

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, C – July 3, 2022 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Bham – 5pm Sat. Vigil; 7:15, 8:30, & 11am Sunday Masses – 800 words

To understand the gospel this Sunday, we must go back to last Sunday’s passage. Jesus had “set his face” toward Jerusalem, “resolutely determined to journey” there. And precisely because of that, a village of Samaritans that he and his disciples tried to enter would not welcome him. The Samaritans had similar beliefs as the Jews, but their temple was not in Jerusalem, but at a place called Mount Gerizim. They did not accept the legitimacy of the Jerusalem temple, and this was an opportunity for them to make that point by refusing even basic hospitality.

So in our passage this week, which flows from that previous one, the Lord is sending out his disciples to all the places where he intends to visit – which surely include other Samaritan villages and towns. Thus he equips them on how to meet with rejection. They are to be simple, not arriving as a caravan laden with supplies, but just with the clothes on their backs, relying on the generosity of those whom they encounter for all they need. And they are both to offer peace to those whom they attempt to visit and to leave with that peace if rejected.

What the Lord is instilling in his disciples here is confidence in the message they bring. What they have to offer is the truth about the Kingdom of God – and if others will not accept it, they are not to dilute it, to compromise on it, or otherwise to alter it. Some might have been tempted to say, “You know, you Samaritans are so similar to us; let’s just ignore our differences – after all, who can know for sure which temple is the true one?” But Christ does not offer that option; no, his disciples possess the truth and the true worship, and must insist on it.

By adding the gesture of shaking the dust off their feet – completely dissociating themselves from the place that rejected them – is effectively a psychological aid to making their point. Have you ever been shaken by another person’s confidence, causing you to question yourself? This is what that was supposed to do. It’s as if to say, “We insist – and to further make our point, we will wash our hands of you entirely.” I am not sure what our equivalent today would be – perhaps blocking the person on social media! Alas, we are living in odd times.

The disciples’ efforts to bring all into the true worship of God’s kingdom, however, was accompanied not only by words and gestures, but also by what would have been understood as classic “signs of the kingdom”. They cast out demons; they healed the sick; in short, they set people free. Jesus, in effect, equipped the disciples in such a way that they could appeal to the whole of each person whom they encountered: to mind and to heart, to body and to soul, to theory and to experience. The disciples had something of great substance to offer.

And their response – returning to the Lord full of joy – shows that they also encountered success. His way works. It does not work always, for human freedom remains, and some do choose to reject him and his gift. The disciples surely did have to shake the dust from their sandals on some occasions. But there were many others who accepted them and their message, and the disciples’ confidence thus was bolstered. Christ’s way is a surprising, unconventional one. But if we take him at his word and step out in faith, we will see positive results.

As we pray the Master to send out laborers for his harvest – the one command he gave us concerning vocations –, it occurs to me that it would be good for us to pray also for those who are already laboring. For bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and lay evangelists who may be struggling to have confidence in Christ’s teachings and ways; for those who have encountered heavy doses of rejection in their work; indeed, for those who have fallen into the trap of compromising on non-negotiables or settling for less than what the Lord intends to give.

The true challenge for all is to keep the cross before them always, as St. Paul spoke in the second reading. It is the means of our salvation – the narrow gate through which all must enter, the path which all must follow – to find everlasting joy in the eternal Jerusalem. As the first reading said, “In Jerusalem you shall find your comfort”: what awaits us beyond the way of the cross is a place of great abundance, peace, and security. This way is worth it! Our prayers thus rise up for all who are laboring to lead others on this way – and that more would respond to the Master’s call.