

11th Sunday OT – Matthew 9:36-10:8

“Jesus Summoned and Sent Out the Disciples”

Matthew introduced us to the teaching of the Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and his healing activity in his collection of miracles. It is now time for Jesus to involve the disciples, whom he has called in his mission of the Kingdom. Like Moses, Jesus speaks of the people being like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus then sent these Twelve out on their formal mission. Like Jesus himself, they were to go only to the lost sheep of Israel. After his death and resurrection, they would go to all the nations and announce the nearness of the Kingdom. They were to perform the same messianic works that Jesus recounted to John the Baptist. Mark reported their return after their mission which was apparently successful, but Matthew tells us...nothing. We have to assume it was successful since we are here today.

In light of today's Gospel, when do we stop being *sheep* and start being *disciples*? Is this what Pope Benedict was hoping for the Church with the *New Evangelization* initiative, or Pope Francis with *Synodality*? Allowing ourselves to be *led* like sheep assumes we don't know the way, or the right direction. The danger in allowing someone else to lead us is that we can be *misled*. Not all shepherds are Christ-like.

Jesus summoned the disciples and sent them out on mission. At one point even the *sheep*, that the disciples led, eventually had to replace those first disciples, simply because they were martyred or eventually died of old age. We are all baptized and anointed as Priest, Prophet and King. We participate in the three offices through our participation in the liturgy and the sacraments. Even in marriage, the spouses administer the sacrament to each other.

With the preparations for the Archdiocesan Synod 2027, we are being called to full participation in this Synod which hopes to address our future as Church in the Cincinnati Archdiocese. It is a continuation not only of the Synod Process that the late Pope Francis began, but as an ongoing and continuing process that every diocese and archdiocese throughout the world holds every half century or more.

Today, the sheep are being called to take up discipleship at a time when our world needs to be re-evangelized, called back to the gospel values. It is a time

when our world continues to turn away from religion because of the continuing secularization and clerical abuses, among some of the more outstanding issues.

However, a new threat faces the Church. It is a more sinister danger that will distract us from the gospel message and will even replace our attention and participation in the beauty and goodness of the world around us. Our youth is already on pacifiers through the internet, which has already replaced even face to face gatherings and encounters, even in the home.

The real danger of Artificial Intelligence is that it will also replace God who came to us *in the flesh* with an *artificial god*. Ironically, the iconic movie, *Wizard of Ozz*, who supposedly held all the answers, was goal of Dorothy and her three friends that she met along the way.

They were hoping that the Wizard of Ozz would help them in their quest, first, to help Dorothy find her way back home. For her friends, to find the three virtues they were lacking: *courage* to stand up for what we believe, *intelligence* in making the right decisions, and common everyday *love*. This is exactly what we need in today's world, and I doubt if AI could supply with any of the above. If you recall, they were represented by the lion, the scarecrow, and the tin man.

Certain people are called to be leaders, but our baptism reminds us that all are called to be priest, prophet, and king, which takes courage, intelligence and love. We need leaders in today's world, not followers. We need Leaders, who imitate Christ, like our pope courage, intelligence, and love. We don't need to be ordained to receive them, but the Holy Spirit has given them at our Baptism. We just need to exercise them and let them grow.