

**Homily: 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Ex 19: 2-6a; Rom 5:6-11 & Mt 9:36- 10:8)**

**We are Christians called by name to be with Jesus and to continue the mission by our very way of life.**

In today's first reading, we see the first part of our call. This reading tells us about one of the most famous covenants of God with his people in the Old Testament, the Sinai Covenant. Through it, God made Israel his people and offers to guide them toward a great destiny, and his people offer obedience.

If the people are faithful to their promise, they will forever be the sacred people, God's possession. If they fail due to their human destiny, God will not abandon them but will continue to search for them. This is God's way of acting. Although we fail, God never abandons us. Therefore, the saying is wise: "To err is human; to forgive divine."

As humans, we always fail in our part of our covenant with God. Like the Israelites in the Old Testament, we are quick to say, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Exodus 19:8). We are quick to say yes, we believe and will be faithful to our covenant. However, most times, we fail. Despite this, God never abandons us. He continues to be faithful to his covenant.

Coming to the second reading, we see Paul reminds us of how God continues to be faithful to us through his only Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation: "What proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners." Through the sacrifice of Christ, we are constantly reconciled with God. So, God never abandons us because he chose and called us to be his people.

The second aspect of our calling is to be Christ's disciples in a world quickly losing life's meaning, in a world where many feel abandoned, helpless, and hopeless. This call and mission were born from mercy and compassion for a dejected and abandoned world. Hence, today's gospel tells us, "At the sight of the crowds, Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd." (Mt 9: 36).

Therefore, as Christians, each of us has a unique call. By virtue of our baptism, God chose and called each of us by our new name, as he called his twelve apostles today, to help our abandoned world. This is a special call and invitation to lift and save our dejected world from ruins. It is a call to be faithful shepherds to one another. As God and his Son continue to show us mercy and compassion, we must also show mercy to one another, especially to those who have failed or erred in one way or the other.

Dear friends, again our call had a unique purpose and message. Today, Christ sent his disciples with specific instructions. "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and drive out demons." (Mt 10: 5-8)

Is Christ discriminating? No! Indeed, Christ came to save the world. However, our call and mission must start from somewhere. We must start this mission with ourselves. It must begin in our homes, families, and communities (mission *ad intra*). Later, the mission can be extended (*ad extra*) to others. Through this, Christ reminds us that Charity begins at home. This is important because we must first become God's people before becoming God's disciples.

I remember about Graham Stuart Staines was an Australian Christian missionary who came to India in 1965. He along with his wife Gladys Staines had been working in India (Odisha) since then as part of an evangelical missionary organization caring for people with leprosy and helping the tribal community in that area.

It was exactly 24 years ago, on January 23, 1999, that horrific incident happened. Graham Stuart Staines along with his two sons, Philip (aged 10) and Timothy (aged 7) were on their way to attend a village meeting. Since it was a long journey through the jungle, Graham Stuart Staines with his kids decided to take a break and spent the night in their vehicle. While they were asleep in the vehicle a violent mob of Hindu fanatics carrying weapons attacked Staines and burned them alive to death. The Hindu fanatic groups alleged that Staines and his family were converting the tribal community into believing in the Christian faith.

Gladys Staines on the death of her husband and two her sons stated: The Lord God is always with me to guide me and to help me try to accomplish the work of my husband, but I sometimes wonder why he was killed, and what also made his assassins behave in such a brutal manner on that night. It is far from my mind to punish the persons who were responsible for the death of my husband and my two children. But it is my desire and hope that they would repent and be reformed. Gladys Staines with her daughter Esther continued to live and work in India until she returned home to her native country of Australia.

The enquiry commission then set up by the government of India on the brutal killing of Graham Stuart Staines and his two kids, later found that although some tribals had been baptized at the camps, there was no evidence of forced conversions. I believe, the Staines family preached the gospel to the people through their very way of life

than with mere words. As St. Francis of Assisi would say, “Preach the Gospel at all times; and when necessary, use words.”

Dear friends, let us pray to God to keep us faithful to his call to be his people and disciples to continue the mission in our day today life.