

Matthew 9:36. *When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest."*

At the beginning of today's Gospel, Jesus is involved in a mission to surrounding towns and villages accompanied by his disciples. On His journey He healed many people of many diseases and taught in their synagogues, houses, and in the open countryside. As He travelled on from place to place, preaching and teaching, His fame spread so that the crowds grew larger day by day.

Eventually, the crowds grew to such an extent that Jesus became concerned for them. We're told that He had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, "like sheep without a shepherd." It was at this point that He uttered the prayer that is highlighted at the beginning of this sermon:- "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest." From the disciples who were accompanying Him, Jesus chose twelve to be sent out in His stead.

The twelve men Jesus chose were just ordinary people. They came from ordinary walks of life. A number of them were fishermen with no special qualifications. Far from being perfect, they possessed the same human faults and failings as we find in ourselves. Let's look at some of them.

Simon, the one renamed Peter by Jesus Himself, blew hot and cold. At times he was as solid as a rock, justifying the name that Jesus gave him. But at other times he was anything but solid. As the crucifixion drew closer Jesus predicted to Peter: "Before the cock crows you will deny me three times." – and he did (Matthew 26:34). There was also Andrew his brother.

James and John were also brothers, the sons of Zebedee, but were both hot headed. There was one occasion when they both wanted Jesus to call down fire and brimstone on a Samaritan village that refused to accept Him. They were also full of personal ambition, and wanted to have the top places in Jesus' kingdom, thus causing dissension among the other disciples.

Matthew was a tax collector. This was a hated occupation for other Jews for they collected tax for the hated Romans, the occupying power.

Simon belonged to a group called the Zealots whose aim was to get the Romans out of Palestine.

The other six disciples were Philip, Bartholomew, James the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus, Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus.

All of these disciples then were chosen by Jesus to be His apostles “those that are sent out.” Jesus saw good in each one of them, even Judas Iscariot. The same applies to each one of us in this day and age. We don’t have to be perfect in order to be called and used by God today. When those original twelve apostles were chosen by Jesus to reach out to others in His name, He equipped them for the work He wanted them to do. They too were called and: - ...”given authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease, and every infirmity.” (Matthew 10:1)

Through baptism we too are chosen to be amongst those who are chosen to be “sent out” to bring others in. Jesus still calls us to reach out to others today, as He did to those disciples so long ago.

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