

ORDINARY PEOPLE TRAVELING LIGHT (Mk 6:7-13)

When I look out from this ambo, what I see are several hundred "ordinary" people, and I say that with the utmost respect. Today we hear Jesus sending out his 12 disciples, 12 "ordinary" people, and it doesn't get more ordinary than those 12 at the time of their sending. There were 4 fishermen, Andrew, Peter, James, and John; there was an accountant, Matthew; there was a rebel, Simon the Zealot; and the others their professions were so non-descript as to not even be mentioned. God uses the ordinary people of every age to spread his message of love, of repentance, of forgiveness, and of mercy. Two people of our age come to mind who were ordinary yet loved in extraordinary ways. One is Nelson Mandela, a poor, black man from South Africa during the time of white domination in that country. He was thrown into prison for 40 years simply for seeking justice for all people of his country. Once released from prison he became president of his country, then later won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in uniting all the people of his country through forgiveness of those who had persecuted the people of his country. An ordinary man.

The second person I think of is Mother Theresa, just a tiny, ordinary woman from Central Europe who served God in the midst of abject poverty, terrible working conditions, among the dying in the streets of one of the most congested cities in the world. You wouldn't think that anyone would even notice what she was doing in such a remote location of the world. Yet her sainthood is without question, even though she claims not to have felt the closeness of God for many years. She, too, won the Nobel Peace Prize for the comfort and healing she brought into the darkest corners of human life. An ordinary woman.

I have no doubt that within this congregation of "ordinary" people there are "extraordinary" stories of how the love of God has been spread throughout our community and possibly throughout the world because they heard the call of God and went out. And my guess is that they would downplay anything which they have done as being only what they felt compelled to do --- compelled, called by God to bring healing and compassion to his children, and they responded, just like Peter and Andrew, James and John, and the rest of the Apostles.

One of the most interesting things about this gospel passage is that the writer makes sure that we know that they took **nothing** with them on their journey. They were to travel "light."

There was a tennis player who had made it to the top of the tennis world, then left the game for a few years. But the passion for tennis wouldn't leave, so he returned to the game. When he did, he underwent a rigorous training program

to become as nimble and light on his feet as he could be. You can't have any extra pounds around your mid-section when you have to chase shots from one end of the court to the other. Andre Agassi was known for chasing down shots that other tennis players could never have reached. He once again reached the heights of the tennis world because he had shed everything that was not necessary to be at the top of his game.

We are called to travel light spiritually by the Lord as did the Apostles 2,000 years ago. We are called to rid ourselves of attachments to things of this world which hold us back from living out obedience to the message of God's love, Jesus' way of life. Attachments become obsessions and keep us from focusing all of our energies on doing God's will. Certainly, one of those attachments which we have to let go of is that to money and possessions. Money and possessions in and of themselves are not the problem; it's our attachment to them that interferes with our ability to follow the will of God. These days we constantly hear about the financial condition of our world and people in it who are in dire straits, and it creates fear within us. Fear is not of God. This country is the wealthiest, most affluent country the world has ever known, but this wealth has not brought us happiness and love, but rather has brought fear, fear that we won't have enough, fear that we will lose it all. Spreading the message of love for one another is almost impossible in the midst of such fear. We are called to be like the first Apostles, to travel without any attachment to money or possessions. "Ordinary" people traveling "light" is what Jesus asks of us. Several years ago when Hurricane Katrina struck the New Orleans and Mississippi Gulf Coast area, there were thousands of people who went to help the people of those areas recover from the devastation to their homes and their livelihoods. The living conditions for those volunteers were pretty stark. As I considered whether or not I would volunteer to help, what was foremost in my thoughts was not what could I do to help but rather how would I live without my daily comforts, hot running water, clean clothes, a comfortable bed, etc. And my attachments to my nice, soft life kept me from helping my brothers and sisters in need. I know that there were some from our parish who did go and help out. I am not worthy to unfasten their shoes and wash their feet. They were truly Jesus' apostles, ordinary people traveling light.

There are some attachments which might be obvious --- attachments to alcohol, drugs, sex, or gambling which can become addictions and ruin our lives. But one of the other attachments, which is probably not so apparent, which we are called to give up is our need for the approval of others, to be accepted by them and thought of as a good person, regardless of who the other person is. We like to "fit in" with the crowd and "to go along to get along." But in reading the life of Jesus, I notice that he didn't go along with the crowd, rather the crowd came to him because he had the message of love and forgiveness, of mercy and compassion, things which we are all craving in the depths of our soul. Listening to derogatory jokes or disparaging remarks about someone else without saying anything to curb the behavior because we don't want to appear

to be odd or a goodie goodie only builds barriers to living as a community of sisters and brothers in Christ. The workplace offers many opportunities for us to live out our Christian values if we are willing to stand up for what is right behavior rather than going along with the prevailing business practice simply to be part of the team.

Then there are other attachments to things like anger which we consider justified, held resentments over past hurts, and unforgiveness to make us feel self-righteous. Jesus spent much of his public life preaching about our need to forgive, even our enemies. So those of us who have been divorced are called upon to forgive our exes for their past actions towards us. That's a tough one, I know, because I am reminded of it every time we travel back to Louisiana to see our family there, and I have to be in the presence of my former wife. To spread the Gospel of Love I am called to let go of those resentments and to forgive, seventy times seven times. And it's amazing how much lighter I am spiritually when I let go of those attachments. **Ordinary people traveling light** is who we are called to be, just like the Apostles those many years ago.

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July 12, 2009