

Third Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 6

Church of the Redeemer, Astoria

By. Fr. Carlos

There is a saying that sometimes people appear to change, but not really.

One of the jokes I heard this week tells the story of a mountain man named Zeke who went to a revival meeting and supposedly got religion. Later, someone asked his wife if she had noticed any difference in him. She replied, "Well, before he carried his jug of whiskey on his shoulder when he walked downtown, but now he carries it under his coat."

Sometimes faith can become like that. We don't really change; we just hide things better. But the Collect for today calls us to something much deeper. We prayed:

"Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion."

Did you notice what we are asking for? We are not asking God to make us comfortable Christians. We are asking for faith and love strong enough to help us proclaim the truth boldly and serve others with compassion. The truth we proclaim is not an idea. The truth is Jesus Christ. And that is exactly what we see in today's Gospel.

Jesus looked at the crowd, and Matthew told us: "When he saw the crowd, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

Before Jesus sent the disciples, he first saw the crowd. He noticed their pain, confusion, and loneliness. Then he sent his disciples to do something about it. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37).

One detail of this Gospel has spoken to me very strongly during my first months here at Redeemer. Jesus told the apostles first to go to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In other words, begin with those who once belonged but have wandered away. As many of you know, I have now been here for about nine months. Some people have asked me, "Father, why haven't you started this new program? Why haven't you created that new ministry?"

Every priest arrives with ideas. Every priest wants to build something. But I felt that during this

first year, my first responsibility was not to create something new. It was to learn from you, to listen, and above all, to look for the lost sheep.

Many times I have asked members of the congregation, "Do you know someone who used to come here? Give me their name. Let me call them. Let me visit them. Let me invite them." Some have returned. Some have declined. Some never responded. But that is exactly what Jesus told us to do. And that mission belongs to every baptized Christian. Every one of us are called to proclaim Jesus with boldness and compassion. Now someone may ask: "Father, Jesus told the apostles to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons. How are we supposed to do that?" Certainly, we pray for the sick. And God still heals them. But some people are dead inside long before they die physically. People who have lost hope. When we bring them friendship, encouragement, prayer, and the hope of Christ, we participate in God's work of raising the dead. What about cleansing lepers? Today, there are many people who feel isolated and rejected. The elderly who feels forgotten. The immigrant who feels alone. The teenager who feels nobody understands them. When we welcome them and remind them that they are loved by God, we help restore them to community. And what about casting out demons?. Sometimes the demons are addiction, hatred, despair, selfishness, or the voices that tell people they have no value and no future. Whenever we stand with Christ against those forces, we participate in his work of liberation.

That is why the Gospel ends with these words: "You received without payment; give without payment." (Matthew 10:8) Everything we have received from Christ was given freely. And now we are called to give freely.

There is another joke that reminds me of this mission. A barber was converted at a revival meeting. The preacher told him to share the Gospel with his customers. The next morning, after putting hot towels and shaving cream on a customer, he picked up his razor, pointed it at the man's throat, and asked, "Brother, are you prepared to die?" The customer jumped out of the chair and ran away with shaving cream still on his face. That is probably not the best method of evangelism! But the joke reminds us that we are not called to share the Gospel with fear, but with the same compassion that Jesus showed when he looked at the crowd.

Dear brothers and sisters, today let us remember what we prayed at the beginning of this service. May God keep us in his faith and love.

May he give us courage to proclaim the truth of Christ.

May he help us serve with justice and compassion.

And may every one of us become a laborer in the harvest—seeking the lost sheep, bringing hope to the discouraged, welcoming the rejected, and helping others discover that the Kingdom of Heaven has indeed come near. **Amen.**