

In the good old days, people got lost. They persevered, figured it out and made their way back to the correct road to continue their journey. Today, in an instant, we call up Siri, check our phone's GPS and re-route. It removes all the adventure from being lost. When traveling in rural Canada in search of an obscure geographical tri-point, the border agents warned me that it is easy to get lost and that GPS did not work there.

I readily produced my hand drawn map indicating precisely how far I would travel on each dirt road until I reached the destination. Mildly impressed with my map, he said it was correct, but quickly added- "It rained last night, and the roads have a lot of mud. If you get stuck there is nobody to help you." Taking that as a direct challenge to my skills, I doubled down. "Thanks for the info," I said. He offered one final bit of advice: "One more thing...do not even think of crossing into the US when you reach the marker, an alarm will sound." Welcome to Saskatchewan!

By my presence here today, you know that I did not get lost. I succeeded, but not without asking myself several times during the 30-minute journey on an obscure dirt road, "What am I doing?" "What if he was right...what if I do get stuck?" Nobody wants to get lost and sometimes we do things that could be problematic. Still, we pride ourselves on being resourceful.

When Jesus says that he was sent only to the "lost sheep" of the house of Israel, it is a rather peculiar phrase. What about the rest of us? Did Jesus only come for others? What about me?" When Jesus commissioned the Twelve he told them, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Mt 10:5-6)

Today's gospel begins by noting Jesus' withdrawal to Tyre and Sidon. The passage immediately prior to today's details a growing conflict with the Jews over ritual traditions. Perhaps he withdrew because he was frustrated

with growing tensions over hand washing and other ritual prescriptions. Even in the newer pagan territory, his reputation had preceded him. The Canaanite woman addressed him with the messianic title of “Son of David,” crying out, “Lord, help me.” That is a significant development

When rebuffed by the apostles, she continues in perseverance. She was always respectful and polite, and in the end her persistence finally won her a hearing. God’s love will have no end; He is not taking back the offer because by His death and resurrection, he has won for us our redemption, paving the way for the salvation of all, Jew and Gentile alike.

The real distinction here is the first mission to the Jews, followed later by the mission to the Gentiles. Church teaching has been clear on this point: “The Jewish faith...is already a response to God’s revelation in the Old Covenant...for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”¹ God remains faithful to our ancestors in faith, the Jewish people who were “the first to hear the Word of God.”² Later, the mission to the Gentiles began.

There is a tendency to stay within a relatively small sphere of people who share similar outlook on life. But it is equally our task to seek out those who are lost. And who are they today? More numerous than those who have rejected Christ are those who have never truly encountered him. Many babies are not being baptized by their parents. There were 806,138 infant Catholic baptisms in 2010; A decade later, that number has dipped to 582,331, a 28% decrease.³ The birth rate hasn’t decreased to the same degree- parents simply are not baptizing their children.

These are the lost sheep of today whom we are called to engage, inviting them to God’s “holy mountain” into his “house of prayer,” as Isaiah described in our first reading. Our very future depends upon our willingness to reach out, inviting them to a relationship with Christ.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph # 839

² Roman Missal, Good Friday: General Intercessions VI.

³ Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA): Georgetown University