

VESPERS HOMILY
9 JULY 2017

LUKE 10: 1 – 11, 16 – 20

PSALM 66: 1 – 8

In the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

For some years I was Chairman of the Commission on Ministry in the Diocese of Georgia. Our task was to approve, or disapprove, the Diocese sponsoring of a person as a candidate for ordination, which, in many cases, actually came to recommending to the Bishop approval of a person for sponsorship to seminary, or not.

For years the process had been that some local church's vestry would send forward the name of a person who had expressed interest in the idea of being a priest or deacon. A decision had to be made on the strength of paperwork and a brief interview. It was a momentous decision.

Actually, the diocese later adopted a process of regional discernment teams so that before the person appeared before us someone had actually interviewed and evaluated applicants over a period of time. They were tasked with approval or disapproval. For the most part it worked out very well.

The vast majority of the people we interviewed were delightful, really called to be ordained, and expressed their call in a very clear and moving manner. I am sure you have known many of them over the years.

If they had actually read Luke's Gospel, particularly chapter nine, they might have understood the demands that ordination would place upon them. There really are strenuous demands on the life of a "Disciple."

What exactly is a Disciple? In our Christian understanding it means one who follows Jesus' as his or her teacher, his or her rabbi. It isn't a matter of twelve, or eleven,

“Apostles’ whose names we have, sort of. There were far, far more as seen in this passage involving a mission for at least seventy anxious volunteers.

If they paid attention to Jesus’ teaching in chapter nine, they knew how strenuous a life lay before them.

Jesus had called them to take up their own cross daily. He called them to a life of self denial and self sacrifice. . He told them, and He tells us today that “Whoever will save his life,” this worldly life in which we are all too prone to put our own needs and wants first “... will lose it;” the cost of discipleship is the priority of putting the wants and needs of others before their own. The promise is that one who does deny his or herself, who can make sacrifices, who can serve others before self, will gain eternal life.

Quite few years ago now what we might call the “business model” became very popular with all sorts of organizations, even the Army and the church. Up to then I must admit that the church had a certain casual approach to such things as money and property and staff. For many years the emphasis had been on religion, spirituality, pastoralia, and theology. Then, rather quickly, the emphasis became finances, time management, personnel and something called clergy wellness. For centuries a priest had had a covenant with a congregation, unwritten but understood. There is a precedent for that covenant in God’s relationship with Israel. Apparently it no longer sufficed and it was replaced by a contract that stressed work hours, comp time and vacation time. Therein lay the problem. A generation of clergy came to be in the expectation of such contract-defined work and they passed it on.

Service and sacrifice sound quite simple on paper. It’s the living part that gets difficult. Jesus had just confronted three men who missed the point. One expected an easy life and pleasant accommodations on the road, one had a previous engagement burying his father but probably was sure he could catch up later, one had strong emotional ties with the past that he simply couldn’t, or wouldn’t break.

In this chapter Jesus is giving direction to the seventy who apparently had no such reservations or expectations. He gives them some direction as to how they should travel, what they should carry how they should behave. He tells them not to expect

to be greeted or welcomed in every town but to “shake off” rejection and move on to a place where they are welcome.

Most important, He gives them the one, single, important message they were to carry; “The Kingdom of God has come near to you.”

Whether you accept it or reject it, “The Kingdom of God has come near.” It is true, today, tomorrow and forever, no matter how long it takes.

In His Holy Name.