

**Matthew 9: 36 - 10: 8**

36 When Jesus saw the crowds, he was moved to the depths of his heart, for they were overwhelmed and distressed like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest is indeed great, but unfortunately there are not enough workers. 38 Pray, therefore, to him who is the originator of this harvest to obtain laborers to serve this harvest." 10, 1 Then, having summoned his twelve disciples, he gave them authority over disturbed minds so that they could expel them and heal people with diseases and deficiencies. 2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, 3 Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector, James of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus, 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the same one who was going to betray him. 5 Jesus sent out these twelve disciples with the command, "Do not go to the Gentiles or enter the Samaritans. 6 Instead, concentrate on the lost sheep of the Jews of Israel. In your mission, proclaim that God's world has come near, healing the sick, raising the dead, restoring integrity to lepers, casting out evil impulses. As you have received freely, so give freely."

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Gospel commentary - Homily

**What is the Church?**

Here are two recent stories. First, there is that of Nathalie, a graduate of a business school, who, after working for the largest French commercial companies, was recruited to head the real estate subsidiary of Quebec province main investment institution where she and her team manage a real estate portfolio of \$77 billion in 19 countries. For the past two years, returns have averaged 12.4% per year, outperforming real estate benchmarks. Nathalie was recently recognized by the world's leading real estate executives and investors with the prestigious Career Award from the trade publication PERE (for Private Equity Real Estate). Nevertheless, as a wife and mother of three, her family remains her priority.

Then there is Anne-Marie's story. As children, she and her sister often changed addresses following the death of their father. After the first few years in Montreal, she and her mother moved to the United States and then back to Montreal. These years of instability made friendships difficult and landmarks non-existent. At school, she was teased. Then, at age 14, a conflict broke out with her mother who refused her new boyfriend, and Anne-Marie was placed in a foster home. At 18, she found herself in a supervised apartment. She worked at various jobs in restaurants and as a waitress. After a while, she gave birth to her son. But as time went by, alcohol prevented her from holding down a steady job. One day, after a night of drinking, she called the ambulance and went to the hospital of her own free will. This is the beginning of a long convalescence where she will join the group of street vendors who sell a magazine about homeless people in front of the subway stations.

Which of these two stories appeals to us the most? Which one inspires us the most? Which one is more pleasant to hear? I don't mean to oppose these two women or to make any judgement. But the feelings they arouse are different. And it is feelings that we are talking about in today's gospel.

Let's take up Matthew's account of the sending on mission, but starting at the end. What is the purpose of the mission? "Proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near, healing the sick, raising the dead, restoring the lepers to health, casting out demons". If we were to take this mission literally, no one would be qualified. Rather, we must understand the direction that is indicated: to heal human misery. When we lead someone to abandon suicide or to flee from alcohol, we raise him from the dead. When we lead someone to find a meaning to his life or to leave an environment that alienates him, we expel the demons. When we accompany the sick and patiently care for them, we proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. We could multiply the examples, because human misery has a million facets.

There is, however, a phrase in the gospel that might shock: "Concentrate rather on the lost sheep of the Jews of Israel". Historically, Jesus felt called to his people and the choice of twelve apostles was modeled on the twelve tribes that traditionally formed the people of Israel. It was only after his death-resurrection that it was realized that the gospel was addressed to the whole universe. But the restrictions in Jesus' mission contain an important message: we are not called to "save the world", but only the little piece of earth we occupy, only this little part of the universe that is open to us. Personally, I suffered from the ignorance of my parents and sometimes from their lack of openness to reality, and so I saw my mission as being oriented towards knowledge that enlightens and a heart that knows how to open itself to all that exists, without detour.

Why did Jesus send people on mission? To promote himself? To bring people to believe in God? To form a church? The motivation for sending people on mission is summarized as follows: "When Jesus saw the crowds, he was moved to the core, for they were overwhelmed and distressed like sheep without a shepherd." It is important to know that when Matthew puts these words into Jesus' mouth, he has just told the story of the healing of a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years and of the resuscitation of a prominent man's daughter, followed by the healing of two blind men and a possessed mute. It is at this point that Matthew speaks of people who are "overwhelmed" and "downcast", in short of people who are "broken" by life, a summary of human misery. What is Jesus' reaction? He is moved to the core. The Greek verb to describe Jesus' emotion is built around the word for guts, which is usually translated as: to be moved with compassion. So Jesus finds the situation so painful that it makes his stomach hurt. This is the motivation for sending out his disciples. Matthew gives us the image of sheep without a shepherd. What does this have to do with people who are "overwhelmed" and "downcast"? Shepherdless sheep are sheep that are not cared for, whose wounds are not bound.

Moved to the core by human misery, Jesus decides to send shepherds to care for the people. Matthew puts these words into Jesus' mouth: "The harvest is indeed great, but unfortunately there are not enough workers." Why is there a lack of workers? Let's go back to the story of our two women at the very beginning? Which one is the most attractive? Which one is the most difficult to read? It is only by letting our heart speak, as Jesus did, that we can become a worker and take an interest in people who are "broken" by life. What moves our heart can be very varied, and we are not called to the same things. But fundamentally, it is the same heart that moved Jesus to action.

Today, when we talk about the twelve apostles, we usually refer to the Church and its mission is often seen as having the objective of getting new recruits, like new members in a political party. Yet, originally, the Church is not a gathering of righteous people, but the great community of people moved to the core by human misery. Isn't it time to recover our original mission?