

While on earth, our Lord Jesus Christ sent out two missions. One to be conducted by the twelve disciples and the other by the seventy apostles He later on had chosen. Before sending those missions out in the field of service He established very important precepts which were to be followed by the first disciples and apostles and by the church up to this present day.

God is the Caller

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you" (John 15:16). These words, from the blessed mouth of our Lord, confirms that service is a calling from the almighty that needs subsequent joyful and willing compliance, obedience and submission.

Two by Two

The Lord instructed His disciples to go out in pairs. The number two has its significance in both the old and new testaments. In this particular incident, number two signifies solidarity, support, encouragement, empowerment and uplifting. Although our Lord openly contended that *"the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few"* (Matthew 9:37), which would logically make single

mission more economical and productive; yet our Lord at that point in time was more concerned about the quality of service rather than quantity believing that God is capable of sending more workers to His field.

A Compensatory Plan

Sending His disciples out in couples reduced by half the coverage area of service. Knowing the vital indispensable need for more servants would not be met except by prayers, *"Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'"*

(Matthew 9:37-38). This command was not given to the disciples only but to the Body of Christ throughout the centuries. How many times do we remember to pray for more faithful servants?

Required Consecration

An answer to God's calling to serve must be followed by consecration of one's life. This consecration can be either:

- Total Consecration which includes devoting one's whole life to service in priesthood or deaconship, to mention just two. Total consecration should be received with obedience,

spirituality, submission and total readiness to fulfill this calling.

- Partial Consecration involves dedication periods of one's life during which a servant immerse himself in some services that require an amount of time. Partial or periodical consecration can vary from an hour a day to a year at length. It may sound impractical or strange at first glance. However, in real life people do put on halt their life activities such as college or school for various reasons after which they resume their normal life. You can imagine the spiritually fruitful product and change brought about if, for example, after graduation a number of graduates postponed their work life for a year dedicating this year to service in various areas. We, the church should not stand still, hand folded outsiders lending deaf ears to our Lord's appeal for more workers in His field. Our duty is to react and respond proactively to His blessed calling.

Qualifications for the Calling

- Meekness

The first prerequisite is meekness in order for the mission to succeed. Our Lord realized how rough

and crude the road would be but also knew the landmarks on those rough roads. "*Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves*" (Luke 10:3). His words presupposed the preexistence of wolves to which the lambs would be sent. Safety and security of the lambs were not promised. However, conversion of the wolves into lambs was feasible. Christ's followers should not lose their meek nature in the midst of ungodly people but trust they will certainly affect the unruly and change their nature. The Master of the game is our Lord Himself and we are to learn directly from Him, "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matthew 11:29).

- Readiness

The second prerequisite, readiness for service, is manifested in the willingness to sacrifice personal comfort, time, money and even life. St. Paul laid it down clearly when he said, "*As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'*" (Romans 8:36). The ceremony of bishop ordination symbolizes very vividly this concept of laying down the self. The bishop to be ordained gets escorted by two other bishops who pull him by the end of his sleeves up to the altar thus indicating what

persecutions, pain and sufferings await him just like his Master who like a sheep taken to slaughter did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:7). Joshua, son of Sirach says, "*My son, if you draw near to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation*" (Sirach 2:1). A true servant's role is to carry the others' burdens, weaknesses, infirmities and sins causing them to become his, and after that struggle and strive before God in order to be healed from them. St. Paul says, "*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves*" (Romans 15:1).

During the Divine Liturgy, the priest prays in the inaudible prayer of preparation, "Receive this sacrifice on behalf of my sins and the ignorance of my people" thus calling what people committed as ignorance and his, as sins. That is the epitome of submission and readiness to suffer on behalf of the others. Another symbolic item is the crosses on the priest's tonic. For while the back cross is smaller than the front to signify the sins of the congregation, the front one is bigger to stand for his own sins.

- *Rejection of the Earthly*

Materialism is a big hindrance to service. Our Lord's instructions in this area were loud and clear "*Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road*" (Luke 10:4), thus

indicating the need for complete liberation from concern about material needs. His cross examination of the disciples after coming back from their mission was whether they needed anything "*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us*" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Since He is the provider, get preoccupied and concerned about the Provider and stop worrying about the provision.

A church that relies on her richness and monetary funds puts her faith at risk. Depending on money as a primary source for spreading the Word of God is against our Lord's teachings. It is quite surprising to see a congregation standing crippled before the advancement of their church service because of money. "We do not have the money for it." Such people do not realize the power that exists in this lack. In a similar situation, St. Peter's answer to the crippled man "*Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'*" (Acts 3:6).

- Preoccupation with the Spiritual message

The message: "The kingdom of God is near" is the core of service. Advancing the Lord's kingdom and leading people to repentance and reconciliation was the disciples' major concern according to the Lord's

directions. After the disciples service had extended, and fearing getting too much involved in what was beyond their scope and focus, they decided to delegate others to carry on with the social part of service including caring for the widows and the poor (Acts 6).

What to Expect on the Journey

When sending His disciples out on their first mission, our Lord gave them instructions not to take with them any provisions but to trust to have their needs met *"And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house"* (Luke 10:7).

Every city they entered they were to eat and drink as they were given them; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. *"Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you"* (Luke 10:8).

He forewarned them against rejection and gave the solution. *"The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you."* (Luke 10:11). While refusing to take anything from such people who rejected them, they were still to relay the spiritual message that "the kingdom of God is near"

and that people should repent and confess their sins. The message for us today is that the church still remains open in spite of people's hard heartedness and resistance.

Meeting Needs and Expenses

When the disciples returned back, He rhetorically asked them whether they lacked anything. Our Lord wanted to hammer in the need for faith in God the provider. The church does not put any burden on people except that of love and sharing the good news of Salvation. However, it is in people's advantage and blessing to contribute with their financial resources towards building churches and supporting service. St. Paul expressed this concept clearly saying, "*Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account*" (Philippians 4:17). Also that explains the church's stance from money that comes from sinful gain or worldly resources. A sinner's donation is a defiled one. In 1 Chronicles 21:18-26, King David refused free service for God. "*Then King David said to Ornan, 'No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing.'*" (1 Chronicles 21:24) asserting the fact that it is the congregation's duty to meet their church's needs and finance their projects without relying on outside

sources. It is sad to say that nowadays many churches are no more houses of God preaching the message of repentance and reconciliation. Many church buildings have been converted into places of social or business activities.

Taking Service Seriously

Our Lord's instructions to His disciples "*Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road*" (Luke 10:4) reflect our Lord's heart and mind concerning the importance of commitment in service. Delivering God's message should be number one priority in a servant's life.

Attending to Other's Needs

In order for God's message of Salvation and Reconciliation to make sense and be accepted, attention must be directed to their physical needs. In order for people to listen, they must be healed first of their infirmities. That was our Lord's command, "*And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*" (Luke 10:9). Even if total physical healing does not take place, yet praying with a sick person matters much and alleviates at least psychological pain. St. Paul went about performing healing miracles while he himself was denied one and the Lord told him, "*And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'*" Therefore

most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The Content of the Message

- Peace - *"But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.'" (Luke 10:5)*
- Repentance - *"And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" (Luke 10:9)*

The Lord's instruction to His disciples is to deliver the message of Peace and Reconciliation to every one without discrimination or segregation. The response and subsequent fruit bearing is the responsibility of the hearer.

The Honor in Service

"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (Luke 10:16). With these words, the Lord asserted the honorable and fine status of the disciples and subsequently servants who embark upon delivering the message of Peace and Repentance. What an honor it is for us to acquire the mouth of the Lord Himself. That elevation should be a source of consolation and power for all those who serve the Lord with which to overcome adversities and face calamities. The ambassadorship

acknowledged by St. Paul is a confirmation and affirmation of that status elevation. Consequently, how much should people realize this honorable status granted to God's servants and respond genuinely and faithfully to God's message.

The Outcome of the Mission

- Joy

As expressed in the disciples words "*Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.'*" (Luke 10:17) and recognized and admitted by the Lord Himself "*And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'*" (Luke 10:18). However, the secret of Christ's true joy is to see all His sheep having arrived safely to the shore without damage of straying "*And again: 'I will put My trust in Him.'*" And again: "*Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.'*" (Hebrews 2:13).

- **Eternal Life** "*Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven*" (Luke 10:20). More important than the joy incurred by the gifts of the Spirit and success in service is the fact that our names are written in heaven because of the work of Salvation in us. While the first may put us in danger of perdition because of pride or too much trust in the

gifts and the self, the second grants us everlasting life and permanent Salvation and Redemption.

St. Paul was cautious of this truth about the risk of losing one's salvation. So, he decided to "*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Conclusion

Service is not only for priests and deacons. There are different types of service. Any Christian person believing in Christ and having renewed his life and put on the new man is called for consecration and service. Consecration can be total or partial. Service has a price tag that comes with it. Our Lord said "*But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'*" (Luke 9:62) but bear the cross and follow Him looking forward to the honor and glory that awaits those who serve with patience and faithfulness.

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