

Susan's homily for the 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Take maps, case, water, money and a cross

I'm off on a journey. I'm a list maker. Ages before a trip I have my lists ready. A week before, I start packing. I'm booked, and know where I'm going. Map to find the way. Map for when I'm there. It's less than three hours, but I need to take a snack and water just in case. I have to have clothes, knitting or crochet, my meds and hot water bottle any time of year. Of course, with all I take, I need a car to get there. Who am I relying on? Myself, of course. Journeys can't always be like that. I am lucky in a way that I have all that luxury. We see on TV that we are in the greatest global migration of people in living memory. The world is in turmoil for so many reasons. People are being forced to make dangerous journeys with so very little. People today and in Jesus' day knew it was a risky thing to do with no planning, yet here we have Jesus sending his 70 out on such a journey.

Luke 8-10 sets out a very interesting mission strategy. First of all he goes out himself with his disciples, and has a wonderful reception. People turn up to listen and watch and see what he is doing. Then it's the turn of the twelve. They are given instructions very similar to those in today's reading, but without the tone of impending crisis. When they return, they spend time debriefing with Jesus. Now it's the turn of the larger group of disciples to go on a mission. It's always good to read around a Sunday reading, because usually it sets the scene of the reading.

There is a sense of great urgency in Jesus' commission to this big group. We see such urgency quite often in the gospels. Jesus is worried, because he is leaving them. Jesus tells them that it is as though all around them the fields are bursting with food, waiting to be harvested, perfectly ripe. Another day or two and it will rot, or be eaten by birds or animals. His listeners are agricultural and they know about the frenzy of work to get the food safely in. Jesus says the fields are empty and nobody is awake to know what is going on. That's why there is urgency; they must hurry on. Don't even stop long enough to say "Good morning". They don't have time to persuade people. Where they get a positive response straight away, they may stay and preach the good news. Otherwise, move on. There is no time to plant, only to gather in.

They are to rely entirely on God the Father for where they go and what they do. They are to put their faith and trust in God, with no doubts and hesitations and success will come. After their journey they come back full of their success. "The seventy returned with joy saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us'. He said, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning'."

What is very interesting about all these stories is how little attention is paid to the results of these missions. No interest in the numbers, or anything. When the big group comes back, Jesus deflects them from tales of success. "Do not rejoice ... that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice your names are written in heaven." Jesus seems only interested in the coming kingdom. His image of the harvest is key. The mission is about true life in the Kingdom. Without reaping the harvest of the kingdom they cannot have a true life. It is urgent. Now is the time for decision. The harvest won't wait, neither will the kingdom.

The harvest comparison comes back in Galatians. Clearly there are those in Galatia who would like to mix their new faith in Christ with their old ways. 'It won't work', says Paul. 'There is only one world. The old one is dead, nailed on the cross. The old world was selfish and competitive, but in the new one people help each other and bear one another's burdens. This new creation comes about through the cross of Christ. We are surely being told by this, just as the Galatians were that we must make every effort to give up our old ways. We aren't alone in this. Whilst we are quietly doing our Christian discipleship by word and example, we are living in the new order. Joying with the joyful, weeping with the sad, helping, comforting and encouraging – Jesus our brother is by our side, cheering us on, and supporting our efforts, but also enjoying seeing the bad being pushed aside by the good.

Of course, we of faith have to live in today's world. It would be no use us turning up at the airport with no passport and trying to get on the first plane to anywhere. But, in our life of faith, Jesus is telling us to trust and to try to leave behind our old ways that sometimes get in the way. Paul is always concerned about those who profess the faith with enthusiasm, but then drift back to old ways. Paul, as a good Jew, is faithful to the Law of Moses, but says that all Jesus did shows that The Law is fulfilled by Christ, and in love for all. The Galatians are encouraged to work for the good of all. They have the Cross of Christ to show the way of love. So have we (*hold up Cross*). In the Cross, we have all we need to guide our way in our pilgrimage of faith.

Amen.