



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday Year C

### ***The harvest is rich but the labourers are few***

*Readings: Isaiah 66: 10-14, Ps 65, Galatians 6: 14-18, Luke 10: 1-12, 17-20*

Twenty years ago this year I left my parish for a week and came home to Cornwall to join the mission called the Walk of a 1000 Men. Founded by a lovely evangelical pastor called Dan Cozens, a former artist and amateur boxer, the aim was to go into the highways and byways, the pubs and clubs, the community centres and factories and find the men missing from our churches.

We preached in the street. We went into pubs and asked the landlady if we could give testimony. We performed drama in the town centres. We knocked on doors and asked people about their beliefs and gave witness for Christ. We went into schools and colleges and talked to the children about Jesus. We walked from town to town singing God's praises and we slept on church hall floors and took £2 a day with us to survive on.

It all seemed very scary before we started, even for the professionals. Today's Gospel passage always reminds me of that time. Jesus sends his followers, 72 of them, out in pairs, to go to the places He Himself intends to visit.

This is an important point. We go to prepare the way of the Lord. Jesus alone can convert the heart of a man. The evangelists' job is to prepare for Jesus' coming.

Jesus notes that the harvest is huge but the labourers are few. Too true today. Not many of us - but a world to win. The country has a majority of agnostics - don't know - whatever the more comforting statistics say. Believers worship. Non believers wash the car or go to the garden centre or the dump.

So there is much for us to do. All these people do not know or love the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no shortage of opportunity for mission. Unfortunately the church in our culture has become shy of its task, embarrassed by its Divine mandate. We don't like to push our beliefs on others, we excuse ourselves.

That is the same as saying we wouldn't like to offer a lifebelt to a drowning man.

The Catholic Church is a missionary enterprise for the salvation of Man or it is nothing. It is why Jesus came. It is why Jesus died.

Jesus commands the 72 evangelists to go out like lambs among wolves. Go into a pub and preach the Gospel and you will get some idea of how terrifyingly accurate that analogy is. BUT.... You know the extraordinary thing is this. Once you have taken your courage in your hands and done it, all those hard faced men along the bar and the snickering kids in the corner take on a completely different demeanour. They respect your

courage and they talk to you – often about quite deep things in their lives. Sometimes it is harder to get out of the pub than it is to get in.

Jesus tells His men to take nothing for the journey.

My experience is that everywhere we went God provided for us. We would be invited in, fed, watered etc. Usually my £2 was used for buying a man a drink in a pub (those were the days when you could get 2 pints for £2.) Complete dependence reminds us of our real condition before God and our ultimate condition in this world. We are not to worry about provision – just go.

We got to pray with an extraordinary number of people. Just ask and people will be glad you did.

Knocking on doors some people had no time, others invited us in and wanted to talk about deep spiritual things and peace rested on those households. Never be afraid to talk about the Faith and their lives.

So this Gospel resonates with me and reminds me of my little long ago week on the road with the Mission.

Why am I telling you all this?

Two reasons. One is to encourage you always in your central task of mission, preparing the way in peoples lives for Jesus.

The second is that later this year, late September / early October the same mission group is returning, twenty years on, to do Walk Cornwall Part II.

If you get a chance, be part of it.

You can host a walker, an evangelist. You can organise or be part of a prayer support team. You can help at an event. Encourage your school, your church, your club, your pub to invite them in. You can ask them to send a speaker to a Men's Breakfast and invite your lapsed friends. Ladies can use their contacts to arrange similar opportunities. If you are really feeling brave, you can volunteer to do a bit of training and assist at some of the events.

You'll never be afraid again. This is an extraordinary opportunity given to us in the Year of Faith.

Also, working with other Christians gives them the chance to find out the truth about the Catholic Faith rather than the confused picture they normally have.

It's not the priest's job. He will do his bit but mission is the work of the whole church. We are sent out to witness to Christ and call the lost home. The last words of the Mass, *ite missa est*, is usually translated as, 'Go – the Mass is ended'.

The truth is that it actually means that, in the strength of Christ, the Church – that is you and me – is being sent into the world on mission. Go for it.