

Dear Brothers and Sisters



“Jesus summoned the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick – no food, no sack, no money in their belts...” Mk 6:7-8

The formation which Jesus gave to his disciples was this: to be sent out by him in pairs to announce the Kingdom of Heaven, taking nothing for the journey.

The first time I experienced this ‘sending’ was the summer I graduated college, and attended a vocational meeting in Italy. On that occasion I was sent to Dublin, with a companion who was from India, we went two by two to visit parishes, and as Jesus said, to ‘Announce the Kingdom of Heaven.’

That experience was fundamental for me to decide to answer the vocational call, and enter the seminary. I have no doubt that I would not be a priest today if it were not for that experience.

A couple of years ago I again had the privilege to participate in mission and to be sent as Jesus sent his disciples. This time I was sent to Milwaukee, with two companions, both seminarians. We went for a week, with a return ticket, and nothing else.

It was a breath of fresh air for me. As a priest, let alone a Pastor, it is easy to settle down and become comfortable in parish life: food, clothing, housing... is all a given. But the experience of being sent out to announce the Gospel, and taking nothing for the journey, is a call to sincerity, at least for me.

We arrived in Milwaukee airport at night, and slept on the floor before heading out to walk to the city in the morning. Being on the street, no food, no lodging, no security, puts everything in perspective.

One becomes vulnerable, at the mercy of others, but also receptive to be grateful for the small miracles which are experienced, but often taken for granted, in normal daily life.

Arriving in Milwaukee that first day, we walked miles and miles, visiting parishes. One priest, who listened politely, and then showed us the door. As night fell, we found some benches in a church parking lot, and decided to sleep there. The neighborhood was very precarious, drug activity was rampant on the streets in that section of the city, and prostitutes were on most corners.

As we prepared to spend the night there, some men saw us, and called the priest. Twenty minutes later a car came screeching into the church parking lot, and the priest got out, blazing mad, heading over towards us, demanding to know what the heck we were doing there. We told, and shared our experience. We asked if we could sleep on his benches that night.

His heart softened and he welcomed us into his house, insisting that we stay with him for the duration of our week in Milwaukee. I witnessed many miracles during that week. My prayer for myself, and for all of us in our parish here, is to have a heart that is humble, simple, and where the presence of Christ can be seen in others. Amen.

Fr. Sean