

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

When the pope visits a country a lot of work goes in to getting things ready.

Like most heads of state, important dignitaries, and people who have a lot of influence in the world, an advance team arrives to make sure that there will be a fitting welcome.

The seventy Jesus appointed to go ahead of him to those places he intended to visit worked in similar fashion.

The difference is that the seventy were not to simply get the people ready for Jesus to pass through as he headed to Jerusalem, they were to proclaim this message: “The kingdom of heaven has come near to you.”

Jesus gives them power to cure the sick and expel demons as a sign that what they said was true.

We should not be surprised that the seventy returned to Jesus rejoicing that their journey had been a rousing success.

Bringing health and wholeness to a town ought to put people in a good mood.

Being a realist, though, Jesus knows that his emissaries will also experience rejection, as well-intentioned as they might be.

We can speculate as to why they would not receive a welcome:

old grudges could have gotten in the way;

they simply could have been the wrong race for some people;

there might have been economic reasons—Paul gets thrown out of one town because his message, if accepted, will ruin the business of making statues to the goddess Diana;

Sometimes it simply has to do with those who are in power not allowing anything new to upset the apple cart.

A little rejection can stop us in our tracks and might be the single most likely reason why we don't feel comfortable sharing our faith more readily.

Better to leave others alone, we think, or to hope that they will pick up from our example alone what we would like for them to know about God's love and mercy.

As understandable as that is, God calls those who would have their names written in heaven to be his witnesses. That's the primary benefit of putting up with the rejection in the first place.

Actually, to be a witness is a lot easier than thinking you are going to be the one to bring Christ to others.

Oftentimes, in the history of the Church that was the way people approached it: we have Christ and the

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sacraments and we will convert you so that you can enjoy with us the grace that comes from them.

Witnesses go about the task differently. Witnesses expect that God is present everywhere, even though his presence may go undetected.

A witness is someone who has let God into his/her own life and learned to pick up the signs of God's presence in the lives and situations of others.

That's one thing that our tradition does for us. It helps us to be able to see God's presence in our lives and in the lives of others.

Then, we have to give witness to that. We have to recognize it and say something about it.

Some of the rejection that comes from being proclaimers of the Good News is because we forget this fundamental reality and fall into the trap of trying to tell others how to live their lives.

That can be hard to hear, especially if we've lost sight of our own need for conversion.

But to give witness to God's action in the life of someone else takes us and our imperfections out of the equation and focuses the attention where it should be anyway: what God is doing in the life of another and in the world.

As we approach the table of the Lord's Eucharist we can pray for the wisdom to know how to give witness to his presence and for the courage not to let rejection dissuade us from trying again somewhere down the road.

No one succeeds all the time. But the happiest Christians are the ones who know to keep their eyes open for God's action in their lives, and, when they see, to point it out to whoever will listen.