

## 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time      Year C

The Sant Egidio community is an Italian lay community, founded after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. It takes as its founding concept the relationship between the Church and the world as outlined in the document on “The Church In The Modern World.” In particular its mission is that of how to create greater justice and peace in our world. Some of the members follow ordinary lay professions and help finance the community with their salaries; others dedicate themselves more fully to the needs of the poor and the resolution of issues of conflict at levels from the local to the international. They meet daily for prayer, worship and mutual support.

Because they are not seen as carrying their own political agenda, they have been successful in brokering peace agreements, for example in Angola where even the major international bodies such as the United Nations were struggling to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table.

They have also had their moments of failure. Where warring parties are not ready for a political or diplomatic solution, some progress may be made by exploring the issues and the differences but without any outcome or lasting peace. So the other gift of the Sant Egidio community is a combination of humility and patience.

The members respond to invitations to help the peace process with good will, but they also withdraw when their presence is ineffective, ready to wait for the next invitation or window of opportunity.

Luke is the only gospel writer to record two missions of the disciples. The first involves just the twelve apostles, but the second mission has seventy-two disciples being sent out in pairs. Although the mission still takes place within the confines of Israel, the greater number of disciples points to the more universal mission of the church. There is a sense of urgency about the task Jesus gives to his disciples. Despite their numbers they are very few for the task at hand, and they are vulnerable as lambs among wolves.

In the Mediterranean world of Jesus, “hospitality” is extended almost exclusively by men and only to strangers. Graciousness extended to relatives or near relatives is called rather “steadfast love.”

In the ancient world, any person who departed from the family village entered a foreign and hostile world. Death was always and everywhere a threat. Such a traveller had to rely on the kindness of a village elder to extend hospitality and temporary protection from those who intended to harm or kill this stranger. Jesus, therefore, utters a cultural truism when he says to the seventy: “I am sending you as lambs into the midst of wolves” – strangers among non-relatives. All of this reminds us, of course, of the risks Jesus took and the courage he displayed in order to carry out his mission to preach the Word of the Father.

The disciples’ first task is to proclaim peace to the houses they visit. If the household is a house of peace, this peace of the kingdom will stay with them. There is no middle ground. The peace consists of the curing of the sick and proclamation of the gospel.

It is at the heart of our belief that such peace, God’s peace not ours, has to be offered again and again to a world that falls again and again into conflict.

Peace is not just the absence of conflict. It is the positive presence of God in our lives. In this sense it is a gift, but a gift we also work at in order to deepen and develop. All sorts of things prevent us being people of peace. Our best efforts may well be rejected, ridiculed or ignored. But such things do not necessarily turn us into people of conflict. It all depends on whether we allow them to create in us the inner roots of conflict – the anger, bitterness and resentment that can make us reject even the possibility of peace. We are asked to have the confidence and perseverance to keep stubbornly putting forward what is right and just. Even St Paul acknowledges that this is not easy. We can receive a fair amount of abuse, threats and punishment along the way. But because in the end we believe in a peace that comes from Christ, not from ourselves, then we can allow the attacks to flow over and around us and keep working for the truth that will eventually emerge.

Every Christian is sent into the world by Christ. But how few of us ever see our faith in this light ? We tend to think of faith as something to which we cling for our own sake only, like a lifebelt, instead of seeing it as a call to the service of others..... we leave that to others, to the “specialists” But as Jean Vanier said “One of the great myths of our civilisation is that of the specialist.”

The people Christ sent out were certainly no specialists. They had no great training. Nor did they have a great education. Yet they became his instruments, co-workers with him in spreading the Kingdom of God. Christ sent them out among the people. Like them, we can all do something. We can't be everywhere, but we can be somewhere. There are things we can do for Christ which will otherwise remain undone. There are places only we can go, situations only we are aware of, doors that will open only to us.

Christ said: "The harvest is great, but the labourers are few." So what we need is :

More to approve, fewer to disapprove.

More doers, fewer talkers.

More to say: "It can be done", fewer to say "It can't be done."

More to inspire others with confidence, fewer to throw cold water on everything.

More to take one step in the right direction.

More to get into the thick of things.

More to do something about it, fewer to sit on the sidelines finding fault.

More to point out what is right, fewer to keep harping on what is wrong.

More to light a candle, fewer to curse the darkness.

The labourers are indeed few – those who are willing to put themselves out to bring Christ's healing, love and hope to others.

Can I become one of those labourers ?