

### **Heal and Proclaim God's Kingdom (Homily for the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September)**

Our God is a God full of mercy and compassion. Even when humans are unfaithful and disobey him, He remains faithful to them; for He simply cannot forsake his own (Is 49:15). This is the exhortation we get from the first reading. The people of Israel have been allowed by the king of Persia to return from the exile and rebuild the temple of Jerusalem. The prophets interpret this favour as a fulfilment of God's promise and therefore expect the people of Israel to renew their faithfulness to God. Instead, however, the Israelites bring with them vices of idolatry and infidelity from the gentile cultures of Persia. This behaviour displeases the Lord. Ezra's prayer is a simple acknowledge of the guilt of the people of Israel while at the same time it expresses gratitude for the favour God has shown to the "remnants" who have been restored and given a "stable home" in God's "holy place" (Ezr 9:8). "God has not forgotten us in our slavery... He has extended his faithful love to us" (Ezr 9:9).

The Gospel reading provides a concrete way of responding to such mercy and faithful love that God lavishes on us. It challenges us to take seriously our God-given mission of proclaiming His kingdom and healing those who are sick in our midst. How do we do that in our everyday life? Jesus tells us how! In today's Gospel account from St. Luke, we hear the first of the two missioning accounts given in the narrative. The second account, which is unique to Luke, takes the ministry of Jesus beyond the responsibility of the twelve apostles to include other disciples of Jesus. We read that 72 are sent to give the message of peace, heal the sick and proclaim God's kingdom (Lk 10:1-12). In today's account, Jesus calls the twelve together and first gives them power (*dynamis*) and authority (*exousia*) before instructing them to go on a mission. While they are on the move, they should travel light and strike a balance between stability in a home and mobility from village to village. Only then they are able to focus on the

matter of the ministry given by Jesus – to heal the sick (including casting out demons) and to proclaim the message of the kingdom.

We here in Hekima as students or lecturers are in every sense the remnants, referred to by Ezra in the first reading, who have received mercy and favour in the sight of God. Our being at this place here and now is an opportunity to renew once again our relationship with God so that all the more readily and effectively we may take our God-given mission to transform the cultures we interact with through our scholarly endeavour. We need to constantly ask ourselves whether the cultural values we import (from traditions and our social surrounding) into our Christian lives transform or deform our relationship with God.

At the same time, we are in every sense the extension of the apostles of Jesus time. Before Jesus missioned his disciples, he had prepared and trained them in his ministry. He taught them by word and deed, gave them power and authority, and set before them a challenge to imitate him. There should be no wonder therefore that we should spend some time acquiring thorough academic and practical (pastoral fieldwork) training here in Hekima so that now and hereafter, we have no excuse, but to plunge into our mission and deliver accordingly.

And as we go about this business, we ought to take note of Jesus' instructions: **take nothing on the journey** – trust in hospitality of God through our neighbour and learn to live with and without (Phil 4:11); **be stable as you move** – participate in the life our respective communities; **Proclaim the kingdom and heal the sick** – resist the evil (Rm 13:12) and accept the excluded as you heal the sin of division and disintegration in the society; **take what is on offer from those you work with and work for** – share in communion with others and in intimacy with God.

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