

OPENING COLLECT

O God, the strength of all those who put their trust in you, mercifully accept our prayers and, because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without you, grant us the help of your grace, that in the keeping of your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING: Exodus 19.2–8a

2 The Israelites had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. 3 Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6 but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.' 7 So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. 8 The people all answered as one: 'Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do.'

The Gospel is about Jesus commissioning The twelve to share in his work Our link passage reminds us that the task is not new!! The Israelites were, from the first, called to be a special people for God; to be a 'priestly kingdom and a holy nation', obeying the 'voice of God and keeping his covenant'. Now priests were treated as 'holy' or 'set apart' as mediators between God and his people, to lead them in the right way. In the same way, this priestly role was always vital to being the people of God. Although they answered Moses (v.8) that they would fulfil this obligation, the prophets constantly found them wanting. Hence the mission of Jesus.

SECOND READING: Romans 5.1–8

1 Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

This passage from Romans begins four crucial chapters (5-8) in which Paul grapples with what it means to experience the new life in Christ (as the renewed 'People of God' really). Justification by faith (v.1) is in stark contrast to justification by law, as he has already stated boldly in Romans 3.21-6. However, this does not mean that we are to be exempt from 'trials and tribulations', rather that if we keep confident in our relationship with God, we will maintain our hold on fullness of life, the blessing which God had always promised his people, because 'God's love has been poured into our hearts' (v.5). vv.6-8 really begin the next part of Paul's argument as he explores the Atonement, our reconciliation with God wrought by the death of Christ.

Gospel: Matthew 9.35 – 10.8, (9–23)

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; 38 therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

1 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;

3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus;

4 Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans,

6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

7 As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." 8 Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

9 Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts,

10 no bag for your journey or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. 11 Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. 12 As you enter the house, greet it. 13 If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. 15 Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town.

16 See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

17 Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. 19 When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time;

20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. 21 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; 22 and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man 10 no bag for your journey, comes..'

This Gospel reading, as so many, warrants careful and reflective reading. Jesus has been moving around preaching, teaching and healing, and may be said to, now, realise the enormity of his task: he needs help. The people are "like sheep without a shepherd", he says, and "the harvest is plentiful, the labourers are few". So he commissions the twelve disciples, giving them authority to heal and proclaim the Good News. Unlike Luke's account. 9.1-6, Jesus is very specific that the disciples are to go to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel', and not to Samaritans and Gentiles, and Matthew, characteristically, adds the threat of judgement. Further, the disciples are warned that that they may face rejection, even persecution. They are to trust God and the power of his spirit, for strength to face such treatment and for the words to say.

There are surely lessons here for the Church. We are reminded of our mission today, when too many seem 'without a shepherd'. We should not, however, expect an easy ride as we share the Gospel of love by word and deed, and we need to realise where our inspiration and strength lie, for this demanding task. How are you doing?

Post-Communion Collect:

Eternal Father, we thank you for nourishing us with these heavenly gifts: may our communion strengthen us in faith, build us up in hope, and make us grow in love; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.