

HOMILY
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B – OLPH – 2015
(Amos 7:12-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13)

Once upon a time an ordinary but well-off family was packing their huge and luxurious SUV for a **two week vacation**. There were two parents, two big kids, two smaller kids and one gorgeous little five month old **baby girl** who gurgled and smiled at everyone. There were a lot of things to pack into the SUV – the beach toys for the small kids (which would have filled an ordinary car) the sports equipment for the big boy who could not go on vacation unless he was prepared for basketball, baseball, football and soccer, and clothes for the older girl and the mom who could only travel with enough clothes so they would be ready for a week of formal dinners and dances. As they piled stuff into the SUV the mother gave the baby in her car seat to the big girl who put her on the lawn next to the car. Well, eventually the SUV was loaded and there was just enough room for the family to climb in. They'd gone two miles when the mother counted noses and came up one short, **one tiny baby nose**. I won't recount the fights about who's fault it was as they raced back to find the baby. They pulled into the driveway and found the baby's car seat EMPTY! They were about to call the police when two teen age girls from the house next door appeared with the baby who was grinning and smiling and gurgling happily. "We saw her out there in her car seat and figured we'd take care of her till you came back." They made room for the car seat in all the other mess. The baby smiled contentedly and promptly went to sleep. It was a long and quiet ride to the lake.

In the 11th and 12th century the church had become very comfortable with riches of land and treasure and the gospel message almost got lost in the golden decorations of palaces and churches. God sent **St. Francis**, himself from a rich family and used to all the privileges that worldly belongings can bring. Called by God, he gave everything back to his earthly father and relied on the providence of his heavenly Father. Francis called **ALL Christians** back to the gospel values. In the 13th century St Dominic found himself in a similar situation. The **Albigensians**, an Eastern sect that regarded material reality as evil, were being very successful, particularly in the south of France, because people were impressed with their ascetic way of life, which compared favourably with the vanity and luxury of the Catholic clergy. The Albigensians went about on bare feet. Dominic realized that the Gospel could not be preached from horseback – the luxury transport in those days – so he took to the roads on bare feet, like the Albigensians themselves. But when he approached a town he would put on his sandals, in case he was mistaken for an Albigensian!

It is quite clear that the Gospel cannot be preached from a **Mercedes or a Rolls Royce**. Some of the most impressive and effective religious groups have been the ones that returned to poverty and simplicity of life, such as the **congregation of sisters** founded by Mother Theresa of Calcutta. The call to "take nothing for the journey" is as resonant today as it was in the time of the first disciples of Jesus. Our Holy Father, **Pope Francis**, addressed this need for return to the fundamental Christian value of CARITAS – LOVE in different and varied ways. By taking the name of St. Francis, the message is loud and clear. The Pope follows up with example after **example of simplicity**: in his daily life, his apartments, his car, his vestments, his pectoral cross etc, Again and again, Francis reminds his Cardinals, Bishops and Priests that only simplicity can bring the message of Jesus closer to the poor of the world.

Today Jesus reminds us of the **only source of true blessing**. He did this when he sent his disciples out, two by two. Each one had a traveling companion, but not much else: no food, no luggage, no money in their belts. Through their lack of possessions they would witness to authentic wealth, what Jesus calls *the kingdom of heaven*. Laying hold of that wealth involved **three things: repentance, liberation from demons and, for the sick, anointing with holy oil**.

And what do the apostles gain by **giving up everything**? Jesus promises both **material and spiritual earnings**. In this life the disciples will receive a dividend of 10,000 percent (that is, a hundred fold). That compares very favourably to any kind of investment available nowadays, especially in the current economic times. Jesus also assures the missionaries that they will find homes ready to receive and care for them. You might protest: I don't want the generosity of other people; I want my own home, my own kitchen, my own bank account. That's fair enough. Having one's own possessions is part of human freedom. Yet, in a deeper sense, Jesus is trying to tell us that the one thing none of us can ever have is **"our own things."** When we try to hold on to our things, they may separate us from God and other people.

The simple fact is, that once we own something, we want to guard and protect it. We spend money on security and consider it money well spent. But there is a danger. Possessions can become more important than people. There is a big difference between **ownership and stewardship**. Stewardship begins with **gratitude and ends with sharing**. Ownership asserts that I am somebody because of what I possess. When you think about it, it is so unrealistic. Sooner or later everything we own will slip from our hands. Let me paraphrase from the book of Job, *'naked I came into the world, and naked I will leave it.'*