

“Get it right and enjoy!” Mark 6:7-13

“[Jesus] called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff-- no bread, no bag, no money in their belts-- but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.

And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.”

Today’s Gospel reading presents to us this challenging topic - Jesus sending His disciples in mission. To share the Gospel. This is what we all are sent to do. This is what we all struggle to do, some more and some less.

Today we’ll try to see what can we learn from our Gospel reading that could be practical and useful for us as Jesus’ disciples, carrying on His Great Commission, that is, making the disciples of all nations.

We need to remember once and for all, that being a Christian is not so much about doing something, than about receiving. It is about learning to live a receptive life, about learning to receive everything from the Triune God.

People have these misperceptions that Christians are those good people who live those perfect lives. That being a Christian is about living a decent live. And if only you try to live a decent live, then you are a good Christian.

No, if someone thinks that being a Christian is mainly about living a decent life, then that is how you can be simply a decent person, or a decent unbeliever, but not necessarily a Christian. I’ll repeat it once more that being a Christian is primarily about receiving.

What exactly does it mean? In our Baptism you received your new identity. You were made a child of God. A member of the Divine family, the Church. Now you can learn how to receive all the benefits of this new identity.

For being a child of God means that the Triune God Himself takes care of you. The Father provides everything for your life. He gave you this new identity, but He also provides for all your daily needs. He has promised to do it till the end of your days.

The Son provides for your salvation. He offers you this wonderful exchange. He takes your sins and your death upon Himself and gives you what is His; His righteousness before God, the forgiveness of all your sins and His life.

The Holy Spirit creates your faith. True faith and trust in the Triune God. That's right, your trust in true God and desire to be with Him is a gift from the Holy Spirit. He calls you by the Gospel and keeps you in the one, true faith.

Being a Christian is to continually learn how to receive and be grateful for all these gifts. For when our eyes are open by the Spirit, only then we can truly rejoice as children of God, for only then we begin to see God's involvement in our lives.

This is what changes everything, what gives us this new life. Knowing how close God is, growing in peace and joy that comes from being in His presence and being cared for by Him.

From being continually transformed by God's love, growing in our love towards Him and in our desire to be with Him and to know Him better, instead of simply desiring His gifts.

Being a Christian is about love between two persons. Between this God who wants to be your God and you. It is not about you being a decent person. It is so sad, if instead of receiving and enjoying God's love we want to focus on how good persons we are in our lives. Thus one rejects God's love and exchanges it for the love of self and our own goodness.

But once you have tasted how good the Lord is, you can't keep silent. You want to share it. For this is such a joy. You want others to know about it, to have these wonderful relationships with this the most amazing Supreme Being.

We see it in today's reading that Jesus was providing for His disciples. They had enjoyed His presence and now given them everything they needed Jesus sent them to share the good news about God's Kingdom.

Once you have received, you are sent to share. This is how it works. Dr Martin Luther compared a Christian with a tube. From one end God pours into you His countless blessings. From the other end, you pour these blessings over your neighbours.

The greatest of these blessings, of course, is to know true God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. To know and to have Him as your God. This is what you all have received, this is what we all are sent to share.

Yes, and this is where it gets hard. You may be overflowing with joy coming from the Lord's nearest presence, filled with His gifts, ready to share His love with others, but others... they simply wouldn't care.

These days people have been trained to use different phrases just to keep out of any meaningful conversation. For example, they may say that 'you may have your opinion about things, and I have my own. Let's leave it there.'

And... your conversation is over. It shuts down your attempts to bring them the most wonderful light of Christ. How could you bring anything in through closed doors. And it may seem that it is easier not to talk about this Jesus.

But, please, don't give up! Don't fall for this temptation to keep silent. For we are sent with the most important message. This message is about life and death, about eternal life and death. Everyone needs to hear it.

So, what to do, how not to give up? Jesus sent His disciples to meet people where there were. To stay with them where they were until they departed. It is a very simply advice. Meet people where they are!

Both literary and spiritually. What does it mean? It means that we are called to cultivate open, honest and caring relationships without any self-interest, with the goal to share and to discuss the most important questions in our lives.

It may take time. It will take time. Of course, it is easier not to do it. But this is both, the will of your God, and also your opportunity to bring someone from the power of darkness into the Kingdom of light.

Cultivate this kind of relationships! Not because you want to prove that they are wrong and you are right, but because you care for their salvation. You want to rescue them from the power of Satan and to have them in God's eternal Kingdom.

When people say that they have their own views, and you have your own, don't stop. Ask them to share their views. What is this that they believe about this world, about God or something higher? What do they believe about us as human beings?

What do they believe the problem of this world is, why is there so much misery, and what could the solution be? Be interested to hear them! Be interested to learn what they believe! Meet them where they are!

Then ask them 'can I share what I believe?' Then share with them Christ's message. You don't have to prove they are wrong. You are called to confess what you believe. As clearly and fittingly to each situation as possible.

But I believe in God the Father Almighty. He is the Creator. He is behind everything. He gives me life every minute. To you too. He is in control. And He wants to be my God. He wants to be your God and care for you as well.

I believe that we all are captives of sin. We all know that we are not in control of our thoughts, desires and emotions. As Paul the apostle wrote: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." (Rom 7:19)

I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He is God's own solution for our sin. He came as one of us to save us from our sins and eternal death, and to bring us into God's presence, into His Kingdom.

I believe in Him because of His life, death and resurrection. Hundreds and thousands witnessed what He did and what He spoke, and some of these witnesses were chosen to deliver this message to everyone. Also to you, my friend.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. Yes, it is God's Spirit, which He sends in our hearts to create our faith, to give us new hearts, new lives and to restore our relationships with God so that we desire to receive His love and stop turning our backs to Him.

I believe that the Holy Spirit has written God's message in the Bible, using for that chosen people, and that He still speaks to the world through the Word of God, and also when we share His message with others, like you. Like right now.

I believe that the same God has promised to come and to bless us even today. He has chosen to do it in what we call the Divine Service. That's where He invites everyone, so that you can learn about His love towards you and receive what He has prepared for you.

I believe that when my time is over, or when the time of this world is over, this God will take myself, and everyone who desires to be with Him into His Kingdom. He will destroy all the evil, and restore the heavens and the earth, and there will be no more death, no more pain, no more suffering.

He Himself will dwell with His people and we'll enjoy His presence and love forever. This is what I believe. And if you are interested, I can show that this faith is rational, and historical, and experiential.

I also believe that this God wants to be your God, and that right now He speaks to you through me. That's right. He is gentle, He doesn't impose His will, He invites, He wants to be with you and to bless you. This is what I believe.

And don't hope that much will change right away. But you can be sure that the word of God never returns empty. It always accomplishes what it is sent to do. You can't save anyone, you can only deliver this live saving message.

What then? What did disciples do? They reported back to Jesus. What should you do? Report back to Jesus. In prayer. Share with Him how your conversation went. Learn from Jesus so that you can understand better the opinions of others.

How to do that? From His Word. Search for answers in His Word. In Bible Studies. Come, learn, ask, discuss, engage. Talk with others, with brothers and sisters in Christ who are on the same missions as you.

Talk with your pastor. I'm sure he will be more than happy to assist you with all that he has got. Learn from Jesus so that you can understand how your neighbours perceive this world.

Then, prepare to meet them again. Pray for them, for their salvation. Pray that you would have more opportunities to continue your conversations. Pray for the Holy Spirit's wisdom to find the right words and to demonstrate the right spirit. Do it again and again, and again.

When we do something, we expect something to happen, we expect some kind of results. Be sure, something will happen. In fact, there are at least a few things which will happen for sure.

We don't know what will happen with the people to whom we witness about Jesus. It is out of our control. Only the Holy Spirit can change their hearts. We should, of course, do our best, but we may as well never see much of results.

But something else will happen. First, as you do this, the Holy Spirit will grow your faith. As you pray for others and for the guidance of the Spirit, you will learn to listen to Him more and to trust to Him more. As you are working to bring others to faith, your own faith and relationships with the Triune God will grow deeper and more intimate.

Second, you will grow in your wisdom and understanding. That's right. As you are wrestling with the challenges of witnessing, as you are reading, learning, thinking and praying for your neighbour, the Holy Spirit moulds and shapes you. He draws you closer to the Word of God, and the Word of God makes you wiser. It gives you true wisdom and understanding that surpasses all human wisdom.

Third. You will experience true fellowship of the Holy Spirit with your brothers and sisters in Christ. That's right, and what a joy it is! As you are in mission with Christ, you are not alone. We all are called into the same mission.

As you share your witnessing experiences and struggles with your brothers and sisters in Christ, as you look for their advice and they benefit from your experiences, the Holy Spirit is active among you. Filling you with His joy.

For you are in mission together with Him. You are building God's Kingdom. And His is the Kingdom of joy and peace, of heavenly excitement and hearty fellowship, of self-sacrificial love and brotherhood.

You see, even when you do what the Lord has called you to do, you are still receiving. His Spirit, His wisdom, His love and fellowship. You already are blessed to be made God's children, now take up His mission and experience how good our Lord is.

Amen.