

Twenty Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time
September 27, 2015

The 19th century Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin once wrote the ideal mission statement for being a prophet: "It is the task of the prophet to stand alone before God, bear the burden of God's revelation and pass it on to others."

As we heard in our first reading today, that noble task was wearing Moses out. So, he asks God to spread His spirit among the people. God agreed and bestowed His Spirit on "seventy elders."

Even when a couple of those elders, Eldad and Medad, skipped the confirmation meeting, God inspired them in spite of their absenteeism. But that alarmed and angered some of the human protectors of God's spirit. If the designated prophets were not at the official commissioning, they shouldn't prophesy. To which God replied: "Nonsense! Go ahead and prophesy!"

This is where Joshua entered the scene. From his youth, Joshua had been one of Moses' closest friends and supporters, organizing Moses' affairs, fulfilling his wishes. He was jealous for Moses, and wanted to protect him from people who tried to take his authority. So Joshua told Moses that he ought to exercise greater amount of control over the prophets.

But Moses had grown to be a wise old man who knew that the Spirit of God could never be contained. If you stifle it here, it squeezes out there; if you chain it, it breaks its bonds. Better to let the Spirit blow where it will. In fact, Moses said, wouldn't it be nice if absolutely everybody had his or her own personal slice of the Spirit pie?

That's precisely what the prophet Joel would foretell centuries later which would be quoted by Peter at Pentecost: "I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind; your sons and daughters will prophecy; even on the slaves will I pour out my Spirit."

Our Gospel from St. Mark showed how the disciples inadvertently show themselves to be like the complainers in our first reading from Numbers while insisting on their own righteousness. Theirs was a problem of disordered orientation. Like the tattletale in Moses' story, John informed Jesus that someone who "does not follow us" was driving out demons. There are two major problems with St. John's approach.

First of all, his very words demonstrated his mistaken conviction that the disciples were the ones others should follow. That demonstrated his complete inability to understand the meaning of the word disciple (one who shares the Good News) or apostle (one sent by another).

John's second problem, even more serious than the first, was that he missed the point that being called to discipleship was a vocation to collaborate in God's plan for humanity.

Any disciple properly oriented to God's plan would have rejoiced, like Jesus did, that someone else, anyone else, was involved in the successful struggle against the demons.

One day, John and all of the apostles would understand that the Holy Spirit is given to the whole Church. Each of us has been given our own particular outpouring of the Spirit.

And that means we are all gifted with God's grace, we're all commissioned to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to others.

But first, we have to accept that Jesus is in fact Good News in our own lives. Pope Francis, in just a few days in our country, has shown us how attractive and compelling the Good News of Jesus is and how easily it can be shared in a way that is non-threatening, life affirming and is also so very effective. The Holy Father is showing us the way of becoming successful missionary disciples by simply sharing what is already in our hearts.

Who knew that this remarkable yet remarkably simple approach would work? Jesus knew. Because that's what *he* did. And today, and everyday, He's asking us to commit ourselves to doing the same.