

[When I hear today's gospel reading from St. Mark, I am taken aback by the absence of something: Jesus is doing an awful a lot of instruction commissioning the Twelve, but the Disciples themselves *are noticeably silent!*

This is a shock to our sensibilities. I can speak for myself and say that I've put up a finger when asked to do far less! Go underclad, underprepared, and do what only Christ did. Yet here no one said: "Lord, let me tell you my opinion on this," or "Mr. Christ, I guess we'll have to just agree to disagree on how to be a disciple." If there was any murmuring or second-guessing, we have no record of it. And perhaps for that reason we could speculate the exact opposite scenario: that the apostles were more than happy to do precisely as Jesus told them. Instead of fear, doubt, and dissention we can posit the apostles being enthusiastic, full of conviction, and loyal.

What, then, is this uneasiness we have about the Apostles' silent compliance? It is this: **conditional discipleship**. We're happy to follow Jesus so long as it suites our tastes and comforts. We think we should never be offended and every preference should be catered to. Yes, we'll come to church, but only if you play this kind of music, if Mass lasts only this long, and you let my daughter have two pagan "godparents" at her baby's baptism (even if the Church asks that just one be a Catholic in good standing).

Conditional discipleship. Is that you or I?

There was a movie that came out almost a decade ago called *X-men Origins: Wolverine*. Now, if you haven't seen this movie – don't, because it's awful.... But even in this trashcan-fire-of-a-movie there was one poignant line. At one point in the film, the mutant protagonist, Wolverine, is urged by his girlfriend to use his superhuman powers for some people in distress when all he wants to do is go unnoticed. Playing on his

conscience, she says to him, “You have a gift.” To this the superhero replies, “A gift you can give back.”

A gift you can give back. When we are conditional disciples then our hearts can't be open to do God's will. And yet over and over again in Salvation History we see that those who abandoned their own preferences were the most blessed: Abraham leaving all to go to a far off country, Joshua facing down stronger armies to claim the Promised Land, Mary and Joseph setting aside a quiet life to bring up the Savior. We know that in the last case many others did not accept Christ when He came – the gift was given back.]

Our first reading from the prophet Amos illustrates how we ought to accept gifts from God without condition. *Amos is my bro* – maybe because I always feel like Amos prophesying doom on all the gum chewers at Mass.... But Amos is a man who had the courage to do the job God asked of him. A superficial read of this passage might make us think Amos is passing off his prophecy of doom on God, treating his vocation like a burden. He was no reluctant prophet like Jonah, but a ready servant like the Mary.

We have to understand that the Kingdom of David in his time split between the tribe of Judah in the south with its capital in Jerusalem, and the Northern Kingdom of Israel with all the other tribes. The northern kingdom was wealthier than the south *but worldlier too* – more given to acting like the nations around them. So Amos is from Judah but he's prophesying up in Israel. It would be like you being sent by God to some godforsaken place like...Iowa, or something.... That's not Amos' country, so you can imagine why the priest Amaziah says to go home and preach bad news to his own people. Yet what does Amos say in reply? He's no prophet by profession – he's a blue collar guy! A shepherd and a “dresser of sycamore trees.” (His moonlighting job always

fascinated me. In an arid land where you need all the sources of nutrition you can find, he pinched the fruit of sycamores to help it ripen into palatable food. It was labor-intensive and lowly for sure!) Amos says he's no prophet. He's an average guy, a non-professional, not a part of the establishment or elites – very much the opposite of Amaziah the priest. Then out of nowhere God, he says, *took him* and told him to go prophesy. He must scold the Israelites who think that if they perform their rituals God will overlook all their injustices and immorality outside of worship. He calls out them out without mincing words! Think about it, it's no cushy job: he leaves his home to convict people who'll obviously take offense. Nevertheless, Amos goes because God told him to go. His joy was not in the praise of men but in doing God's will. This was no burden but a gift. He had no preconditions for God's will!

So what does the silent compliance of the Apostles and the Prophet Amos, the immediate readiness to get out of your comfort zone and just do it, mean for us? Well, so often we come to Mass or prayer with our needs. *Nothing wrong with that!* God desires us to rely on his providence. Yet, it is so easy for us to control, to take gifts for granted, and start to think that the whole world revolves around number one. I propose this: don't stop asking the Father for what you need, but ask too, "Lord, how may I do your will?" I imagine He'll give you an answer. You might be like Amos, just an average guy or gal doing humble work, but I bet you God will give you something to do in Christ – something *unexpected*. To be a champion of the Pro-Life movement in our region. To facilitate our youth program getting involved at the Ministry Center. Or maybe just to discipline yourself for a period of deliberate and silent prayer each day. Ask God in prayer what His will is for you.

Now, some of us don't want to ask because, frankly, we're afraid of what we'll hear. You'll give the excuse that it's not your job. That's similar to when people say, "Mass is *boring*," or, "I don't *get anything* out of Mass." To that I say: So what! The Mass isn't about you, it's about worshiping Almighty God for whom you owe every gift including your very life – not only does your boredom come dead last, but why are you not *putting something into* the celebration of Eucharist? Here too in asking for gifts from God, God comes first. But the good news is that when more is asked of us more grace is given to fulfill it! Ask for God's will! St. Benedict says, "Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love" (RB Prol. 48-49).

Christ gave the Apostles authority to do things that only He could do. He can do as much with you in the Church today!