

## **Tuesday: Ordinary 23-B**

### **Building Mass**

John Paul II Pastoral Centre

11 September 2018

Dear brother priests, deacons and colleagues:

#### ***Gospel***

Today's Gospel recounts Jesus making one of the most important decisions of his earthly life: the selection of the Twelve, those men whom he called to be especially close to him, to be formed in his teaching and in his way of life, and whom he would later commission to carry on his ministry of proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Such a decision could not be made lightly. Nor was it.

St. Luke tells us the secret of what Jesus did. He prayed – and not just momentarily, but “he spent the night in prayer to God” (Lk 6:12). Jesus liked to go to “lonely places” to pray (cf. Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16). He often withdrew to “the hills” to be alone (cf. Lk 6:12; 9:28); and “the night” afforded him the solitude necessary for him to be alone with the Father (cf. Mk 1:35; 6:46-47; Lk 6:12).

And so, at daybreak, after the night in prayer, Jesus very deliberately chose from among the many who had been following him just twelve very ordinary men – as there had been twelve tribes that made up ancient Israel – and he named them Apostles (cf. Lk 6:13): the ones to be sent forth on mission to evangelize the world.

The number of Apostles – 12 – not only expresses continuity with the holy root of the People of God, the Israel of the 12 tribes, but also the universal outreach of their ministry; they were to bring the Good News of salvation to the very ends of the earth: everywhere, to everyone.

All this is summed up in the words of Benedict XVI, “the calling of the disciples is a prayer event; it is as if they were begotten [born] in prayer, in intimacy with the Father.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Peter at the Head of the List***

All the evangelists record an order when they list the names of the Apostles: Peter is always head of the list. This is important to our understanding of his mission in the Church.

Our attachment to the Successor of Peter, especially as those who work at the Pastoral Centre, is not just a sentimental matter, and so we put up pictures of him in our building. It is a doctrine of our faith that we give him filial obedience, for his ministry is a constitutive element of what it means to be a Catholic Christian. Without communion with Peter, we would not be fully the Church that Jesus willed. We need the Rock. We need the Shepherd. We need Peter in Francis.

### ***Choice of Judas***

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 170.

But what about Judas? Why did Jesus choose include him? This choice is as troubling today as it was, no doubt, at the Church's beginning.

This choice was just as deliberate as that of the others. Judas was no accident. All the Evangelists insist on his status as an Apostle; he is repeatedly called "one of the twelve" (Mt 26:14, 47; Mk 14:10, 20; Jn 6:71) or "of the number of the twelve" (Lk 22: 3). He therefore belongs to the group of those whom Jesus chose as a companion and collaborator.

The mystery of the choice is all the more troubling because Jesus later pronounces a very severe judgement on him, and how sad he must have been to pronounce it: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed!" (Mt 26: 24).

Nonetheless, the Lord placed his trust in Judas, as he did in all his disciples – and as he does in us – even though he knows that trust will be violated. Anyone who has been betrayed by a friend knows some small part of the sorrow that the sins of Peter, and especially Judas, caused Jesus. Listen to what St. Augustine wrote so long ago:

Judas the traitor is chosen, not unwittingly, but knowingly, for Christ has indeed taken to himself the weakness of man, and therefore did not refuse even this share of human weakness. He was willing to be betrayed by his own apostle,

that you, when betrayed by your friend, may more calmly bear your mistaken judgment, your kindness thrown away.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps, just perhaps, the choice of Judas as one of the Twelve Apostles is an opportunity for us to reflect on what Jesus later says: “Love your enemies.” For he did, as is clear in his love for Judas, and he sets that example for us.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Prayer***

We should therefore pay close attention to just how Jesus called his closest associates, before he undertook any good work. In this he is a model for us; he is teaching us an invaluable lesson.

The first thing Jesus did before choosing his Apostles was to pray: before calling them, Jesus spent the night alone in prayer, discerning the Father’s will (cf. Lk 6:12). It is only after Jesus’ intimate conversation with the Father that the calling of his Apostles takes place.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels*, 2.20.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 90-91.

Prayer, of course, is absolutely central to every Christian life, all the more so for those, like you, who are more involved in the Church's evangelizing mission. A life of prayer is not esoteric. St. Teresa of Avila said that it consists in "being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with him who, we know, loves us."<sup>4</sup> **Conclusion**

This prayer and choice of Jesus remind us of what our "work" or "apostolate" is to be. The work of carefully encouraging and supporting the life of our local Church. Ours at the Pastoral Centre, no matter what the particular office or responsibility is a ministry. It is a work of service rooted in prayer.

And so, let us pray that we will be faithful to our own calling to minister to the People of God whom the Lord has entrusted to us.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>4</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Libro de la Vida* 8, 5.