

Homily for 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD

Readings: Isa 66:10-14; Ps 65(66); Gal 6:14-18; Lk 10:1-12, 17-20

Theme: Lord, Send us your Peace!

With the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine; the Islamic State (IS) continuing to unsettle parts of the Middle East and spreading to parts of Africa; Boko Haram, bandits and kidnappers ravaging the most populous black nation on earth, Nigeria; with the shootings and killings in the United States or the knife stabbing in the United Kingdom, no one can talk about absolute peace in any part of the world. The threat to peace affects every part of the world. Lack of peace is part of the root cause of migration. Migration has become an issue the UK government and many so-called Western countries are currently struggling with. Where, when and how do we find peace in the world? The answer is in calling on the Lord to send us his peace. Jesus sends out seventy or seventy-two disciples. They are to declare peace to whatever homes they enter. But not everyone will receive the disciples. Some people will always reject peace because they thrive and benefit in an atmosphere of chaos and war.

Our first reading is from the last chapter of the prophet Isaiah. This final chapter summarises Isaiah's prophecies of the last days when there will be joy and restoration after the exile for the people of God. There will be rebuilding of the temple (vv.1-4), judgment on the enemies of Israel and the just (vv.5-9). Our reading is from vv. 10-14. There will be joy once again for Jerusalem. The opening words *samach et-Yerushalaim!* Rejoice Jerusalem! is a call to be joyful after all her travails. Those who love her and mourn over her because of the destruction caused by the exile should rejoice once again, for the Lord is doing something new. Jerusalem will become again where people find solace. The author uses the imagery of children sucking from their mother's breasts. Such will Jerusalem be, a place where people will find satisfaction and joy. The reason is that God will *natah*, that is, extend or stretch out or spread out peace like a river upon Jerusalem. Jerusalem will become the place of peace for all the nations of the earth, including the *ha-goyim*, the nations. All those who run to Jerusalem will be comforted. Like a son comforted by his mother, so will God comfort those who go up to Jerusalem. But where is this Jerusalem? It is a symbolic representation of the dwelling place of God, ultimately, the kingdom of God. But Jesus taught us to pray for that kingdom to come and the will of God to be done on earth (cf. Matt 6:10). When God reigns in the world, there will be peace. The last verse of our reading says, 'the Lord shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.' There are many enemies of peace in the world, upsetting the peace God desires for his people.

Jesus sends out some of his followers in the gospel to work for peace in the world. Some manuscripts record that Jesus sent out seventy and others seventy-two. The number seventy recalls the seventy elders chosen by Moses to help in the work of administration of the people of Israel (cf. Num 11). But on that occasion, there were two invited to the camp, Medad and Eldad, who did not join the others. Some tradition, therefore, holds that Moses chose seventy-two elders. The different manuscripts may record the number seventy or seventy-two depending on the tradition they uphold to align the action of Jesus with that of Moses. Of utmost importance to us is the mission to which Jesus sends them. Jesus appointed them and sent them out in pairs ahead of him to places he wanted to visit because the labourers were few, and the harvest was plentiful. He sends them out on a risky and challenging journey as lambs among wolves.

Lambs are known for their gentleness, innocence and dependence. They are peaceful. The disciples of Jesus are to be gentle in their mission. Gentleness means they must not approach the mission with violence or arrogance but must have a peaceful disposition. Hence, Jesus says to them, 'Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!"' They must be innocent and live a faultless life to win people for the kingdom of God. They

must be dependent on the owner of the mission. The mission is not theirs. They must rely on Jesus, the good shepherd. Just as God was the true shepherd of Israel who gathered the lambs in his arms because they were helpless (Isa 40:11), Jesus will hold his disciples in his care and love as they go out for the mission. Sending out the disciples as lambs reveals the vulnerability of the disciples in the world, which is full of wolves. Wolves are described as terrifying predators in the Bible. They devour, tear and destroy their prey (cf. Gen 49:27; Eze 22:27; Jer 5:6). They are natural enemies of sheep and attack their helpless victims mostly at night (cf. Hab 1:8; Zep 3:3). Jesus compares the unbelieving world to the wolf who will be hostile to the disciples of Jesus.

The wolves in the world create chaos and a lack of peace. But the disciples of Jesus are to bring peace to this same world. Jesus is aware of the dangers involved in preaching the gospel. Still, many people need to hear the good news and be liberated from the enemies, the wolves in the world. It will not be easy for the disciples. Some will be rejected and killed just as they treated Jesus. But that must not be a reason for discouragement. In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us of the cross of Jesus Christ. In taking up the cross and following Jesus, we find peace and mercy, first for ourselves and then for the entire world. Therefore, as Jesus sent out the 72 in the gospel, we must cry out to God to send more labourers who will work for peace in the world. Like the psalmist, we trust that God will not reject our prayer nor withhold his love from us.