



18. October 2021

I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves

Lk 10:1-9

*The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself would be visiting. And he said to them, "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to do his harvesting. Start off now, but look, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Take no purse with you, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the labourer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house. Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is put before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you."*

How much we need good labourers for the harvest; labourers who are aware of their dignity and responsibility to serve in the Kingdom of God!

They must be clear that they are in the service of God and of men, who are waiting for them and want to receive what the Lord will give them through them. If only each one of us could understand this; and not only those who are called to rule in the Church, but all those who had the grace to meet the Lord and were touched by Him. What each one of us should at least do is to fulfil this wish of the Lord: *"Ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to do his harvesting"*.

But, even further, we can correspond to this wish of the Lord by being true disciples of His, so that in our witness of life the beauty of faith shines forth, opening the way for vocations to arise. The *"labourers in the harvest of the Lord"* are not only priests and religious - although these vocations certainly have great weight - but every Christian must take his or her rightful place and bear fruit there.

The Lord then goes on to describe how His disciples are to fulfil their commission. Here His first sentence stands out: *"I am sending you out like lambs among wolves"*.

This attitude we can only learn from the Lord Himself, who came into the world as the "Lamb of God" (cf. Jn 1:29). The comparison of sheep in the midst of wolves applies to Himself, for He shows us that the Kingdom of God cannot be established through weapons or violence. In fact, it is an entirely different way, which consists in conquering people in love and truth, rather than dominating them. If possible, even those who have yielded to the evil inclinations of their fallen nature and have thus become wolves should be reached.

But how is this to be done?

To walk the “way of the Lamb” by no means signifies giving up and being at the mercy of the evil we encounter outside or within ourselves. No! We must even be fully prepared for combat and clothed with the spiritual armour that the Apostle Paul describes in the sixth chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians (v. 11-18). But these weapons are purely spiritual, and the fight against evil must be waged in the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, we cannot adopt the attitude of the wolf in order to defend ourselves against him, let alone to defeat him. The opposite would be the case, for inasmuch as we would act like him, we would be spiritually joining the wolf pack and fighting on the wrong side.

Instead, the sincerity of the disciples must be shown. To fulfil their commission, they do not need the supposed security offered by material goods: *“Take no purse with you, no haversack, no sandals”*. Nor are they to stop unnecessarily: *“Salute no one on the road”* for they are to be totally focused on their mission: *“Cure those in it who are sick, and say, ‘The kingdom of God is very near to you.’”*

In these three phrases from today's gospel that I just quoted, we can see a fundamental training for this “service of the Lamb”:

1) *“Take no purse with you, no haversack, no sandals.”*

The disciple's security in fulfilling his mission is to be in God alone. This demands a deep union with Him, and requires processes of inner purification, where one still wants to find his security in secondary sources. The latter restrict the purity of focus. We can understand it well in this example: a Church with many goods and attached to them will hardly have the strength to tame, much less defeat the wolves; but in certain areas it will end up cooperating with them and adopting their way of being and acting.

2) *“Salute no one on the road.”*

Disciples are to concentrate on the essentials. There are many distractions in this world, which bind the strength and focus of our soul. These are not sins; they are willful distractions, which over time weaken us and make us more susceptible to temptation. Whoever wants to be part of the "Lamb's retinue" must remain focused on the essentials in order to fulfil the mission entrusted to him.

3) *“Cure those in it who are sick, and say, ‘The kingdom of God is very near to you.’”*

Even the "wolves" are sick, for all wickedness disfigures the essence of man. Therefore, the "wolves" need not only to be converted, but also to be healed, because they have fallen into the hands of bandits (cf. Lk 10:30), i.e. they are under the influence of demons, who want to usurp the life of grace from man. The proclamation of the Kingdom of God, which in the Person of Jesus came to us, is the centre of the mission of the disciples. At all times and in all places, in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2), the love of God must be proclaimed. Only he alone can turn wolves into lambs and awaken mankind.

Disciples are at the service of God's work! For this, they only need to be sent. Everything else will be given to them by God (Mt 6:33).