

Our Gospel today continues the theme that we listened to last weekend, where we were asked to reflect on our call to be prophets. Today it calls us to be missionary, and its instruction to take nothing for the journey except a staff, - no bread, no haversack, no coppers for our purses, etc.

It reminds me of a discussion we had during our recent Chapter, where we came together to discern the direction of our future over the next 4 years and beyond. As I think you are aware, - for a number of years now we, the Augustinians, have brought a number of students from Vietnam to prepare them for their life as Augustinians and for the priesthood, with the aim of taking them back to Vietnam to establish the Order of St. Augustine there. One of those students was ordained now more than a year ago, while another will be in September.

Because the vocation situation in Vietnam is still favourable our Prior General feels that this is the right time for us to go there, and he wants us to do so before the end of 2019. That led to a discussion of how well-supported this first community needs to be, financially as well as spiritually. While we all agreed that these two men, together with an older mentor, will need our support, there was much back and forth about the things and finance they would need, but in the end the advice was that we should go in poor, for if we went in well-supplied that would be a dis-incentive to the people of Vietnam to assist us, and to appreciate the gift, the charism, which, as Augustinians, we bring.

As followers of Christ, the same applies to all of us, clergy and lay-people alike. If Christ, in his poverty and vulnerability cannot be recognised in us, then our value as witnesses to Christ, and as missionaries, is greatly diminished. So, let's look at that Gospel again, as it applies to all of us who are called to be witnesses to, and missionaries of Christ.

The first thing Jesus does as he sends out his disciples is to give them authority over unclean or evil spirits; - that is to say, over the evils that exist in our society: injustice, claims of privilege, abuse of power and lack of faith in God, - evils which we, first of all, need to come to grips with in ourselves, so we have credibility when we speak about this to others.

Then he tells us to go out two by two; - that is, to be a support to each other. That's good advice when planning new ventures, like our planned entry into Vietnam, but the call to be missionary is also individual, like the witness you bear at work or at home through your integrity and the principles you live by. Then your support comes from your faith community, your parish or the ministries you are involved in, which nourish your faith in practical ways, besides the regular practice of Mass and the other Sacraments. We all need support to live our faith, and to have at least one person to lean on, who supports us with prayer, and with whom we can share our challenges, and who's support is both comforting and energising.

The next thing Jesus tells us is not to bring bread or haversack not coppers for our purses. In other words: to come simply, to live simply, to let our faith in God speak. One of the messages Jesus taught was that the Kingdom of God is close at hand, and we can see that become a reality whenever people care for each other, as we saw with the rescue of that young football team from a deep cave in Thailand this week. We really don't want anything else. The other things we crave are most often an attempt to fill the emptiness which is brought about by a lack of mutual love in our lives.

The last thing Jesus mentions is to shake off the dust from their feet and move on, when a town will not listen to the message they have come to bring; that is: not to be paralysed by failure. None of us will have a 100% success rate in our missionary endeavours. We need to make sure we do and give of our best, and then move on. Otherwise we could be caught by the same malaise which paralyses our listeners.

So here we have four bits of advice from our Lord to his first missionaries and to us. We need to believe in our staff, our authority to overcome unclean and evil spirits, and to trust in God's providence for the material support we need. Then we are encouraged to rely on our faith community and to trust our spiritual companion, who can give us encouragement, support and prayer. And we are not to be paralysed and pre-occupied by failure. There are other towns, other people and other places that need to hear you, where the truth of Christ will be received.

As Christians we are on a journey. We are not wanderers, but pilgrims and missionaries. We have a purpose and a goal. And we have the truth. If the Lord gives you a mission, he will also, at the right time, give you the resources to carry it out.