

OCTOBER 5, 2019 Saturday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

Bar 4:5-12,27-29

Ps 69:33-37

Lk 10:17-24

In the Gospel for today, the seventy (or seventy-two) disciples return from the mission with joy, to give account to their master Jesus of their pastoral success: “even the demons are subject to us because of your name” (Lk 10:17). And Jesus shares in the joy of his disciples: “I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky” (Lk 10:18). As disciples of Christ, we have received the power to walk over serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing can harm us (see Lk 10:19). This is the same promise that Jesus brings to all his disciples in Mk 16:18: “They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Jesus thus warns us that the mission will be arduous and difficult, but with his Spirit and his grace we will always be victorious over the forces of evil in the world. “Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you but rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). It is legitimate for the disciple of Christ to be proud and happy with the successes of his own work of evangelization, but the main reason for this joy should be eschatological. We must have the joy of salvation, the joy of hope: “Good and faithful servant... Come, share your master’s joy” (Mt 25:21.23). It is the joy of the useless servant (see Lk 17:10) who did what he had to do.

What really matters for the disciples is that their names are “written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). In the Hebrew idiom of the time, this means that the seventy (seventy-two) returned from the mission are recognized by God as citizens of heaven. This is their true home, the kingdom to which Jesus asks them to invite others to whom they are sent. Then, suddenly, in the middle of his conversation with the missionary disciples, Jesus addresses another interlocutor, his Father in heaven. As newly confirmed citizens of the kingdom of God, the seventy – and we, observing them – are privy to a divine conversation. We are witnesses to a moment of profound prayer between Jesus and his Father. Jesus gives thanks to the Father for his merciful will: great mysteries have been revealed “to the

childlike” rather than to “the wise and the learned,” from whom they remain hidden.

In the historical context of Jesus, the disciples sent on mission are “children” not only because they are carrying out their first missionary experience, but also because they probably had not received formal education in the things of God equal to that of the learned rabbis, scribes, and other Jewish leaders of the time. This does not mean denying the value of theological formation but recognizing that the encounter with God is always a gift of God, that faith in him is the foundation of every mission.

Jesus then reflects aloud, so to speak, on the nature of the relationship between himself and the Father. Here, in a passage similar to another in Matthew (see Mt 11:25-30) and to many others in John (see Jn 3:35, 13:3, 14:9-11), Jesus reveals the complete mutual knowledge between Father and Son and the absolute openness to one another that they share. It is a source of joy and communion, the cause of fruitfulness and mission.

It is by virtue of this relationship that Jesus has the power to invite others into relationship with God, to enter into his divine communion. In this intimacy, we come to know the Son as the one who is known and loved by the Father, and the Father as the one who is known and loved by the Son. The seventy, called to alleviate suffering and oppression in the name of Jesus, find the meaning of their mission in the Father and the Son and in their communion of love. Hearing this Gospel message today, we continue to be invited more deeply to enter this same relationship. It is, of course, only on the basis of an encounter with the Father, as Jesus revealed it to us, that we have the gift of God’s love that we can offer in mission to others.

The word of God today calls us not only to consider the different aspects of the mission, but also to actively discover what these realities reveal to us of God. When we recognize with faith the ways in which God comes and works in us, we can allow his Spirit to carry out his mission to others through us. The profound communion of missionary disciples with Jesus, in his loving, divine unity with the Father, gives joy, passion, and zeal for the missionary effort. Rather than rejoicing in their own success, missionary disciples rejoice in love, in communion

with their Master and Lord, and in the vocation of being sons and daughters of God whose names are written in heaven.

This is the sense in which Pope Francis writes, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in section 21:

The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy. The seventy-two disciples felt it as they returned from their mission (cf. Lk 10:17). Jesus felt it when he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and praised the Father for revealing himself to the poor and the little ones (cf. Lk 10:21). It was felt by the first converts who marvelled to hear the apostles preaching “in the native language of each” (Acts 2:6) on the day of Pentecost. This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present. The Lord says: “Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mk 1:38). Once the seed has been sown in one place, Jesus does not stay behind to explain things or to perform more signs; the Spirit moves him to go forth to other towns.