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A program for a Mass opening the synod process in the Diocese of Camden, New Jersey, is seen at St. Agnes Church of Our Lady of Hope Parish in Blackwood, New Jersey, Oct. 17, 2021. (CNS/Catholic Star Herald/Dave Hernandez)



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In [*The Diary of Jesus Christ*](#), a book as profound as it is delightful, Fr. Bill Cain has Jesus admit that he sent the disciples out on mission because he desperately needed a break from them. But even more than that, he knew they needed the experience of doing the mission rather than simply witnessing what Jesus did.

For some reason, today's selection from Matthew's Gospel stops before we hear Jesus tell the disciples to take nothing with them for the journey. Perhaps the last instruction, "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give," summarizes the idea that what they are to do does not come from their own expertise, but from the transforming grace of who they have become with Jesus.

Although it is not emphasized, today's Gospel reveals a great deal about Jesus. While we are not surprised by his compassion for troubled and abandoned people, we gain a great insight as we hear him tell the disciples to pray for workers to respond to the needs that he saw.

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Exodus 19:2-6a

Psalms 100

Romans 5:6-11

Matthew 9:36-10:8

As if inspired by his prayer, Jesus turned and gave his disciples the power to take up his mission. This suggests that when Jesus prayed, he was seeking to discern how God desired to act through him rather than for him.

What must those disciples have thought when Jesus told them they too could take command over evil spirits and heal the sick? What were they picturing when he suggested that they would cleanse lepers? Raise the dead? Did they have any clue about what he meant in telling them to give in the same way they had received?

When we read the rest of Matthew's story, we hear Jesus warn them about all the dangers they would face — dangers that became all too real for them after the Resurrection.

Whatever they felt, whether excitement for the adventure, fear of the road, or a sense of woeful inadequacy facing what seemed to be expected of them, they went out. At some level, they must have felt a bit like their desert ancestors about whom we hear today, people loved beyond measure — and charged with a vocation precisely because they were so loved.

Our reading from Exodus invites us to observe God telling Moses just how precious this people was. God commanded Moses to remind the Israelites of how they had been cared for — borne away from the Egyptians as if by eagles! All this just so that they could be God's own, a special treasure, the dearest on earth.

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Then God explains that none of this is just for themselves. They are God's chosen because of what they are to become for others — a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. As the beloved of God, they were responsible to make God present to the rest of the world.

There's a very practical spiritual dynamic at play in both of these stories. Whether we think of Israel or the disciples (as 12, they were symbolic of a renewed Israel), they were being invited to experience God's love in the most realistic way.

It was not enough to sit back and bask in warm feelings. That would be self-indulgent, and by the very fact of focusing on themselves, it would erode their awareness of God's love as a free gift.

What Jesus knew from his own life was that the love of God must be shared lest we lose touch with the source and become like Narcissus, lost in our own mirrors.

Jesus sent the disciples out for their own good as much as for the good of the world. In the dynamics of the reign of God, good is not separable — what is truly good for one, is good for all of creation and vice versa. We will only comprehend how much God has given us by giving it to others. Grace does not exist as a private possession.

What does this say to us here and now? As a church, we are in a [process of synodality](#) that calls us to prayer, contemplation, listening, discernment and mission. Our experience of synodality is much like the disciples' mission — it is a new and powerful invitation to be Christ's presence in our world.

In [Pope Francis' words](#), "It is not enough to have a synod, you must be a synod."

Taking the invitation and challenge of today's Gospel to heart, we will do all we can to be and become a church of disciples who continue the mission of Jesus. As we continue to be synodal, [let us pray the synod prayer](#) with hearts and minds ready for the Spirit to "teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it."

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