

**11th Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 15, 2008
4 pm Liturgy**

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There are three things I believe we can learn from today's readings. And they each have little aphorisms that seem appropriate.

The first comes is attributed to a mid-19th century professor of Greek and Literature at Oxford. His name was Benjamin Jowett. He is credited with first saying: "The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit of doing them." How true that remains into our own time. And Jesus gives a wonderful example in today's gospel. He sends out his apostles with extraordinary powers and a remarkable announcement: the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And they do extraordinary things in his name. And no one needs to worry about taking credit for the remarkable things that happen. The only credit goes to God; they don't have a clue what they are doing or have just done!

But the scene in Matthew's gospel is not some anonymous send-off to do good and avoid evil. No, Matthew makes a clear point of saying that Jesus called each of them by name. It is an intensely personal invitation. It is a scene explicitly reminiscent of the Jewish scriptures (one of Matthew's favorite themes). How often do we read in Isaiah or in the Psalms: "I have

called you by name and you are mine?” Go work wonders, and don’t worry about who gets the credit for it.

Now the context of this whole scene is Jesus feeling great compassion for the hoards in front of him because they are, Matthew says, like sheep without a shepherd. Now I realize many of us get upset thinking of ourselves as sheep. Sheep are mostly dumb and quite passive. But really now, let’s keep things in perspective. Compared to the power of God, compared to the wonders of creation, compared to the glories of the kingdom preached by Jesus himself, as the Psalmist questions: “Who are we, really, that anyone should take much notice?” In comparison to God, being called a sheep doesn’t seem that bad to me.

And here comes a second aphorism, also from the mid-19th century. It is the cry of a warrior-prince going into battle who once said: “I am more afraid of an army of 100 sheep led by a lion than 100 lions led by a sheep.” Maybe we don’t need to feel so insulted at being called sheep. Because we do have a Lion leading us—if we follow.

Jesus still invites us—each by name, quite explicitly—to do the same wonders—and even greater ones—in His name. Yes, you and me, here and now, today! We are still like those sheep Jesus first saw. But we have a Lion in our

midst. I think of St. Ignatius' rather famous colloquy questions: "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What will I do for Christ?"

Today's gospel is not just a pious story from yesteryear. It asks us again today to follow and to give—of ourselves. The gospel ends: "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give."

And when will you start? I leave you with my third aphorism from the pen of George Bernard Shaw: "If you take too long deciding what to do with your life, you'll find you've done it." Listen to God speaking to Moses and the people—speaking again today to us: "You shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all others, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation."

My brothers and sisters, that's us! Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give—give to each other. And come, follow me.