

HOMILY
15TH Sunday in Ordinary Time
Saint Lawrence Parish – Great Bend
July 12, 2015

Just this past Monday at 6:30 in the morning, I blessed high school students from parishes around our diocese as they prepared to depart for a summer mission trip to Mississippi sponsored by our mission office. Not a few parents wondered how their sons and daughters would exist without cell phones for over a week - manage with very little money - and, most significantly, survive apart from their watchful eyes. ... And yet, if this trip is anything like scores of previous mission experiences, these young people will likely survive extremely well and marvel at what they were able to accomplish serving with and among the poor.

Almost two weeks ago, I was privileged to celebrate Mass for hundreds of other young people at an annual youth rally hosted by parishes from throughout our Diocese. The gospel, taken from Saint Matthew's version of the Pentecost event when the Spirit of God was poured forth upon the first followers of Jesus, recounted the words of Jesus, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you!" ... ALL are sent – young, old, rich, poor, those who believe themselves to have much to offer, and those who see themselves with little to give.

And recently, I was privileged to reflect with about 25 young men who participated in a priestly vocational experience about my own journey these past five years as Bishop of Scranton. ... Being called to serve the Church as a Bishop hardly figured into my plans for ministry.

There's a common denominator in each of these scenarios that I just shared. Each conveys the reality of unlikely and reluctant individuals who are called and sent by God to be his presence in the world and to build his kingdom in our midst. ... Each is quite typical of all of our lives and the manner in which God works within the Church.

God's way of working in our world goes back to the very beginnings of his relationship with his people. ... In our first reading today from the Old Testament, we encounter the prophet Amos – an extremely reluctant soul who had no intention of becoming a prophet of the Lord. In fact, he states rather emphatically that he was a shepherd and a tender of sycamore trees. He rejected the title of prophet. He saw himself poorly prepared and trained for the work. Yet God called him and used him to preach to his people.

And in Mark's gospel, Jesus sends the twelve apostles out on mission for the first time on their own to test the waters and to see how they would fare. ... Another example of unlikely individuals for the task presented. ... One was a tax collector, the remainder were fishermen – not people of any great social standing. The tax collector was hated. The fishermen were simple souls with little education or eloquence. Taken together, the apostles were hardly the sort of people whom you would be inclined to think most skilled at building up a following for an itinerant rabbi from Nazareth, of all places.

Yet, what is so remarkable about the ministry of Amos and the twelve is that both the prophet and the apostles knew who they were in relationship with God. They recognized their own limitations but they also understood God's desire to save his people, to deepen their faith and to fill them with his healing, his love and

his peace. ... Indeed, Amos and the twelve had a confidence that grew from that relationship God. They understood that they were chosen by God and provided with every spiritual blessing in the heavens. They trusted that God would not let them down, for after all, they were building HIS Church – not their own.

Still today, it's God's Church that continues to be built in our midst and that continues to grow and flourish. It's for that reason that I'm so pleased to be a part of this Sunday celebration of the Eucharist in Saint Lawrence Parish. More than most any of us realize, we celebrate today – and every time we gather in prayer – God's ever present care and concern for his Church – the People he has called into being.

This community is strong and vibrant not simply because of the dedicated leadership with which you have been and continue to be blessed, but also because of each of you. Most of you would be the last individuals ever to revel in your particular gifts and talents – yet you use them well and generously for the sake of the Church. You work together for the continued building up of the Body of Christ in this corner of God's kingdom. And you also so beautifully reflect an openness to the challenge of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who calls us to “rise over and above our own varied preferences, likes, affiliations or tendencies in order to enter into the expanse of God's horizon” in and through which we are all blessed recipients of his mercy and love.

Saint Lawrence Parish is a blessing because like countless numbers of baptized souls down through the ages, you understand just how essential it is for you and all of us – as God's people – not only to affirm with words but to live our faith in service of one another.

That's the heart of today's gospel message and what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus. ... Thank you Father Cramer, and especially thank you to you, my brothers and sisters of this great parish community for your willingness to continue to embrace the mission of Jesus – even when, like the apostles, you feel a little ill-equipped or reluctant to do so. It truly is in such moments that the essence of our strength shines forth – a strength rooted in Jesus – whose Church we are privileged to build.