

## **A Reflection for the 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year A**

Today's Gospel continues Jesus' discourse aimed at preparing the Twelve for their initial participation in his own ministry. While its immediate reference is to the first mission of the Apostles it relates to the life of the Church down through the ages. Thus it shaped both St Dominic's and St Francis' understanding of their own and their orders' apostolate. In this light we see today's Gospel as an opportunity to reflect on how the Church understands its mission today, especially as it relates to the lay faithful.

First of all the Church sees itself as carrying on the mission of our risen Lord. In the words of Vatican II, "The Church intends but one thing: to carry forward the work of Christ under the guidance of the befriending Spirit." (*Church in the Modern World*, 3) That is a basic insight into the Church.

The work or mission of Christ is briefly described in Vatican II's Decree on the Laity thus: "Christ's redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of humankind, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order." Its mission is both "to bring to all people the message and grace of Christ and to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the gospel" (*Apostolate of the Laity*, 5).

Thus Pope Saint John Paul II could say "If the Church makes herself present in the defence of, or in the advancement of man, she does so in line with her mission, which, although it is religious and not social or political, cannot fail to consider man in the entirety of his being."

The role of the lay faithful is to share in the whole mission of the Church. Thus while the clergy's primary role is to preach, celebrate the sacraments and be pastoral leaders the laity are also called to witness to Christ. A Council document could say that the laity "exercise an apostolate of evangelizing and sanctifying" (*Apostolate of the Laity*, 6), its ministry complementing the clerical ministry. An obvious example - it was because of my parent's faith that I was baptized and it was they who nurtured my faith by their example and teaching.

As well, the laity are called to witness to Christ by renewing in the Spirit of the Gospel the temporal order by "transforming the world from within." What this means has been further spelt out in the Council's document on the laity (*Apostolate of the Laity*, 2) "Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardour of the spirit of Christ."

The clergy's apostolate also includes the temporal order, in one way, for instance, by teaching and promoting social justice, so they too are involved in the whole ministry of the Church in a way that complements the mission of the laity.

Thus let us approach today's Gospel with confidence that through the Holy Spirit it will help us reflect on the way we participate in the mission of the Church in the service of our times.

**Fr David Willis OP**