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Jesus Prepares Witnesses to Himself and His Ministry

Biblical Reflection for 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time C

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, JUNE 29, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- The theme of "peacefulness" appears in all three readings today, and there is a definite link between the first reading from Isaiah (66:10-14c) and the reading from the Gospel of Luke (10:1-12, 17-20). Isaiah's poetry celebrates the long-awaited return of Israel from exile and imagines their triumphant return to the nurturing arms of Jerusalem, the Holy City and Mother of all cities.

There is certainly a parallel and a contradiction in today's Gospel. Both Isaiah's reading and the gospel speak of the rejoicing that characterizes the return of exiled Israel to Jerusalem and the return of the disciples after a successful mission.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus, like Israel, is also journeying toward Jerusalem, where he, too will be welcomed by the city -- but then rejected. It is in the holy city of Jerusalem that Jesus will inaugurate the new kingdom of God by his passion and death.

The mission of the seventy-two

Only the Gospel of Luke contains two episodes in which Jesus sends out his followers on a mission: the first (Luke 10:1-6) is based on the mission in Mark 6:6b-13 and recounts the sending out of the Twelve; here in Luke 10:1-12 a similar report based on Q becomes the sending out of seventy-two in this Gospel. The episode continues the theme of Jesus preparing witnesses to himself and his ministry. These witnesses include not only the Twelve but also the seventy-two who may represent the Christian mission in Luke's own day. The instructions given to the Twelve and to the seventy-two are similar and that what is said to the seventy-two in Luke 10:4 is directed to the Twelve in Luke 22:35.

When Jesus orders his followers to carry no money bag (Luke 10:4) and greet no one along the way, he stresses the urgency of the mission and the single-mindedness required of missionaries. Attachment to material possessions should be avoided and even customary greetings should not distract from the fulfillment of the task.

Evangelization and healing

Luke relates evangelization and healing in Jesus' commissioning of the Twelve. He summoned the disciples and sent them on mission to engage in ministries that would restore health and well-being to individuals, families and communities. Jesus also sent the seventy-two, our predecessors: "Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you.'"

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In the sending of the seventy-two, Jesus confirms that through his disciples, and those who would come to believe in him through their word, his peace and the news that "the kingdom of God has come near to you" would be proclaimed to the world. At their joyful return, despite rejection, Jesus rejoices at their success in the submission of the evil spirits in his name: the message is never to cease, never to give up. And yet the call to repentance that is a part of the proclamation of the kingdom brings with it a severe judgment for those who hear it and reject it. As the kingdom of God is gradually being established, evil in all its forms is being defeated; the dominion of Satan over humanity is at an end.

Proclaiming the Word brings healing

For Jesus, healing is never just the healing of the body but also mind, heart and spirit. It is not just about making people physically better, but it is about hearts made whole, sins forgiven and a world healed. The very proclamation of the word is meant to heal and cannot be separated from care of neighbor. As we share meals with the stranger, as the seventy-two did, we naturally build relationships, which will lead us to a deeper concern for their health and well-being. As we let go of our self-interest and focus on the healing needs of others we will restore God's covenant with those who have been denied the opportunity for health.

Healing has always been a significant concern and an ongoing activity of the Church. The relationship of reconciliation, healing and salvation are recurring themes in Luke. Jesus called his followers to repentance and to a transformation of their old attitudes and way of living into a radically new set of relationships and attitudes.

Rejoicing in the Holy Spirit

Commenting on today's Gospel, Pope John Paul II, in his masterful 1986 encyclical letter "Dominum et Vivificantem" (On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World) wrote in #20: "Thus the evangelist Luke, who has already presented Jesus as 'full of the Holy Spirit' and 'led by the Spirit ... in the wilderness,' tells us that, after the return of the seventy-two disciples from the mission entrusted to them by the Master, while they were joyfully recounting the fruits of their labors, 'in that same hour (Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was your gracious will.'" Jesus rejoices at the fatherhood of God: he rejoices because it has been given to him to reveal this fatherhood; he rejoices, finally, as at a particular outpouring of this divine fatherhood on the 'little ones.' And the evangelist describes all this as 'rejoicing in the Holy Spirit.'"

Continuing our reflection on the Holy Lands

After the Council of Nicea in 325, Palestine began flourishing with Constantine's churches especially in the three most venerated places: the Holy Sepulcher and Calvary in Jerusalem, the traditional place of Christ's teaching on the Mount of Olives (so-called Basilica of Eleona) and the Nativity Grotto in Bethlehem. Some of the works were supervised by Helena herself.

For the pilgrims journeying to Palestine in the 4th century, those sites constituted the core of their interests. Holy spots became so popular and desirable that one of the Christian traditions placed Jerusalem, specifically the hill of Golgotha, at the center of the world. This is clearly seen on many ancient maps of the Holy Land from this period. In 333 a Christian pilgrim from Bordeaux made the journey to Jerusalem by land. As a remembrance, but more likely for the benefit of future pilgrims, he compiled a detailed record of the stages and distances on the road both there and back in his important work called the Bordeaux Itinerary.

Here in this city of Jerusalem

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St. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem (349 - 384 A.D.) had a unique privilege of presiding over the church in Jerusalem immediately after the completion of new buildings begun during Constantine's reign. Cyril is the envy of every bishop, pastor, chaplain, parish council, finance committee and pastoral minister! Imagine walking into a situation where everything is newly built and no fund drives or building campaigns are needed! Cyril preached magnificent sermons within feet of the actual places of Christ's death and resurrection. He said of Calvary, "Others only hear, but we both see and touch." Cyril wrote: "Here in this city of Jerusalem the Spirit was poured out on the church; here Christ was crucified; here you have before you many witnesses, the place itself of the Resurrection and towards the east on the Mount of Olives the place of the Ascension."

In the Diary of Egeria (or Etheria), written by a wealthy Spanish woman while making her pilgrimage to the Holy Land between 381-384 (the trip included also Sinai, Egypt, the Valley of Jordan and Transjordanian area), we read not only about her vivid impressions made by the impact of the biblical sites, but also a vivid observation of the liturgy celebrated in the shrines. With many details she describes the Sunday and weekday celebrations throughout the liturgical year, focusing especially on the Holy Week prayers in which she participated in Jerusalem. From Egeria's Itinerary we learn how she enjoyed the cordial reception of local Christians who met all her needs as a pilgrim, showing her biblical sites, conducting appropriate acts of worship in the spots, escorting her, giving hospitality and advice. Egeria's positive experiences might be very indicative of the experiences shared by most pilgrims at the end of the 4th century, and of pilgrims today who have the privilege of meeting the local peoples of the Holy Land.

Those who settled in the Holy Land

Another pious practice linked to the pilgrimages was settling in the Holy Land. Some pilgrims explicitly decided to set out for the Biblical Land in order to live there, or during their sojourn made up their minds to remain there. Such is the case of St. Jerome and his women friends. After arriving in Palestine in 386 he established a community in Bethlehem. Jerome would exclaim in his writings: "Here, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes; here he was seen by shepherds, here he was pointed out by the star; here he was adored by the magi." Jerome later wrote to his friend Paula in Rome urging her to come and live in the Holy Land. He wrote: "The whole mystery of our faith is native to this country and this city." Nothing else in our Christian experience can make this claim. No matter how many centuries have passed, and no matter how far Christianity has spread, Christians are wedded to the land that gave birth to Christ and Christianity.

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[The readings for 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time are Is 66:10-14c; Galatians 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20 or 10:1-9]

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