

“Summoned and Sent”

- 15th Sunday
- July 15, 2018
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

The scriptural readings for today ask two questions. In the first about the prophet Amos, the question is, “Where are you summoned?” In the gospel about the disciples, the question is, “Where are you sent?”

I would like to talk about these two questions, “Where are you summoned?” and “Where are you sent?” in light of a meeting in Bilbao, Spain, of the International Association of Jesuit Universities, all 189 Jesuit universities from all parts of the world. The meeting took place in the Basque region of Spain. It was there that I experienced something about the question “Where are you summoned?”

I realized I was in the land of Ignatius of Loyola, his Basque homeland, and also the home city of Pedro Arrupe, Bilbao. It is also the homeland of Fr. Ignacio Ipparraguirre, the martyred rector of the Jesuit university of El Salvador. After just two days there I found myself curiously drawn into a deeper, fuller prayer. I realized that as a Jesuit this was home for me, where it all began, and I was summoned by the place to come home in prayer to the deepest and most long-lasting inspirations of my Jesuit identity and life. I was summoned to hear the gospel anew, fresh, and more deeply because I was brought home to both a place of origins and to a place in myself where, because of who I am, I am at home. When we went to Loyola itself and saw the place in the Loyola fortress of two bedrooms—the one where Ignatius was born and the other one in which he had his conversion—the summons was only deeper.

So I ask myself and I ask you, where are you brought home, where are you summoned to hear the gospel more deeply, truly and freshly? Is it a place? A place of your origins or inspiration? Or are you brought home and summoned to hear the gospel by certain people, for example among a L’Arche Community where the heart has priority, or among the poor and homeless where your humanity is most fully summoned in identification and compassion? Or are you summoned to hear the voice of God in the places of your life where you come home to what really matters to you, in your places of suffering, loss, of grief, of birth, of undeserved joy, of unconditional love. My answer to the first question, “Where are you summoned?” where do you hear the gospel and the voice of God, is wherever you are called home. Where are you called home and what do you hear there anew, fresh, more fully embracing the whole of your life?

The second question is, “Where are you sent?” as the twelve disciples were sent by Jesus of Nazareth to announce the forgiveness of the kingdom, to cast out demons, and to heal the sick. As a Jesuit and as the president of a Jesuit university among the million words—an underestimation, I’m sure—I heard in this week of the international association in Bilbao, Spain, I heard one sentence in which I experienced being sent in a new way. It was really quite simple. The Jesuit who is the international coordinator for the Society of Jesus for planning and discernment—how would you like that little job?—said, “While the Church is often experienced

as being focused on the disgraces of sin and of the world, the Jesuits are meant to be ‘detectives of grace’.” Bingo! That’s what it is all about, that’s what we are about, that’s what our university is meant to be, that’s where we are sent, to be “detectives of grace”. That’s a new, fresh, telling way of saying “seeking and finding and serving God in all things”. But doesn’t it say it in a fresh and evocative way? God’s grace is everywhere, and in everyone, in all lives, within all relationships, in us, between and among us, in our cities and country and world, in our earth, in our communities, classrooms, churches, neighborhoods. God’s grace—his hidden bounty and presence and love—is there and we are sent to be detectives of that grace, that hidden presence. To detect it, to spy on it, to be alert to its clues, to track it down, to arrest it, to convict ourselves and others of it.

There may be better answers to the question, “Where are we sent?” but my answer from my experience is, today, we are sent to be “detectives of grace”. I think I was able to hear where I was sent because like those twelve disciples sent by Jesus into the villages to proclaim and show the kingdom, I was among 300 Jesuits and colleagues who were asking where we are being sent today through our universities. How different that may be for those from Madagascar, or Russia, or Nicaragua, or Germany, or India, or Croatia, or The Ivory Coast, or from Boston or Seattle, but it comes closer to anything I have ever heard about where we are sent as Jesuit universities, “to be detectives of grace” in our classrooms and disciplines, in our social projects, in our helping students and alumni to discern their life choices—in all of this where we are sent is to be “detectives of grace”. Does that answer also where you are sent in your lives, in the current circumstances, work, family life, joys and sufferings, service and vacations of your life, to there be “detectives of grace”?

Two little questions inspired by the prophet, Amos, and the Master, Jesus, and opened up when Jesuits and Ignatian friends came back to the Basque homeland; two questions worthy of our meditation this Sunday in Seattle—“Where are you summoned?” and “Where are you sent?” Summoned when you come “home” and sent to be “detectives of grace”. Two very good places to be as is this one in the Chapel of St. Ignatius.