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## Father Cantalamessa on the Apostolic Mission

### Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on This Sunday's Liturgy

ROME, JULY 14, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the Pontifical Household, on this Sunday's liturgy.

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He sent them out two by two

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time (B)  
(Amos 7:12-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13)

"And he called to him the Twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics."

Bible scholars explain that, as usual, Mark, on referring to Christ's deeds and words, takes into account the situation and needs of the Church at the time he is writing the Gospel, that is, after the resurrection of Christ. But the main event and the instructions that Christ gives to the apostles in this passage refer to the earthly Jesus.

It is the beginning and like the general trials of the apostolic mission. For the moment it is a limited mission to the neighboring peoples, that is, to Jewish fellow countrymen. After Easter, this mission will be extended to the whole world, also to pagans: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" [Mark 16:15].

This fact is of decisive importance to understand the life and mission of Christ. He did not come to realize some personal prowess. He did not want to be a meteorite that goes across the sky only to disappear later into nothingness. He did not come, in other words, only for those few thousands of people who had the possibility to see and hear him in person during his life. He thought his mission should continue, be permanent, so that each person, in all times and places of history, would have the possibility to hear the Good News of God's love and be saved.

That is why he chose collaborators and began to send them ahead to preach the Kingdom and cure the sick. He did with his disciples what a good rector does today with his seminarians, who, on the weekends, sends his young men to parishes so that they will begin to have pastoral experience, or sends them to charitable institutions to help those who look after the poor, those outside the European community, to prepare for what one day will be their mission.

Jesus' invitation "Go!" is addressed first to the apostles, and today to their successors: the Pope, bishops and priests, but not only to them. The latter must be the guides, animators of the others in the common mission. To

think otherwise would be as if saying that war can be waged only with generals and captains, without soldiers; or that a soccer team can be established only with one trainer and referee, without players.

After this sending of the apostles, the Gospel of Luke reads, Jesus "appointed seventy-two others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come" (Luke 10:1). These seventy-two disciples were probably all those he had gathered up to that moment, or at least all those who followed him with a certain continuity. Jesus, therefore, sent all his disciples, also laymen.

The post-Conciliar Church has witnessed a flowering of this awareness. The laity of ecclesial movements are the successors of these seventy-two disciples. The Vigil of Pentecost gave an idea of the dimensions of this phenomenon with those hundreds of thousands of young people who arrived in St. Peter's Square to celebrate Vespers of the Solemnity with the Pope. What was most impressive was the joy and enthusiasm of those present. Clearly, for those youths to live and proclaim the Gospel is not a burden to be accepted out of duty, but a joy, a privilege, something that makes the living of life more beautiful.

The Gospel uses only one word to say what the apostles should preach to the people ("that they repent,") whereas it describes at length how they must preach. In this regard, there is an important teaching in the fact that Jesus sent them two by two. Going two by two was customary in those times, but with Jesus it assumes a new meaning, no longer only practical. Jesus sent them two by two -- explained Saint Gregory the Great -- to inculcate charity, because with less than two persons there can be no charity. The first testimony to give of Jesus is that of mutual love: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

We must be careful not to misinterpret Jesus' phrase about shaking the dust off their feet when they were not received. In Christ's intention, this was meant to be a testimony "for" them, not against them. It should serve to make them understand that the missionaries had not gone for selfish reasons, to take money or other things from them; more than that, they did not even want to take away their dust. They had gone for their salvation and, rejecting them, deprived themselves of the greatest good of the world.

It is something that must also be stressed today. The Church does not proclaim the Gospel to increase her power or the number of her members. If she acted like this, she would be the first to betray the Gospel. She does so because she wants to share the gift received, because she has received from Christ the mandate: "Freely you received, freely you must give."

[Translation and adaptation from the Italian by ZENIT]

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