

Homily for the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 14-15, 2018

Readings: Amos 7: 12-15; Ephesians 1:3-14, or, 1: 3-10; Mark 6: 7-13

Preacher: Gloria Ulterino

Snapshots! So many snapshots these days of weddings ... graduations from what has been ... commencement promises of what is yet to be. Just recently my daughter had snapshots of her son, from infancy to graduation. At the conclusion she wrote, "You look around for your little boy and he's not there. In his place stands a grown man." Ah, yes, we know it well! Out of so many snapshots the big picture emerges.

Today's Gospel story is a snapshot. Of mission. Of Jesus sending out the twelve to preach repentance—just like him. And to heal the demons of his day—just like him. Go! Take nothing to distract you from the mission.

Will it be easy? No! Rejection might be just around the corner. Indeed, Jesus has just been rejected by his hometown folks and family. But, he urges, go anyway. With support, two by two, for the Cross always looms. Just go, with God's longing, yearning, and desire for human hearts burning deep within. For *maybe* that profound longing of *God* can strike a chord in those to whom we are sent: a yearning for kindness ... justice ... and peace. In the poetic song of the Psalmist today: "Lord, let us see your kindness."

Yes, today we're given a snapshot ... and also the Big Picture, as found in Ephesians. The picture of God's ever living, ever passionate dream for the unfolding of Jesus' mission snapshot. Not just in Jesus' day, but in every day ever since, down to the present. Down to us, the twelve of today, the Church marked with Christ's Cross and Spirit, in Baptism. Down to our being sent at the end of every Mass, having been fed by God's Word and nourished with Christ's Body and Blood. "Go. You are sent forth!" Just go, whether easy or not. Go anyway. For we are being sent, just like the Twelve, with God's longing for human hearts burning in our very souls.

But we might say, who am I to be sent? I'm not big. I'm not important. How can I go? Even with others? My Uncle Joe, my godfather, might have an answer for

that. He returned home to his wife and son from fighting in the Pacific in World War II and before long became an alcoholic. Probably a victim of PTSD, though nobody had the words for it in those days.

But he and his wife had six more children, whom he supported as a shoe salesman. It took a few years, but one day recovery found him. Partly inspired by a priest he came to know well, a Jesus person. Not only did my uncle remain in recovery, but he helped heal so many others suffering from this demon of alcoholism. At his funeral, my cousin told me that literally hundreds came up to the family with words like these: "You'll never know how he helped save my life."

For my uncle had discovered and lived out the only path to recovery. Reliance, one day at a time, on the power of God. Not a showy, fireworks kind of power. But a power rooted in vulnerability and weakness. The power of Pure Love. The power that never, ever, forces itself on any of us, but rather waits on us, longs for us, heals us from inside out when we're ready. From shame to all our possibilities. The power of the Cross.

Go, you are sent forth. Yes, *we* are sent forth. And the demons lurk everywhere today. Personally. Communally, in Church. Communally, in our nation. We can name them, can't we? We can name the lies of separating out others from ourselves by name-calling and bullying.

Lies, that we are different from one another. Better than others. Lies that we need to build walls to keep others out, rather than build bridges of connection and possible understanding. Lies that violence is the answer to our troubles, that more guns will solve our problems. Lies that returning hatred with more hatred will work. No! On the contrary, we are sent like Jesus. To preach his good news of repentance, of turning our insides over to God, little by little, with intention and discipline, that we might become more and more the mind and heart of Jesus. That we might intentionally live into and embrace his Cross, rather than run away from it out of fear. That we might thereby become ever more compassionate, profoundly caring of human needs at our doorstep rather than indifferent to them. That we might respond to them in our own unique, little way. That we—the Church together—might become a field hospital of healing in our world, as Pope Francis would say.

Consider, then, a present day snapshot of ourselves. What do we see? Who looks back at us? How about the big picture? Where do we fit? Where are we headed? Are we willing to risk being sent forth into our Church and our world for the sake of healing and wholeness? Are we willing to commit to God's vulnerable power of Pure Love?