

Opening the front door I encounter two young men in black slacks, white long-sleeved shirts, conservative colored ties, wearing rectangular black plastic name badges prefixed by "Brother" and then their name. They are missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly known as Mormons. They are canvassing the neighborhood in search of potential converts. They travel in pairs, unknown to each other before being paired together at a church affiliated training program sent to a two year mission in Ames, Iowa. Numbers of us have encountered these missionaries at our doors. If I'm dressed in my black clerical clothes, it's obvious to my callers that I'm already a "committed" member of a church. If not, I politely inform them of my vocation and occupation. In all cases, I spend a few minutes visiting with them about their homes of origin, their mission, and bid them farewell praying God's blessing on them and their work.

Today's Gospel scene of Jesus sending the twelve disciples out on mission occurs near the mid-point of St. Mark's Gospel. Until now the disciples have been "mentored" by Jesus and his message and works of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God in the world. Today Jesus sends them out in his name and authority and charges them to go and do in the towns around the area what they have heard him say and seen him do. Accompanied by the readings from the book of the prophet Amos, St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians and the experience of the Mormon missionaries, today's Gospel story raises points of reflection for us.

St. Paul reminds us God has specifically chosen us to receive the gift of faith, eternal life in Jesus and adoption as his children through our baptism and confirmation through no merit or work of our own. It is by God's grace. The Gospel teaches us that this election, though unique and personal to each of us, is not given for the purpose of a private holiness or salvation. The call of God, while personal, comes to us through a community of fellow believers, the Church. We have been made part of a community and it is as this community that we are sent together to give witness to Jesus in the world, even if, at times, that community is only one fellow believer. As Jesus himself tells us; "Wherever two or three are gathered, there I am in the midst of them." (Mt. 18:20).

The Gospel, is given us to be shared. We are a missionary people by nature. As I stated several weeks ago, the most important words of the Mass are: “Go in peace. The Mass is ended.” That is what our baptism, confirmation and gathering for the Eucharist equips and strengthens us for. We are not to hide our light under a bushel basket but allow it to shine for all to see. (Mt. 5:15 ff.)

The Mormon missionaries, like some other faith traditions, interpret Jesus’ command literally. While as Catholics the Church does not demand such a requirement for membership, our history contains the record of the witness of many men and women who have, in fact, carried out Jesus’ words literally as missionaries in this country and in foreign lands. But that does not let the rest of us off the hook. How is each of us, or can each of us, live our missionary mandate?

The many opportunities our parish offers through our Social Justice Committee are an invitation to invest our time, talent and treasure in a variety of missionary works. Check out the new pamphlet display in the vestibule offering information on the many opportunities available to us through our Social Justice Committee. Or consider offering yourself to be a homebound minister of Holy Communion, a catechist in one of our Faith Formation programs. Being a missionary doesn’t necessarily mean quoting Bible verses to someone. St. Francis of Assisi is said to have stated: “Preach the Gospel wherever you go. If necessary, use words.” Offering a word or gesture of welcome, a listening ear, can be an anointing with the oil of gladness, the balm of healing and forgiveness. Choosing to respond with kindness and conviction on a point of Gospel or Church teaching in a heated political argument instead of lobbing a verbal bomb may earn us the scorn shown Amos, but a Gospel seed has been sown which may yield a future harvest

How will each of us respond to the other who knocks on the door of our heart or on whose door we knock? As another of the ritual words of dismissal at the end of Mass bids us, “Go and announce the Gospel.”

Fr. Jim Secora