



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Homily

[*Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 85; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13*]

A few weeks ago, I traveled to Prince Albert for the ordination of Bishop Stephen Hero. As I was getting things together for the trip, it occurred to me that I couldn't remember the last time I packed a suitcase. Travel has been on hold for a long time. Well, that is changing now, and as travel restrictions are lifted, we can expect more people to be on the move and many suitcases to get packed.

When we put things together to throw into the travel bag, the inevitable question arises: What do I need for the journey? To answer that we'll ask ourselves questions like, "What can I simply not do without? What is superfluous? Have I packed enough? Too much?"

The Gospel text for this morning raises this very question, "What do I need for the journey?", but poses it in reference to situations of far greater consequence than a vacation getaway or business trip. The immediate reference is to Christian mission. By extension it is also posed in relation to the journey of our entire lives. Let's consider each briefly.

In the passage we heard from Saint Mark, Jesus begins to send his apostles out on their missionary journeys. As he does, he tells them what to pack: nothing! They were to take with them no bread, no bag, no money, just a staff. I remember years ago celebrating my final mass at a parish, and this was the Gospel text. I confessed in the homily to being rather embarrassed at the many boxes of books and other things I had packed for the journey to my new assignment. Some parishioners tried to console me afterward by suggesting there must be a misprint in the Gospel, and that Jesus had really said "take only your stuff". Well, no, that's not what he said. He said, "Take nothing", by which he was teaching the apostles to rely in no way upon themselves but only on him. Jesus alone is enough. His grace is sufficient.

That same message comes to us today. As we undertake the missionary journey incumbent upon all of us in virtue of our baptism, we need pack nothing. Jesus alone suffices. We are sent to announce the plan of God, which St. Paul teaches has been fully revealed in Jesus Christ: God's plan to save the world by restoring all things in His Son. As baptized missionary disciples, we are sent wherever the Lord wills to send us – around the world or across the street. The odds will usually be stacked against us. From that arises the temptation to "fill a suitcase" either with clever plans and strategies, or with anger and fear. Sufficient, we must always remember, is the grace of Jesus Christ. We are to rely on nothing else, and must always be on guard against packing and carrying anything that will weigh us down and detract from the message.

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The travel instructions of the Lord apply more broadly as well to life in general. It is commonplace to speak of life as a journey, which leads by different “routes” mapped out by personal choices to a variety of “destinations”. Frequently, too, are we of the mindset that our suitcases need to be filled with as much as we can squeeze into them to provide for every contingency. Governing it all is the illusion that we each set our own direction, that each person is his or her own compass. As a result, what ends up filling the travel bag most often is a collection of useless worry, anxiety and fear as we discover that this journey of life most often takes us to situations beyond our control.

There is but one destination provided for everyone by the love of our God, and that is eternal life with Him. The only thing needed for the trip is faith in the Lord Jesus and in his all-sufficient grace. This faith, in fact, is not something that we carry, but which carries us. So, as both God’s children by adoption and missionary disciples of the Lord, let us pray in this mass for a deepening of the gift of faith, and the peaceful conviction that, for the trip, we need nothing apart from Jesus Christ.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
St. Joseph’s Basilica
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