

July 12, 2015 Avon Lady Homily

As I reflected on today's gospel reading (Mk.6-13) I was reminded of an incident dating back to my early teenage years. One afternoon, hearing the ring of the doorbell in my family home, I descended the staircase and was the first to reach the front door. Upon opening the door, I saw a smartly dressed middle-aged woman with cosmetic samples in hand. In a cheerful voice, she said, "Ding dong. Avon calling." It was my first and only encounter with the "Avon Lady". She inquired about the whereabouts of my mother, who was then not available.

Later, I wondered, if in her training, the saleswoman was prepared by her supervisor/teacher for rejection and failure. What does a saleswoman do if she is turned away? What if someone slams a door in her face? What if days go by and she sells no cosmetics? Does she lose heart and quit? Does she maintain her resolve to continue working in sales? A lovely smile can only have a minimum impact on all potential customers.

Consider our gospel reading today. After a period of extensive training, Jesus sends the twelve apostles, his ambassadors, out with his authority. The evangelist tells us that they were given authority over unclean spirits and were given the power to heal the sick (Mk.6:13). Christ is fully aware that the authority invested in them is no guarantee of a warm reception. The twelve men have witnessed Jesus being rejected on a number of occasions and there remains the strong likelihood that they, too, will experience rejection as well!

In the gospel Jesus gives his disciples fair warning: "Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them" (Mk6:11). "Shake off the dust" is a gesture performed by Jews upon returning to the Holy Land from a Gentile (heathen) region. The dust of a Gentile land was... in the words of the rabbis, defiled, unclean. For those who turn away the disciples, all that is left for them to do is "shake off the dust" in testimony against them.

Let us ask ourselves: How do we react to setbacks and disappointments, particularly in the service of Jesus? How persevering are we if the results we desire are unsatisfactory? Do we then adopt the attitude, "Why bother"?

In her lovely reflection on today's reading, the Swiss mystic and medical doctor, Adrienne Von Speyr, offers this thought. "No apostle can say: I possess a truth that belongs to the Lord, but no one wants it! There is always someone who is looking for it, perhaps the fiftieth, the hundredth, the thousandth person. In moving on the mission seeks this person who will receive the message and the messenger".

Perhaps, without realizing the full extent of our Christian witness, we have planted a seed, and the possibility of that seed not bearing fruit for days, months, even years. But many will remember our efforts in the name of Jesus. Let failure not enfeeble us, discourage us. Let us remember with affection the Lord and His apostles. They experienced rejection and failure, too.

Amen!