

Historical Commentary



(The Fourth Sunday of Trinitytide - Year C)

The Liturgy Letter

Commentary on Luke 10:1-11,16-20 from Church Fathers and John Calvin

Ambrose: He says this to the seventy disciples whom he appointed and sent out in pairs before his face. Why did he send them two by two? Pairs of animals were sent into the ark, that is, the female with the male, according to number, unclean but cleansed by the sacrament of the church... Those animals are opposites, so that the one eats the other. A good shepherd does not know how to fear wolves for his flock, and therefore he sends those disciples not against a prey but to grace. The forethought of the good Shepherd prevents the wolves from harming the lambs. He sends lambs among wolves in order that the saying may be fulfilled, "Then wolves and lambs shall feed together."

Cyril of Alexandria: How then does he command the holy apostles, who are innocent men and "sheep," to seek the company of wolves, and go to them of their own will? Is not the danger apparent? Are they not set up as ready prey for their attacks? How can a sheep prevail over a wolf? How can one so peaceful conquer the savageness of beasts of prey? "Yes," he says, "for they all have me as their Shepherd: small and great, people and princes, teachers and students. I will be with you, help you, and deliver you from all evil. I will tame the savage beasts. I will change wolves into sheep, and I will make the persecutors become the helpers of the persecuted. I will make those who wrong my ministers to be sharers in their pious designs. I make and unmake all things, and nothing can resist my will."

Cyril of Alexandria: When preaching to people everywhere the Word that he spoke and calling the inhabitants of the whole earth to salvation, he requires them to travel about without purse, bag or shoes. They are to travel rapidly from city to city and from place to place. Let no one say that the object of his teaching was to make the holy Apostles refuse the use of the ordinary articles of equipment. What good or what harm would it do them to have shoes on their feet or go without them? By this command, he does wish them to learn and to attempt to practice that they must lay all thought of their livelihood on him. They must call to mind the saint who said, "Cast your care on the Lord, and he will feed you." He gives what is needful for life to the saints.

Ephrem the Syrian: He sent them two by two, in his likeness. He sent them preaching without a salary, as he had done... "Behold, I am sending you forth like lambs among the wolves," to show that as long as the Shepherd was with them they would not be harmed. To

encourage them, he said, "He who receives you, receives me."... He forbid them to take money for fear they would be considered businessmen and not announcers.

Augustine: Since we do not know who is a son of peace, it is our part to leave no one out, to set no one aside, but to desire that all to whom we preach this peace be saved. We are not to fear that we lose our peace if he to whom we preach it is not a son of peace, and we are ignorant of the fact. Our peace will return to us. That means our preaching will profit us, not him. If the peace we preach rests upon him, it will profit both him and us.

Cyril of Alexandria: Consider the great authority he gave the holy apostles, how he declared them praiseworthy, and how he decorated them with the highest honors... "He that hears you," he says, "hears me, and he that rejects you, rejects me; and he that rejects me, rejects him that sent me." O what great honor! What incomparable dignities! O what a gift worthy of God! Although men, the children of earth, he clothes them with a godlike glory. He entrusts his words to them that they who resist anything or venture to reject them may be condemned. When they are rejected, he assures them that he suffers this. Then again, he shows that the guilt of this wickedness, as being committed against him, rises up to God the Father. See with the eyes of the mind how vast a height he raises the sin committed by men in rejecting the saints! What a wall he builds around them! How great security he contrives for them! He makes them such as must be feared and in every way plainly provides for their being uninjured.

Cyril of Alexandria: Christ gives those who love instruction the assurance that whatever is said concerning him by the holy apostles or evangelists is to be received necessarily without any doubt and to be crowned with the words of truth. He who hears them, hears Christ. For the blessed Paul also said, "You desire proof that Christ is speaking in me." Christ himself somewhere also said to the holy disciples, "For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you." Christ speaks in them by the consubstantial Spirit. If it is true, and plainly it is, that they speak by Christ, how can they err? He affirms that he who does not hear them, does not hear Christ, and that he who rejects them rejects Christ, and with him the Father.

Irenaeus: The Lord of all gave the power of the gospel to his apostles. By them, we also have learned the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God. The Lord said to them, "He who hears you hears me, and he who despises you despises me, and him who sent me.

Cyril of Alexandria: What is Christ's reply? "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." That is, "I am aware of this, because as you set out on this journey by my will, you have conquered Satan. I saw him fall like lightning from heaven." This means that he was thrown down from on high to earth, from overweening pride to humiliation, from glory to contempt, from great power to utter weakness. The saying is true, because before the coming of the Savior, he possessed the world. All was subject to him, and there was no one able to escape the trap of his overwhelming might. Everyone worshiped him. He had temples and altars for sacrifice everywhere and had an innumerable multitude of worshipers. Since the only-begotten Word of God came down from heaven, he has fallen like lightning.

Maximus of Turin: Since we possess the Lord Jesus who has freed us by his suffering, let us always look on him and hope for medicine for our wounds from his sign. That is to say, if perhaps the poison of greed spreads in us, we should look to him, and he will heal us. If the malicious desire of the scorpion stings us, we should beg him, and he will cure us. If bites of worldly thoughts tear us, we should ask him, and we will live. These are the spiritual serpents of our souls. The Lord was crucified in order to crush them. He says concerning them, "You will tread upon serpents and scorpions, and they will do no harm to you."

Cyril of Alexandria: To rejoice only in the fact that they were able to work miracles and crush the herds of demons was possibly likely to produce in them the desire of arrogance. The neighbor and relative of this passion constantly is pride. Most usefully the Savior of all rebukes the first boasting and quickly cuts away the root that sprang up in them—the shameful love of glory. He was imitating good farmers who, when they see a thorn springing up in their parks or gardens, immediately tear it up with the blade of the pickax before it strikes its root deep.

John Calvin: The twelve, therefore, were sent to awaken in the Jews the hope of an approaching salvation. After their return, as it was necessary that higher expectation should be excited, others were sent in greater numbers, as secondary heralds, to spread universally in every place the report of Christ's coming. Strictly speaking, they received no commission, but were only sent by Christ as heralds, to prepare the minds of the people for receiving his doctrine. As to the number seventy, he appears to have followed that order to which the people had already been long accustomed. We must bear in mind what has been already said about the twelve Apostles, that as this was the number of the tribes when the people were in a flourishing condition, so an equal number of apostles or patriarchs was chosen, to reassemble the members of the lacerated body, that the restoration of the Church might thus be complete...

Now as the return from Babylon prefigured a true and complete redemption, the reason why our Lord chooses seventy heralds of his coming appears to be, to hold out the restoration of their fallen state; and as the people were to be united under one head, he does not give them authority as judges, but only commands them to go before him, that he may possess the sole power...

When Christ commanded that his Gospel should be preached, he did not at all attempt a matter of doubtful result, but foresaw the approaching ruin of Satan. Now since the Son of God cannot be deceived, and this exercise of his foresight relates to the whole course of the Gospel, we have no reason to doubt, that whenever he raises up faithful teachers, he will crown their labor with prosperous success...

Hence we infer, that our deliverance from the bondage of Satan is effected in no other way than through the Gospel; and that those only make actual proficiency in the Gospel, in whom Satan loses his power, so that sin is destroyed, and they begin to live to the righteousness of God. We ought also to attend to the comparison which he employs, that the thunder of the Gospel makes Satan fall like lightning; for it expresses the divine and astonishing power of the doctrine, which throws down, in a manner so sudden and violent, the prince of the world

armed with such abundant forces. It expresses also the wretched condition of men, on whose heads fall the darts of Satan, who rules in the air, and holds the world in subjection under his feet, till Christ appear as a Deliverer...

20. *Your names are written.* As it was the design of Christ to withdraw his disciples from a transitory joy, that they might glory in eternal life, he leads them to its origin and source, which is, that they were chosen by God and adopted as his children. He might indeed have commanded them to rejoice that they had been regenerated by the Spirit of God, (Titus 3:5,) and become new creatures in Christ, ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#);) that they had been enlightened ([Ephesians 1:18](#)) in the hope of salvation, and had received the earnest of the inheritance, ([Ephesians 1:14](#).) But he intended to point out, that the source from which all these benefits had flowed was the free election of God, that they might not claim anything for themselves. Reasons for praising God are no doubt furnished by those acts of his kindness which we feel within us; but eternal election, which is without us, shows more clearly that our salvation rests on the pure goodness of God. The metaphorical expression, your names are written in heaven, means, that they were acknowledged by God as His children and heirs, as if they had been inscribed in a register.