

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2021 B

Sometime this morning, you put on your shoes. What was on your mind? For the most part we don't think too much about it at all. Shoes are shoes and off we go. When Jesus sends the Twelve, He instructs them to travel light and rely on God to provide for their needs. So, no luggage, food, money, extra clothes. But where the other Gospels also list sandals as something to leave behind, Mark very directly includes them. Curious minds might wonder why.

Remember that when Moses encountered God in the burning bush on Mount Sinai, he was told: "*Come no nearer. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place you are standing is holy ground.*" Moses taking off his sandals implied a couple of things. First, this was a common gesture of respect and humility. But ***even more, removing his sandals put Moses in touch with that holy ground***; he was being invited from understandable human fear and confusion in front of that bush into a deeper union with God. There is also a connection here with the veil in the Temple that would be torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died – that which stood between God's holiness and human weakness was taken away so we could come into contact with the Lord's mercy.

So for Mark, the Twelve's sandals imply that they are on their way to God, but they have not yet arrived. They have a journey to make by sharing in Jesus' own work from the Father. They are ***missionary disciples, chosen and sent***. This first evangelization trial run probably didn't take them very far in miles, but it took them out of themselves, leaving the reliable and the routine to go where Jesus sent them.

The same Jesus also chooses us, asks us to support one another, and sends us into the world – perhaps not far in miles, but still an interior journey. We do not go alone; we are part of the Church, sent to announce Christ's Gospel, and we are to travel together towards that holy ground of God's living presence, the promise of every spiritual blessing in the heavens. Like the Twelve, we too have no guarantee of success or even welcome. And we have to be watchful not to go to places, in fact or in our

attitudes, that are not where **Jesus** is sending us. As the Apostles experienced, God does not call us only in exceptional circumstances and send us to unknown places. Day by day, we are chosen and sent by Jesus. And most often, we are sent right back into the same setting – the same people, the same responsibilities, the same problems and obstacles, the same opportunities that we brought with us when we walked into church in our sandals and shoes. It is in those ordinary times of life that the Word of God most needs to be spoken. When we focus on our blessings rather than complaints; when we see with patience and empathy rather than rushing to judgment; when we encourage rather than find fault; when we take time to do a kindness; when we offer a silent prayer rather than cataloguing our grievances – it is to such places and moments that we are sent. They may seem trivial compared to the problems of the world. But while we might hope we will be able to rise to great occasions and witness to our faith in crucial moments, there are vastly more of these small, ordinary events in life. We are all traveling through the same day; when our paths cross, we can either make it a little bit better for another, or a little bit worse.

So, back to your shoes. Perhaps the Apostles never quite thought of their sandals in the same way after Jesus sent them to evangelize their neighbors and friends. We may never know in this life what a difference a kind word and a thoughtful gesture might make for someone who needs a sign of God's love in that moment. When you put on your shoes this week, remember: I am not simply going to work, or to the store, or to pick up the kids, or to a friend's house ... ***I have been chosen, and I am being sent by Jesus, on my way to holy ground.***