

## 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

### Exodus 19:2-6a

*Today's reading takes place just three months after the Israelites left Egypt. They have just arrived at the base of Mt. Sinai.*<sup>14</sup>

**2**In those days, the Israelites came to the desert of Sinai and pitched camp. While Israel was encamped here in front of the mountain,

**3**Moses went up the mountain to God. Moses ascended Mt. Sinai, which most modern authorities identify with Jebel Musa on the Sinai Peninsula. This is a peak that rises to a height of 7467 ft. and can be scaled in about an hour and a half. It also has an adjacent plain, which coincides with the encampment area at the base of the "mountain of God."<sup>2</sup> Then the Lord called to him and said, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob; Jacob's name was changed to Israel in Gen 32 so the "house of Jacob" is a common designation for Israel.<sup>15</sup>

**4**tell the Israelites: You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself. This reminds us of God's initiative, of how he moves towards us first.<sup>7</sup>

**5**Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, There are two requirements for the Israelites: they must pay attention to the Lord and obey His commands. IF they do so, THEN they will be His people. **you shall be my special possession**, This means that they will be God's private property, his personally acquired and carefully conserved possession. Of all the nation's of the earth Israel is to be God's property because He has chosen it and He will protect it with special care.<sup>1</sup> Note that a covenant is offered, not imposed upon the people.<sup>14</sup> **dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine.** The reason for this choice is that these are the descendants in the line that has been faithful to God since the beginning. In Exodus 4:22 God speaks of Israel as his "first-born son." The covenant that was started with Adam, continued with Noah and through his firstborn son Shem's great-great-great-great-grandson, Abraham, and through his son Isaac and his son Jacob and their descendants, is now clarified and expanded with Moses who represents the Nation Israel, the people who are these descendants!<sup>3</sup>

**6**You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, This does not mean that they will be ruled by priests, or that the entire people will exercise the role of priest (which is in fact reserved to the tribe of Levi); rather, it reflects the fact that God gives Israel the privilege of being the only nation in his service. Israel alone has been chosen to be a "kingdom for the Lord", that is, to be the sphere where he dwells and is recognized as the only Sovereign. Israel's acknowledgment of God is shown by the service the entire people renders to the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Because Israel is the "first-born son", God's plan is that together they would reach the other nations—as Israel's younger brothers in the family of God.<sup>3</sup> Israel would be a priestly people because they would mediate between God and the rest of the earth's peoples.<sup>4</sup> **a holy nation.**" By being God's possession Israel shares in his holiness, it is a "holy nation", that is, a people separated out from among the other nations so as to keep a close relationship with God; this is so close that in Deuteronomy Moses addresses the people: "You are the sons of the Lord your God." This new way of being means that there is a moral demand on the members of the people to show by their lives what they are by God's election: "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy."<sup>1</sup> The Israelites would be wholly set apart from pursuing their own

ends, wholly dedicated to Yahweh's agenda.<sup>4</sup> This special vocation is not forced on the people, but is left to their free choice. Two verses later, they accept the covenant.<sup>14</sup>

### **Romans 5:6-11**

*The friendship which reigned in paradise between God and man was followed by the enmity created by Adam's sin. By promising a future redeemer, God once more offered mankind his friendship. The scale of God's love for us can be seen in the "reconciliation" which took place on the Cross, when Christ did away with this enmity, making our peace with God and reconciling us to him.<sup>6</sup>*

#### **Brothers and sisters:**

**6**Christ, while we were still helpless, As the result of Original Sin, we were helpless and could not do anything on our own to save ourselves!! Someone had to come and rescue us!!<sup>16</sup> This is the status of the unjustified man. Heaven is closed and man is incapable of doing anything which will attain forgiveness of sin.<sup>14</sup> **yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly.** Jesus paid the price for our sins with his death on that cross at Calvary! The dying of Christ prior to any merit on our part shows us the depths of God's unconditional love for the world. This is all the more remarkable since the world, which he here calls "ungodly" and in verse 10 refers to as "enemies", certainly did not deserve it.<sup>5</sup> So if he died for his enemies, just think what he will do for his friends!<sup>14</sup> God sent Jesus to die for us, not because we were deserving, but because he loved us.<sup>16</sup> The Catechism teaches that Christ died for all men without exception: There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer.<sup>9</sup> (CCC 605)

**7**Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die.

**8**But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. This brings out the truly gratuitous character of Jesus' sacrifice.<sup>14</sup> Christianity is not just about what we must do to be saved, it is also about appreciating what has been done to save us!<sup>7</sup>

**9**How much more then, since we are now justified by his blood, Justification is our becoming sons and daughters of God. Blood is the principle of family unity. The human family, broken by original sin, is nonetheless united through Adam's flesh and blood. Paul says that we are now justified by Christ's blood. For Christ, the eternal Son of God, unites Himself to Adam's flesh and blood in the womb of Mary, and that flesh and blood is later crucified on the Cross, and then raised on the third day. It is distributed to us in the Eucharist. That's how Christ starts a new covenant: His body and blood become the body and blood of a new and everlasting family! The Council of Trent defined justification as "a transition from that state in which a person is born as a child of the first Adam to the state of grace and of adoption as children of God through the agency of the second Adam, Jesus Christ our savior."

Justification, though momentary when one first receives it through Baptism, is also progressive. It is the life of the child of God maturing in God's grace.<sup>8</sup> **will we be saved through him from the wrath.** The "wrath" does not so much represent God's anger as the tragedy of being unfit at the final judgment!<sup>7</sup>

**10**Indeed, if, while we were enemies, (unbaptized and living with the effects of Original Sin) we were reconciled to God through the death of this Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life. Salvation can be described in terms of the past (with reference to our Baptism which saves us from the filth of our sins), present (when we allow grace to make

us steadily more virtuous and holy), and future (where we hope that we will live forever with the Lord in glory).<sup>5</sup>

**11**Not only that, but we also boast of God The unredeemed person boasts through self-praise but the person who acknowledges redemption through Jesus, boasts in God himself.<sup>17</sup> Having experienced God's love in the death of Christ, he can now exult at the very thought of God!<sup>2</sup> **through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.** God's love for us can seem so abstract that we need to be reminded of something that Beryl Hendrickson said in the August, 2004 Guideposts: "If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring. And a sunrise every morning. Face it, he's crazy about you!"

### **Matthew 9:36-10:8**

*Jesus is in his first year of public ministry. He has performed his first miracle (turned water into wine at Cana), talked with the Samaritan woman at the well, has arrived in Galilee and preached the Sermon on the Mount. He has healed numerous people and has recruited Matthew. In the discourse we hear today, Jesus admits others to share both his mission and his powers, and he commissions them to proclaim on a scale wider than he could reach personally.<sup>14</sup> This reading recounts the choosing and commissioning of the twelve apostles. This implies the establishment of the church, the new Israel, for the Twelve represent the twelve tribes of God's people. The choice of leaders and giving them a mission points to the structure and the purpose of the church.<sup>10</sup>*

**36**At the sight of the crowds, These crowds are the sick and diseased and the poor.<sup>14</sup> **Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned,** From the start, the Church has existed to serve the needs of the people.<sup>10</sup> **like sheep without a shepherd.** Sheep often represent the people of Israel. Shepherd imagery is used for Israel's spiritual leaders. 1) Joshua was Moses' successor and the "shepherd" of Israel. 2) David was elected to "shepherd" Israel as its king. 3) In Ezekiel, God himself promised to set "one shepherd" over his people to feed and protect them as a new Davidic king. Jesus draws on these examples to illustrate his own role as the Shepherd and King of the restored Israel, the Church.<sup>11</sup>

**37**Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest The harvest is "the close of the age" which will witness a coming together of all peoples for judgment. The "workers" can help people prepare for the harvest.<sup>13</sup> **is abundant but the laborers are few;** The missionary work of the disciples is compared to a harvest. Jesus will turn this problem into an opportunity.<sup>14</sup>

**38**so ask Pray! **the master of the harvest God to send out laborers for his harvest."** Pope Paul VI reminded the people that the responsibility for spreading the Gospel belongs to everyone—to all those who have received it! The missionary duty concerns the whole body of the Church; in different ways and to different degrees, it is true, but we must all, all, be united in carrying out this duty. Prayer for the Missions is the first way of fulfilling this duty."<sup>18</sup>

**1**Then he summoned his twelve disciples Jesus chose 12 patriarchs, like the 12 sons of Israel in the OT, to carry out his mission. In doing so, he designated the Church as the restored Israel.<sup>10</sup> **and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness.** The all-inclusiveness of "every" disease and "every" illness means

that the power received is by rights only divine, but by an act of mercy it is passed intact and undiminished from Creator to creature.<sup>12</sup>

**2The names of the twelve apostles** There were a number of disciples who were followers of Jesus and studied under him. The Twelve were disciples, but they were chosen by Jesus to be his constant companions and they were submitted to a full instruction in the truths which he proclaimed.<sup>15</sup> **are these: first, Simon called Peter,** “First” here is not an adverb of order (like saying “first of all”), rather, it recognizes the role of Peter as spokesman for the group.<sup>12</sup> The Greek word *protos* (first) unequivocally states Peter’s primacy for in its context it means “primary first” and that Peter, out of all the Apostles, was first in the eyes of Christ. We can also note that second and third do not follow and this shows that “first” is not a numeral here, but designates rank and pre-eminence.<sup>21</sup> **and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John;**

**3Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus;**

**4Simon from Cana, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.** Jesus called people who did ordinary things.<sup>20</sup> There were fishermen, a political activist, a tax collector, Thomas was a carpenter and legend has it that Simon from Cana was a shepherd who saw the angels sing on the night when Christ was born.<sup>19</sup> They were chosen from the common people; men who did the ordinary things, men who had no special education, men who had no social advantages. Jesus chose these men, not only for what they were, but also for what they were capable of becoming under his influence and in his power.<sup>20</sup>

**5Jesus sent out these twelve** Three things are involved in the making of these apostles: in verse one 1) Jesus called them and 2) gave them his own authority to save and heal and now in this verse 3) he is sending them forth.<sup>(12)</sup> **after instructing them thus, “Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town.** In their early apprenticeship, Jesus restricts the Apostles’ area of activity to the Jews, without this taking from the world-wide scope of the Church’s mission. In his final “great commission” he charges them to “Go and make disciples of all nations.”(Mt 28:19)<sup>14</sup>

**6Go rather to the lost sheep** This “lost” is used in the sense of “perished”, “utterly ruined”, and not at all in the sense of someone who has merely lost his way. The power the apostles have received is intended to do more than putting the lost sheep back on the right road! They are, rather, to heal them and restore them to life. The change foreseen in the sheep has to do with their nature and not only their direction which merely involves advice and guidance.<sup>12</sup> **of the house of Israel.**

**7As you go, make this proclamation: “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** Jesus says that the kingdom has approached, but not that it has come! A great deal depends on what the apostles do or do not do. The divine rule, initiative, and presence are all contained in Jesus from the start, but the extent to which that takes root in our midst greatly depends on the way we carry out Jesus’ commands, or the ardor with which we are intent on his work.<sup>12</sup>

**8Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.** These powers are the very sign of the Kingdom of God or the reign of the Messiah proclaimed by the prophets. At first it is Jesus who exercises these messianic powers; now he gives them to his disciples as proof that his mission is divine.<sup>18</sup> **Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.”** To be an apostle means to be a constant receiver and giver, never a holder. This applies to both the gift and the manner of giving for the gift of God’s life — Jesus — does not pass through one

like water through a pipe, leaving them unaffected. It descends upon them like fire on a sacrifice, roasting the meat and making it edible for God's hungry.<sup>12</sup> The divine truths of salvation are so important for everyone that they must be taught without regard for the listener's ability to pay.<sup>14</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary has been taken from: (1) "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," (2) "The Jerome biblical Commentary," (3) "A Father Who Keeps His Promises" by Scott Hahn, (4) "The Story Of Stories" by Karen Lee-Thorp, (5) "Ignatius Catholic Study bible: The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (6) "The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians," (7) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2002" by Aelred R. Rosser, (8) "Catholic For A Reason: Justification as Divine Sonship" by Richard A. White, (9) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (10) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999" by Lawrence E. Mick, (11) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (12) "Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Word" by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, and (13) "The Gospel of Matthew" by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (14) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (15) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (16) "The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (17) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Romans" by John J. Pilch, (18) "The Navarre Bible: ST MATTHEW", (19) "The Twelve" by C. Bernard Ruffin, (20) "The Gospel Of Matthew" by William Barclay and (21) "Jesus, Peter And The Keys" by Scott Butler, Norman Dahlgren, and Rev. Mr. David Hess.*

*In memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*