

14th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C”
July 2-3, 2022

Like lambs among wolves

Readings: Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Today’s Gospel from Saint Luke is unique in that it is the only one in which Jesus appointed “seventy-two others,” who were sent out in pairs. Scholars engage in text criticism, comparing ancient manuscripts. Some early manuscripts read seventy,¹ while another,² the Vatican’s early 4th century manuscript, reads seventy-two. But what appears to be a throw away detail, came to have great spiritual meaning.

Clearly, the mission of the seventy-two parallels that of the twelve. But there are important differences. The word disciple comes from the Greek meaning student, but clearly this group of seventy was distinct from the Twelve. A medieval text even attempts to list all 72 names, but the truth is we have no idea. So, what happened to them? Have we forgotten them?

Eastern orthodox churches surely have not! They celebrate a feast in their honor on January 4. Sadly, the Scriptures do not say what happened to them, at least not directly. There is a passage in John’s Gospel in which Jesus says, “For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” A few verses later we learn as a result of this, “many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.” Who knows?

In the book of Numbers,³ Moses gathered 70 elders at the meeting tent to assist him. Two others chosen, Eldad and Medad, did not go, yet “the spirit came to rest on them also,” thus the 72. In Genesis 11, the number appears as the “table of nations,” a catalogue of all the people in the world. This is an example of typology in the bible, a pre-figurement. Jesus, in making this connection with Moses, demonstrates that his mission is in continuity with this account and fulfilling the Old Testament message.

¹ *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Alexandrinus*,

² *Papyrus 75* or *Codex Vaticanus*, ἑβδομήκοντα δύο (early 4th century)

³ Numbers 11:24-25, where Moses takes these elders, and he appoints them to help him administrate.

Our Catechism states that the one who reads the bible in this way “discerns in God’s works of the Old Covenant prefiguration of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son.”⁴

The fact that these names have faded into obscurity should not trouble us, as the “who” is less important than the role they played. I suspect the names Dennis Ledon, Louis Caillet, and Thomas Gibbons mean little to you. A century from now, the names Skluzacek, Johnson and Ubel will mean little to future parishioners sitting in those pews. We all served as rectors of the Cathedral. Some served for decades, others for just a year or two. None is indispensable, and many are forgotten. That doesn’t matter.

What matters is the mission. The disciples were called and sent on a mission to proclaim Christ. The ministry continues today, and when the Gospel is proclaimed, at times we will feel like lambs among wolves. I saw an incredible interview with Kristan Hawkins of Students for Life. She was interviewed on a cable network, clearly not known to be friendly to her convictions, on the very day of the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision.

I met Kristin at a conference four years ago, and a more joyous, articulate, and calm voice for life, I have not met. Though Kristan never cited her Catholic faith, the interviewer, sensing the argument was turning, went to the tired line of questioning her about imposing her Catholic belief about the beginning of life. Kristin rightly pivoted, pointing to science regarding the beginnings of human life. She never once appeared agitated by the line of questioning. Her composure derives from her strong faith.

By the end, the interviewer was clearly impressed by her poise. The essence of Christian witness is in realizing that truth is never a “gotcha” moment. It is a total commitment to witness to others in love. It is safe to say that lambs win over more hearts than wolves. Seventy or seventy-two disciples? Who knows? The real question: “How many are there today?”

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph #128.