

Homily for the 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year (B), St Ignatius Church, July 16, 2009.  
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What can we do with a gospel like that, which seems so wildly impractical! Yes, true enough that we are all disciples – and we go on trips with considerably more equipment than Jesus talked about. And then, there is that image of rejection. What is the meaning of it all?

We hope a scholar is right who says that this gospel may be an account by the evangelist of a mission later on to a difficult people who rejected them. St. Paul ran into that kind of situation. Another approach: the gospel could be a reminder that in life's journey right now we should travel light – with a lot fewer things than we now possess. When we move or someone dies we discover just how much stuff we have accumulated—closets, garage, and basement are not big enough to hold it all. Could we share some of it now, before we die?

What is this reference to evil spirits? In those days it simply referred to sick people, because they believed that all illness came from a demon inside. (Perhaps you felt that way with a case of the flu!) They knew nothing of germs or viruses. To talk of demons, demonic, and devil is really to use a symbolic language for evil. And evil remains a mystery; it is even called the mystery of iniquity. Some of it is explainable because we have bodies which are mortal and subject to disease. Some evils are due to the finite or limited nature of creation; it does not work perfectly, as tornadoes and earthquakes remind us. I really don't know why God didn't make a perfect world, but one result is that good people try to overcome evil with works of healing, goodness, compassion. We overcome ignorance by teaching, and hunger by feeding people. Jesus did both – two weeks from today we will hear again the story of the loaves and fishes. It is told so many times – seven – for a number of reasons; it reminds us of the Mass, what we are doing right now, which feeds our spiritual hunger. But also, that we should share food and money – and ourselves – with those who have less.

**There are two halves to a circle. You cannot have a circle with one half missing. And you cannot have a true follower of Jesus who is not committed in some way to service.** Worshiping the almighty is important or we would not be here. But so is service to the poor. Remember how Jesus taught the Great Commandment – the love of God and neighbor. Two halves to the circle. And remember how he made service to neighbor very real by telling the Good Samaritan story. If you know that parable well, you know that to help the man abandoned and dying involved risk, spending time and money, and forethought—even providing for his future. If we are disciples called by Jesus, as the Twelve were called, we have to find ways to be Good Samaritans.

This parish (which I can praise objectively, being a non-Jesuit!) certainly gives great thought to worship – look at this beautiful church, the new baptistery with the flowing water, the great organ and music we always have, the lovely baptismal tower (where I hope someday we install a church bell!), this splendid altar. And look at you, the

worshippers, here on a beautiful Sunday to thank God for his blessings, to offer and receive Christ. But St. Ignatius is also a parish mindful of service – to the homeless shelter we long ago adopted, and assistance to our sister parishes in Jamaica and Roxbury which are not so well off. And many other works of service the bulletin announces each week. It is a good scene; the prophet Amos whom you heard today would be pleased. St John also – he has a blunt question that “if you cannot love the neighbor whom you see, how can you love God whom you cannot see?” We do see God indirectly – in the splendor of creation (did you see the full moon last week?) and above all, in the love and goodness of people. But we have been talking about genuine Christianity – not chasing after supposed images of the Blessed Virgin in the stump of a tree – in Ireland last week. (Not along ago it supposedly happened here on a bank window!) I don’t disparage genuine appearances of Mary at places like Lourdes and Guadalupe, but genuine religion is not chasing after signs and wonders. Nature is wonder enough (especially now that the sun has returned!)

So the gospel is really about Jesus sending out disciples to confront evil and replace it with good. We are all disciples. It goes along with our baptism.