

In today's gospel Jesus said "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." This is the bad news of the gospel. It is also an invitation. How many men are willing to step up and offer their lives to serve God and the people of God as priests. How many men and women are willing to offer their lives in service to God and the people of God through consecrated religious life? How many parents actively encourage those vocations in the home? Beyond that, what are the laborers actually doing? They are proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth, in other words evangelizing, introducing people to Jesus. Is that just the job of the ordained ministers of the church and the consecrated religious? The work of evangelization belongs to every single baptized person and, in fact, you guys can reach far more people than I can in your families, workplaces, sports teams, and your circle of friends. Luke's gospel makes that very clear with the commissioning and sending of the seventy-two. Everybody needs to get involved.

What is it we are supposed to proclaim to the ends of the earth? Paul told us in the letter to the Romans. "Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." Paul wasn't only writing to people who were alive in Rome 2000 years ago; he's writing to us today. God proves his love for US in that while WE WERE STILL SINNERS CHRIST DIED FOR US!

Every single one of us has sinned. Did Paul write that to make us feel bad about ourselves? Am I emphasizing what he wrote to make us feel bad? NO!!! That passage is a reminder of how much God loves us. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. God loves us and sent his son as expiation for our sins. God became man so that he could pay the price for our sins that we cannot pay ourselves. The innocent Son of God allowed himself to be tortured and nailed to the cross and put to death so that the debts we have individually incurred through our sins could be paid in full. Jesus died for us because he loves us and he wants us to always be with him. He wants us with him in heaven for eternity.

Look at the crucifix. Better yet, go home and watch the Passion of the Christ. Or read a scientific/medical explanation of what a person would have experienced while being crucified. That is what Jesus did for us out of his own free will. How do we respond to that? What does it mean when people say—and I have heard people say this—I don't believe in sin? Ot that sin isn't really very

serious. Why, then, did Jesus die? Why would Jesus have allowed himself to experience the excruciating torture of the cross if sin wasn't a big deal? What does it say when we hold on to our sins, when we refuse to say we are sorry? Keep in mind that nothing impure can come into the presence of God. If we hold on to our sins, if we refuse to ask for forgiveness for our sins, those sins make us impure—we cannot enter into God's presence. When we hold on to our sins, when we refuse to say, "I am sorry," we are telling Jesus that we don't want to be with him. He wants us to be with him because he loves us; if our actions—or lack of actions—say we don't want to be with him, what are we actually saying to Jesus?

After the Resurrection Jesus established the sacrament of reconciliation. We heard this on Divine Mercy Sunday, the first Sunday after Easter. Jesus appeared to the Apostles and gave them his authority to forgive or retain sins. The church teaches that that authority was passed on to the successors of the apostles (our bishops) and to their coworkers (our priests). Why would Jesus establish a sacrament if he didn't want us to use it? Do we have to go to sacramental confession for every single sin we commit? No. St John tells us this in one of his letters. Some sins are less serious; the Church calls these venial sins. They weaken our friendship with God. Other sins are so serious that they break our friendship with God; the Church calls these mortal sins. Venial sins can be absolved through a simple act of contrition like the one we say at the beginning of mass. Mortal sins are so serious that they can only be absolved through the ministry of the Church in sacramental confession.

This isn't so we have to be embarrassed or afraid of confessing our sins to a priest. In the confessional, like in the sanctuary during Mass, the priest is acting "in persona christi" in the person of Jesus. The priest is a physical sign of the presence of Jesus, acting under his authority. When the priest says the words of absolution, it is God himself who is forgiving our sins. Nothing is more liberating than physically hearing those words telling us we are absolved—forgiven—of our sins. Many people carry the weight of sin around with them for years. Sacramental confession cuts us free from that burden. There will still be a mess that needs to be cleaned up but at least we can go forward knowing that God has forgiven us and we have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus.

Sin is slavery. We have been captives and Jesus came to set us free. He wants to forgive us and heal us. Why does he do it? God is love; it is as simple as that. But we need to let him do his work.