

Reflections

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The Group of the Twelve

How is Jesus able to inaugurate an entire revolution of the world, a profound transformation of men and communities, in only three years? He utilizes a very adequate strategy: He dedicates himself to forming and preparing witnesses, instruments, his envoys – that is – apostles.

If we look at the Gospels, it comes to our attention that Jesus, in his public life, hardly ever appears alone. We always see him surrounded by his twelve or some of them. They are like his shadow, his permanent companions. Neither do we ever see them alone. Jesus can appear without the multitude, but not without that group of friends. They are associated to his teachings, to his works, to his task. They are his extension, his continuation; not only occasional friends who could not be there tomorrow.

A second aspect is that it is about a fixed group. They are not just a few friends, today some and tomorrow others. The apostles form an unbreakable unity. They are a collection, a college with a very defined number: 12. With this name, “the twelve,” they are almost always designated in the Gospel. At other times they will be called the 12 disciples or apostles. The list of the group is repeated various times in the Gospel and sometimes the order of the quotation is changed a bit, but new names are never introduced nor is there anyone lacking of the chosen twelve. And the apostles themselves consider – after the death of Jesus – that number important. Thus they will elect Mathias to substitute the lack of Judas.

But the most obvious is that those twelve have been chosen for something very concrete. Jesus does not limit himself to give them a teaching, as He does with the multitude. He does not expound on a series of truths which they may or may not accept. What Jesus confers on them is a mission. It is a mission which commits them totally. Their position as chosen is at risk with this.

And it is not about just whatever mission. They do not have to do a part of Christ’s task – they are not his helpers. They have the same mission as Jesus: “As my Father sent me, so I send you.” And they will not be simple “chroniclers,” they will not only have to relate what Christ did.

They will have to continue it, make it their own, extend it. “Go and teach the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

And it has to do with a salvific mission: a mission for which no man is equipped, if he does not receive his special power from Above because it is the same mission as that of Christ. Therefore, Jesus gives them the Holy Spirit, because only with that supernatural and superhuman power will they be able to fulfill it.

Thus, it remains clear that it is a permanent mission. They will be the witnesses and authentic representatives of Christ. They will be more than simple bearers of his message, authentic actors in the Work of God. And to be able to fulfill this superhuman task, they will also receive superhuman powers: Jesus gives them the power to forgive sins; he gives them the keys to the Kingdom. And He also gives them “the authority to expel filthy spirits and to heal all illness and pain.”

And all of this is not a mission which they can each fulfill on their own, but only all together. Therefore they must “be one” (JN 17,20) because working together will be how the world will believe. Beginning with his apostles, his followers from all nations will constitute a new community, but united to Christ. It is the “small flock” to which its Father will give the Kingdom.

Due to the extraordinary surrender and fidelity of the apostles and by the grace and love of God, we all form part of this flock of the Lord, of that Church which He founded.

Let us ask Jesus that He give to each one of us that apostolic spirit of the forerunners so that we also can be useful instruments for the conquest of the Kingdom of God.

Questions for reflection

1. Do I feel like an envoy?
2. Do I behave like someone who is an extension of Jesus?
3. Do I feel I have a divine mission?

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