

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 6th 2014

Today's gospel brings a familiar message from Jesus, a message often referred to in conversations about mission and heard in "missioning" ceremonies. Jesus sends us out into the world in simplicity, as his disciples, carrying only our trust in the goodness and generosity of others, our faith in God and a message of repentance, e.g. inviting people to a change of mind, of heart, of conduct. It is the latter half of the gospel passage that caught my attention today: "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." I imagine the disciples being told to stay somewhere long enough to get acquainted – don't flit from place to place giving a superficial message. After that, if there is no interest or curiosity, take off. It is interesting to note that the message is not: "Whoever does not agree with you, stay there until they change their minds and hearts", or, "slip out so you don't step on anyone's toes".

There is great wisdom here for our conversations today about things that matter to us – conversations about values, faith, morality, and how we are to live with one another.

How are we to receive the message of another? We welcome them and listen to them, giving them an open mind and an open heart. We don't have to agree with them – just give them a hearing. Consider their arguments; imagine ourselves in their place and see it from their point of view. How are we to respond when another does not hear our message? Walk away. Where did we get the idea that if people don't agree with us it is our job to keep trying to persuade, or worse, attack them – either with words or weapons? Why do so many of our young folks feel that they need to keep their thoughts about significant issues to themselves so they don't offend someone's culture, religion, beliefs or sentiments? Conversation about differences doesn't need to be offensive.

This kind of dialogue needs wisdom, courage and sensitivity. We need to speak out in order to continue the search for truth and justice in our time. It also requires a discerning heart, a heart resting in divine truth and goodness. Our job is to invite, but to change minds, hearts and behavior is the work of the Holy One.

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