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Daily Reflections



THE HARVEST IS ABUNDANT

By Father David Robinson, SJ

An Excerpt from the Gospel of Luke

The Lord Jesus appointed seventy-two disciples whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so, ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this household.’ If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you.”

LUKE 10:1-6

Reflection

Jesus modeled a life of radical dependence on the grace and abundant love of

God as he ministered throughout the communities of his day. He imbued in his disciples this same faith as they set out on their own journeys of teaching, service, and healing. Their spirit of trust and generosity was a radical sign to those they met that wealth and property were not the measure of a person's worth before God. Their willingness to leave everything behind mirrored the spiritual freedom initiated in the ancient Jewish tradition of *jubilee*, a 50-year cycle in which the ownership of purchased land was returned to its original owner, slaves were freed, and debts were canceled. In Jesus' era, in a society marked by Roman power structures, control of economic systems, and social stratification, the disciples' freedom from possessions marked a stunning vision of how life should be lived in and for God.

The practice of trusting that God would provide through the generous hearts of those the disciples met on their travels became the spiritual foundation for the future lives of the *medicants*. These were individuals and religious communities who relied on the 'kindness of strangers' and begging to care for their daily needs. In the early centuries of Christian life, the lifestyle fell into disrepute, but was revived by the spiritual life of poverty espoused by Franciscans and others. The willingness to forego economic stability as a mark of those surrendering themselves totally into the hands of God became a revered virtue.

In the ensuing centuries, mendicancy, with its rigorous poverty and lifestyle of begging, became more institutionalized, as Western society placed ever more emphasis on stable income, property, and economic security, and exported these values throughout the world.. Begging began to take on negative overtones and judgments, unless organized under a well-framed religious community structure.

As we look back over the centuries of *jubilee*, *mendicancy*, and other forms of relinquishing material comfort, we can discern our growing distance from the radical surrender known by the first communities of faith. Our value systems may keep us from the fear of loss, but they rob us of the radiant freedom that comes with an inner light born of a heart that sees what is owned in terms of how it can be shared rather than how it can be multiplied. We may recognize that all we have or may receive is grounded in God's abundance, but our willingness to consciously search for ways in which we can relieve the suffering of those in lethal poverty, persecution, or abandonment may not keep pace. A handful of holiday credit-card donations can just as readily be an avoidance of contact rather than a heartfelt commitment to bless another who suffers.

Unfortunately, to reflect on these realities can often lead to resistance and self-justification—the dangerous seduction of guilt and regret. These are not the path to spiritual freedom! As we move into the seasons of Advent,

Thanksgiving, and Christmas, we can, each and all, spend just a little more time and focus to discover those simple (and often invisible) ways in which we can bring to others the Godly abundance of which our hearts are capable. Once that self-generated joy begins to increase, we are more than ever able to awaken to the manner in which God blesses us as the most rewarding and fulfilling heart of our life and living. What we give becomes mapped to, and seeded by, the love in what we are.



Jesus' Disciples on the Road
Image Created by David Robinson, S.J.

For Pondering

- How do you express your gratitude to God through the ways in which you use your resources to help those most in need?

- Do you have small but frequent ways in which you acknowledge your blessings by reaching out with concrete generosity?
- Have you planned to expand or enhance your generosity to others in a world of such global and compelling poverty?

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