

Learning to Travel Light
July 11, 2021, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Mark 6:7-13
Fr. Brad

You have heard it said 'we are on a pilgrim journey in this life' and if any of you have been on a religious pilgrimage walk, a simple walk, or a long hike perhaps, you know you want to be careful about how much you carry with you, you don't want to carry too much.

A few years ago I walked the Camino of St. James and in northern Spain and observed how different people carried different distances and different people carry different amounts of things, some carrying a fair bit of stuff on their back to make sure they had enough of what they felt they needed and others carried a bare minimum - - they maybe have had an extra shirt. One finds that the less you had to carry the less distracted you are by what you were carrying and the more energy you have, and the more you can be present to your surroundings and to the people you encounter.

When we look at our gospel today we see that Jesus sends his disciples out 'like sheep among wolves' - - into dangerous territory - - they're sent out on the road alone (perhaps walking at night) not knowing where they were going to stay, especially the first night. Taking little with them had practical reasons, but there are also spiritual reasons as well.

As we look at our prophet Amos in the first reading for example, he is not your typical prophet. His presence marks a turning point. Up to that point in history, prophets were subject to the king, gathered in guilds - - they were often 'professional prophets' and Amos was not one of those.

Amos was not ambivalent, he was not one who needed to please, he was not one to carry baggage, he was a simple man, his lifestyle was very simple as a herdsman. He was pure and he was available to God's call. He understood the goods of the earth, he understood the land itself as something owned by the Creator and held in stewardship by human beings for the sake of all... very unlike our industrialized societies... you see our world obsesses with the highest, the strongest, the fastest, the biggest, the richest, the farthest, and God just cares about people regardless of any of those qualities. To have such a disposition of heart as Amos did, and to recognize the true value of the gospel message - - such a disposition allowed him to travel light, both in terms of physical possessions, but also in terms of freedom of heart and freedom of mind - - because our minds and our hearts can be burdened with excess baggage as well. To be of single mind and heart on God's will is among the greatest of gifts.

Now we are all summoned through our baptism into having a share in the life of Jesus, to be priest, prophet, and king. We were all called to be prophets like Amos and as our gospel says, Jesus sent the apostles out with no bread, no bag, no money belt, (clearly they're not in it for the money either); and clearly they were nonviolent. (You know, if it was today's world and they were sent out in the U.S., I can't help but think that they would each have been given a little pistol to keep in their back pocket just in case). They were sent with nothing, they were non-violent, they were vulnerable to attack, they were in pairs so they were some level of safety I suppose. In such a witness, they invoked a spirit of hospitality from those they would meet.

These are characteristics of a true prophet: vulnerable, an open heart in sharing and perhaps be an agent of conversion - - to invoke in others, hearts that are vulnerable within themselves. This has the potential of invoking a spirit of hospitality.

Imagine if they had a lot of stuff - - that they came to you wearing very rich clothes and clearly self-sufficient and they're going to preach to you about the gospel - - they probably would not have received the same reception or would have attracted the wrong crowd - - a crowd not interested in what they were there to do, but in worldly things. Instead, these disciples presented themselves authentically, as helpless pilgrims with a message - - and they would find receptivity among some of the people.

There are a lot of ways in which we carry baggage in our own lives and we are called to lighten the load as we go through our pilgrim journey in life. How do we let go and what is it we let go of?

There are material things that we have, that we can perhaps let off, we don't need them anymore or - - maybe it does hurt to let go of them, but we have decided that others need the items more than we do. That's comes from a generous spirit. But there is also that other baggage, the invisible baggage - - the distractions from our mission, emotional distractions, when we were grieving, or have a broken heart we may feel burdened. Maybe there is a selfish ambition we struggle with, or we are stuck in a skewed value system that we need to overcome, certainly in our society. We are very much influenced by the world and we all have opinions as we are immersed in the popular culture. There are generally accepted values but, as followers of Christ, we need to see them for what they are and perhaps look a little deeper than opinions.

The Bible doesn't care about our opinion, the Bible cares about the truth and the Bible cares about us proclaiming the good news with our lives. Our opinions are opinions and often they don't have all the information so there is only so much we can say. None of us ever really has it completely right and so we have to leave that opening for God - - that opening for the Holy Spirit to guide us. Motivation by guilt is not helpful either because then we're not really doing it out of a sense of love as much as out of a sense of duty or fear.

Another distraction that we might call baggage is our bitterness, unforgiveness, or jealousy that we feel in our hearts. Sometimes maybe we are angry righteously with our culture for what's happening. We are angry with the church, we are angry with the police, we are angry with the abuses in the world. Granted it's kind of a righteous anger but we have to be careful how much we nurture anger itself in our hearts.

At the beginning of this Mass we sang, "Gather Your People, Oh Lord". In it we are asking God to gather us together in love, and when we leave this place we are called to leave at least a little bit inspired or with a gentle heart or with a peaceful heart and a desire to love our neighbour. If we leave a gathering place whether it is this place, or any gathering, or a rally for example and, rather than being inspired or feeling at peace and loving our fellow man, we are gritting our teeth or clenching our fists with hatred - - we have to question its value as a gathering in God's eyes because that's not what we're about as followers of Christ.

Our mission as prophets is to recognize those are deeper places to live from than the world is tossing back-and-forth. We need to uproot bitterness and resentment from our

hearts - - the paranoia, the self-pity, the jealousy.... all of those things need to be **uprooted** from our hearts. What needs to be **re-rooted** in our lives is prayer and gratitude and deep friendship. In so doing we free our hearts enough to avail ourselves to receiving the inheritance as adopted brothers and sisters in Christ. Then we can more authentically live out our baptismal call as Priest, Prophet, and King.

So as we celebrate this Eucharist together, remember who we are and who we are opening ourselves up to....a God who has a special place and a dignity for us to learn to live by. We take that message out to the world and we recognize when we're being affected in a negative way by the world and we don't let it get to us. As did Amos in his simplicity of life and in his boldness of faith, as did Saint Paul in his message of adoption as brothers and sisters in Christ, and as did the disciples who went out into the world to cast out demons and unclean spirits, we are called to do the same. Amen