

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Upon reflecting on the words of St. Luke in today's Gospel, I am reminded of the words of Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter *Spe Salvi, Saved in Hope*. In it, he speaks of the nature of hope and service as related to articulating the reality that the kingdom of heaven is in our midst.

He writes, "Only for the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and to persevere. Certainly we cannot 'build' the Kingdom of God by our own efforts - what we build will always be the kingdom of man with all the limitations proper to our human nature. The Kingdom of God is a gift, and precisely because of this, it is great and beautiful, and constitutes the response to our hope. And we cannot - to use the classical expression - 'merit' heaven through our works.

Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something 'merited,' but always a gift. However, even when we are fully aware that Heaven far exceeds what we can merit, it will always be true that our behavior is not indifferent before God and therefore is not indifferent for the unfolding of history. We can open ourselves and the world to allow God to enter; we can open ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good. This is what the Saints did, those who, as 'God's fellow workers,' contributed to the world's salvation."

We read of Jesus commissioning or sending seventy-two of his disciples in pairs of two to go before him to various towns he was going to eventually visit. He said to them, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." In one sense, this can seem rather ominous; there is so much work to be done and not enough workers to tend the vineyard. In another, however, there is great cause for hope and optimism as Jesus calls on us to petition his Father for disciples to proclaim the Good News. Jesus invites us to be active participants, both by prayer and action, in the unfolding drama of salvation history. Are we not, like the Saints before us, "God's fellow workers?" There is a certain dignity and respect which Jesus accords us as he invites us to be co-workers in the redemptive and salvific work of exclaiming by word and deed that 'the kingdom of God is at hand for you.'

Our discipleship is not one simply of passive receptivity of God's Spirit and grace but a conscious, willing participation God's plan for us. Our engagement in that participation can lead to a certain sense of pride and a mistaken sense of power and superiority. Jesus warns the seventy-two of this temptation upon their return to him. They rejoiced saying that even the demons were subject to them. Their confidence is understandable; yet, they like us needed to be reminded that the source of their witness comes from God. It is God who gives us to gifts of articulation in proclaiming the Good News. We are able to inculcate this truth in our lives when we pray and celebrate the Eucharist. In this way, we are reminded that it is God's nature, not our own, from which these graces and gifts derive.

Father Tom