

Homily

Taken together, today's two lessons bear two sides of one and the same theme: and that theme is a powerful call to each and every one of us, the unordained ministers of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Most Christians are not ordained, they are not bishops, priests, or even deacons.

Most Christians have neither been to seminary nor read theology under the direction of a Bishop. Most Christians are to be found in the pews, sitting, Sunday after Sunday, under ordained leadership, and that is how it usually works.

but ...

it is as St. Peter wrote:

*"... ye are a chosen generation,
a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a peculiar people;*

*that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you
out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

We have tended to think of the church in terms of producers and consumers, where some, the clergy, provide benefits, and the rest of us merely consume and absorb them. But, let's think of this in another manner.

There is most certainly a priesthood of the Apostolic Succession, a leadership by those ordained and thus enabled to do what others cannot. Without bishops and priests and deacons, there is no truly functioning church, but the ordained are not all there is when considering Christian priesthood.

There is a priesthood of all believers. We are all participants in the very priesthood of Christ Himself.

As St. Paul said:

*“Now ye are the body of Christ,
and members in particular.
And God hath set some in the church,
first apostles,
secondarily prophets,
thirdly teachers, after that miracles,
then gifts of healings,
helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”*

This is only one of several places in scripture where St. Paul lists a variety of gifts.

His lists are not identical to each other, but have this in common: they describe various functions of the Church, some appropriate to the ordained leadership, and some more appropriate to others.

About this he said:

*“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body,
as it hath pleased him.
And if they were all one member, where were the body?*

*But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot
say unto the hand,*

*I have no need of thee:
nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”*

Every member, he tells us, has a purpose in the Body, and gifts with which to fulfill that purpose. All these callings and all these gifts work together to fulfill the purpose of the entire Church of God.

And what is that purpose?

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:

*and, lo, I am with you always,
even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*

Isn't our purpose as Christians, as the church, to spread the Good News? Do we really have any purpose in remaining on this earth other than to bring people to Jesus?

Isn't it our job to show a desperately sinful world that there is a way to Heaven?

We tend to leave the job of outreach, or evangelism, to the professionals. Is that the way it should be?

Is it right for us to feast at the Lord's Table week by week, year by year, to receive all His blessings of Word and Sacrament without telling those around us? Caring for those that they may be facing a dreadful and eternal judgement? We know the Way, unworthy though we are, we know the Way. We have met the Lord.

Others need to know God, whether they know it or not.

The prophet Zechariah, long before Christ, wrote stirring words that we heard this morning. They were addressed directly to the Jews, who were then the custodians of God's Word, but they apply directly to us, even more than to his original audience.

We can hear these words for ourselves, something like this

[the members of the Church shall go forth]

saying,

Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in [the life we live], and to pray before the LORD.

*Thus saith the LORD of hosts;
In those days it shall come to pass,
that ten men shall take hold
out of [every race, culture, and nation],
even shall take hold of the skirt
of him that is a [Christian],
saying, We will go with you:
for we have heard that God is with you.*

Is this the result of our living out of the faith we have received? My hope and prayer is that it is.

THE LORD BE WITH YOU....Let us pray:

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of they Name and the spreading of the Good News of salvation, though Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
