

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

*Is 66:10-14c*

*Ps 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20*

*Gal 6:14-18*

*Luke 10:1-12,17-20 or 10:1-9*

*Daniel E. Doyle, O.S.A.*

*Home sweet home!! Those words of comfort never lose their appeal where all seems safe and peaceful, where you are surrounded by love and where you are free to be yourself. Many of us take that for granted until we suddenly have to move and leave the security of a safe haven due to the death of a loved one or to an unexpected health crisis, or perhaps a new job opportunity, or the loss of income or simply kids all grown up leaving the home which requires a scaling down in size. Jerusalem, the city of David, was just such a place for the people of God. There was the temple originally built by King*

Solomon where earth reached heaven. To there the tribes of Israel made their frequent trips to offer sacrifice to God in atonement for their sins and for praise and thanksgiving. Who of us does not long to relive a certain moment in life when all seemed right with the family? Yet Jerusalem was not simply a refuge, a home, a memory of a golden past. It was God's home where God would protect and look after everyone. For many of us, the loss of both parents becomes a defining point in forcing us to finally grow up losing the security of the two people in this world who are always there for us to fall back on when life seems overwhelming. The sense of loss is acute as the ground feels suddenly taken out from under you. This past week we have just completed our annual celebration of patriotism feeling part of a great nation that boasts in song: "the land of the free and the home of the brave." We usually feel a combination of pride and excitement as we watch the local 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades and the

magnificent displays of fireworks. We never want the fireworks to end and immediately begin the countdown knowing the biggest bang will be saved for the end when they pull out all of the stops. And then it is suddenly over and the huge boom is replaced by the sporadic firecrackers of amateurs.

Yet where lies our true security? In policing the world? In fighting wars overseas? In patrolling our borders? In creating new barriers of entry? Many are tempted to believe it lies in their careers, in their achievements, in their accomplishments, in their life savings, in their 401Ks, in the success of their children. 9/11 changed the sense of security that most Americans have enjoyed since the end of the Second World War and the triumph of the United States as the sole world superpower after the collapse of the Cold War. There is a generalized sense of fear as we hear about the latest suicide bomber or act of terrorism. For the first time in recent generations, Americans

are realizing that their children will not have a better life, or an easier life with higher incomes and a higher standard of living. You can't simply protect your children by getting them into the right school districts and universities. Danger lurks everywhere: alcohol, drugs, pornography, sex, sickness, car accidents, poor judgement. We are creating a world that presents new traps and pitfalls for human beings as fewer kids grow up in a stable family that takes the time to share meals together. Everyone is on the run rushing from one practice to the next competition with the TV blaring in the background or the world tuned out by cell phones, iPods, iPhones or video games. And everyone expects to be a winner so everyone gets a trophy regardless of his or her performance lulling us into thinking we are better than we really are or, more seriously, making us think that we are lovable because of our achievements. That is when an

*unexpected crisis that slows us down can be a blessing in disguise as it forces us to take inventory and rethink our priorities.*

*Paul tells us in the second reading to the Galatians that true religion is not simply about legal observance. Circumcision or uncircumcision means nothing unless accompanied by a change of heart: "A clean heart create for me O God; your steadfast Spirit place within me!" Life spares none of us from suffering. It is part of living. It is simply unavoidable no matter how many precautions you take.*

*When each of us received baptism we were branded forever with the mark of the cross of Christ, a symbol of defeat. Baptism is not a vaccine that guarantees we will be protected against suffering and danger, but rather a life-long protection assuring us that suffering, evil and danger will never destroy us or crush us regardless of our own human weakness or the number of injustices that we are likely to encounter over a lifetime. Once we accept this fact, then we need not*

be shaken when the storm clouds gather threatening our sense of security and peace. The sign of defeat, the crucifixion, has become for us an emblem or insignia of triumph! Today's gospel is a mission statement of how we disciples of Jesus are to manage the work of evangelization in a world that can be hostile, blind, mean-spirited and frankly indifferent. Any one of us alone could be easily overwhelmed by the enormity of the task but Jesus instructs us that together we can accomplish what seems impossible on our own. Luke tells us that Jesus sent out 72 disciples 'in pairs.' This is a challenging moment to be church. So much misunderstanding, hurt, disappointment and poor morale!! There are never enough laborers, not only priests, sisters and brothers, but committed Christians who are informed about their faith. Philadelphia only ordained seven deacons to the priesthood this year, not nearly enough to replace the 19 diocesan priests coupled with the number of Augustinians and

religious order priests who died in the past year. Only three were ordained deacons and will be ready for priestly ordination next year. The same grim statistics can be duplicated all over the country and in many traditionally Christian countries in Europe. Europe, the great supplier of missionaries to the Americas, Africa and Asia, can no longer supply enough vocations to take care of her own people. Many of these developing countries are rich in faith and spirituality and are increasingly sending missionaries to our own shores. Over 25% of those ordained to the priesthood this year in the United States are from immigrant backgrounds: Latino, Filipino, Vietnamese.

The mission of the church cannot be obscured by petty infighting based on ideological differences over liturgy, devotions, inclusive language and moral issues. The church is being purified through the unfortunate process of humiliation and self-abasement that resulted from the clergy abuse scandal. Tragic mistakes were

made and the bishops were too slow to redress them. We need to acknowledge this fact but also recognize the church has made great strides which can be useful to all sectors of American society. Sexual exploitation is not a uniquely church problem; it is a human problem!

The church's power should not be based on her political clout or connections. Why has the bishops' voice on so many of the important issues of our time been drowned out or silenced by the media makers?

All the media seem interested in reporting is controversy. We cannot help but notice the declines in Mass attendance, Catholic school enrollment, church weddings, vocations to consecrated life, the priesthood and family life. Yes, the picture is not merely gloom and doom. We have an unprecedented number of dedicated lay men and women involved in various forms of lay ministry. Increasing numbers of our youth are committed to working on various service projects. The words of today's gospel are not directed primarily to the twelve

or the leaders of the church. The words are directed to all the disciples of Jesus. The number 72 is not only a symbolic number with a denominator of 12; it probably represents the entire number of committed believers not long after the experience of Easter and Pentecost. How can we be sent out into the world like lambs among wolves if we are not equipped with knowledge of our faith that is informed, developed and seasoned? How can we proclaim Christ crucified if we do not know him, love him and have an ongoing relationship with him based on daily prayer, listening and careful reading of Scripture. There are too many other voices in the market place competing for our ear.

The church will always be engaged in foreign missions because of the nature of the Gospel. Today, perhaps, we need to focus our efforts on the home missions every bit as much as the government is focused on homeland security. Our material prosperity based on market

economics and increasing consumerism has come at a great price. We have lost a true sense of inner freedom and a certain moral compass to show us the way to true happiness and peace. We need to proclaim Christ as the solution to human servitude, fear, anxiety, false dreams and utopian visions of success. Christ is calling us today to not put our faith in human resources and strategies alone: "Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals." How do we overcome the enormity of the task, the periodic failures, the sense of despair? People will misunderstand us and our motives. We can't afford to worry about what people think of us. We need to experience the freedom of the children of God

*Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household.' If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you.*

The Kingdom of God makes exciting demands on us and rewrites the boundaries of who is in the family and who is out beyond blood ties and citizenship. Our true homeland is the Kingdom. We

*have more than enough work cut out for us. All of us are called to be involved in the Church's mission. We can only do that when we have allowed this faith to shape our lives and transform our vision about what is important. Then we can taste the freedom of the children of God and let go of the shackles that restrict us and if necessary shake the dust off our feet!*