

Sixth Sunday after Trinity
July 7, 2013
Homily for the Anglican Use Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Since I was appointed to the governing council of the Ordinariate, I have learned that Pope Francis is following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. That is, our prayers that laborers be sent into the harvest are being answered as the Lord inspires more of our separated Anglican brothers to come into the fullness of the Faith; and just as Pope Benedict approved their ordinations to the Catholic priesthood, as he approved my own, so now Pope Francis is giving the same permission. *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, Pope Benedict's Apostolic Constitution, is alive and well under the stewardship of Pope Francis, and our Ordinary, Msgr. Steenson, continues to welcome communities of former Anglicans into the Church.

This does not mean that our prayers should be any less fervent than they have been up to this point. I have also learned since coming on the Council that the Lord is raising up vocations from within the Ordinariate parishes that already exist. Several men from across the country have perceived a call to the priesthood, and have asked that the Ordinariate might help them discern that call. Unfortunately, the Ordinariate is not in a position right now to do that, since we simply do not have the money to erect a house of studies for these men, nor do we have the \$25,000 per year that it will cost to educate them. So while the Lord continues to raise up laborers for the harvest, the Church doesn't always have the resources it needs to bring those vocations to fruition. Please continue to pray, that a resolution to this problem soon be found, so that the men God has called to serve Him may be able to do so.

The prayers that you offer, imploring God to send laborers in to the harvest, are part of a cosmic struggle that Jesus mentions in today's Gospel. He says, first, that the laborers are sent as sheep in the midst of wolves, but He also tells us, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." The devil and his angels refused to serve God, and so they were expelled from the ranks of the heavenly hosts, an event that Jesus tells us He witnessed.

Sadly, the devil and his angels have not been idle since their expulsion. They have used their keen intellect and the allure of sin to draw away from God those more intent to serve themselves than their heavenly Father. Those demons are foot soldiers in the cause of wickedness, but their power is merely to tempt. They cannot drag us to hell with them, any more than God will force us to go to heaven. But their mention in today's Gospel does provide us with a context within which we ought to understand our efforts on behalf of the Gospel.

I think an illustration taken from the headlines will help clarify here. If you saw the news last night or this morning, you may have learned what I did, that a Coptic priest was murdered in cold blood yesterday as he shopped for food in the northern Sinai. Fr. Mina Aboud Sharween's murder has been blamed on the Islamist supporters of the deposed president Mohamed Morsi. But why would they kill a priest? Because the Islamists blame the ouster of Morsi on the Christian minority in Egypt, just 10% of the population.

On its face the accusation makes no sense, as more people demonstrated against Morsi than against Mubarak two years ago. But that's not the point. What we see here is the playing out of an old pattern: whenever the people demand liberty, the tyrants and terrorists attack the Church. The Church is a target precisely because she represents freedom from the oppression that Islamists want to impose. The Church is a target because she represents freedom from sin and death. Whether the Christians were in fact responsible for the ouster of Morsi is irrelevant. Where the cause of light and life advances, the devil fights back with darkness and death.

Even so, the forces arrayed against each other are not of equal standing. Not only is the devil saddled with the great disadvantage of being a liar, the father of lies, his deception was exposed and overcome in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The fact that he was defeated in heaven and expelled was reaffirmed when his plot to destroy the Lord of Life was thwarted when Jesus rose from the dead. Thus, we know the outcome of this struggle. It is, in reality, preordained. The devil and his angels lose, just as they have lost from the beginning.

At the same time, though, until the great day of resurrection and reward, they are free to tempt us; and it is not uncommon, as this weekend's tragic events illustrate, that the devil will employ human agents to inflict harm upon the people of God, that is, harm to our bodies. For him to harm our souls we must permit it, we must invite it. For the devil to claim what is rightfully God's, we must turn away from God and turn to the devil. We must succumb to Satan's wiles.

Where then is our protection? Who will refute the deceiver and inform the faithful that they are being deceived? Who will prevent the devil from claiming souls that are not his to claim? You know the answer: the priest. It is the very laborers we have prayed for God to raise up who serve as a thin black line between your souls and the devil's deceptions. It is the faithful priest who stands up for life in the face of death, who speaks the truth to refute the lies. It is the faithful priest who administers the sacraments you need for strength to resist the assaults of our adversary. Why did the devil coax his agents to murder a priest yesterday? Because on earth it is the priest who serves as the only barrier between freedom in love and slavery to death. It is the priest who stands in the place of Christ and tells us, "Have no fear. I am with you until the close of the age." The Islamists aren't the only ones to kill the priests first as soon as it appears their rebellion is faltering. Our own English ancestors did the same, killing nearly two hundred from Queen Elizabeth to King Charles II in order to prop up their revolution.

You understand, then, that when Jesus implores you to pray for laborers to be sent into the harvest, he is asking for your participation in this cosmic struggle. He needs soldiers who will protect his people, shepherds who will lay down their lives in defense of Christ's flock. He needs fathers who love their children so much that they will tell them the truth. Whether we know it or not, our ministry from its inception has been part of this struggle, for by it we have already raised up one priest. We must commit ourselves to raising up many more, for while we know the final outcome, we do not know which way in the end our neighbors will turn. Having enough laborers could be for our loved ones the difference between life and death. So pray hard. There are souls at stake.