the topics that will be discussed is the possibility of ordaining married men to serve as priests in remote parts of the Amazon region. If the Synod of Bishops recommends such a move to ease celibacy rules and Pope Francis approves, it will be the first time in a thousand years that the Roman Catholic Church will have routinely ordained married men as priests.

Catholic doctrine doesn't require clerical celibacy, and married priests were common in the early church, but celibacy was always honored as a sign of special commitment. Recall what St. Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians "*An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided,*" Today, the relatively small Eastern Catholic Churches that follow the pope observe Orthodox practice, which allows the ordination of married men as priests though not as bishops. In recent decades, some married former Protestant clergy, almost all of them Anglicans or Episcopalians, have been ordained as Roman Catholic priests following their becoming Catholics. So we actually do have married clergy in Catholicism.

My own prayer is that the meeting of the bishops from the Amazon will be successful in proposing to ordain married clergy in that remote area, but also that it will set a precedent to expand the practice to other areas of the world where the need for priests is desperate, including here in the United States. Statistics show that over

half of the 45,000 priests in the U.S. Church will be retired or have died in the next few years. The average age of U.S. priests is in the late 60's... (and I'm just five weeks, three days and ?? hours from leaving that category). However, there is a more critical issue at stake here – and that issue is all of YOU. The foundational sacrament is Baptism, not Ordination. Ordained ministry is rooted in Baptism and a call to serve and empower the baptized. Ordination is a call to servant-leadership, not special privileges. St. Augustine said it correctly: *With you I am baptized; for you I was ordained.* That's the proper balance. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Second Vatican Council redefined the Church.



We no longer see the Church as a hierarchy with rulers over the ruled. The Council defined the Church as the whole "People of God." The bishops at that Council said that all the baptized "share in the mission of the whole Christian people for the building up of the body of Christ."

That's why Pope Francis recently said: *Every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change we so greatly need.... It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's people.* So if you wonder from where the leadership of the parish and church -- both lay and ordained -- will come: Look around you! Christ promised he will not leave us

orphans. The future leaders of our parish are here. The gospel today ends on a note of joy. It tells us: *The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name." And Jesus responded, "Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven."*



An ancient mystic said:
*I slept and dreamt life was joy...
 I awoke and saw life was service
 I acted and, behold, service was joy.*
 May God give each of you great joy
 in serving Him
 through your own baptismal vocation.

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