

SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



**FR. AMBROSE'S HOMILY FOR SCHOOL MASS ON FRIDAY,
2nd WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME, YEAR I:
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2007**

The gospel for today's Mass tells us of the choosing of the Twelve Apostles. Why did Jesus choose Apostles? The gospel tells us: so that these chosen men might be with Christ, so that he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to cast out demons. In other words, he chose them to continue his own mission from the Father for the world's salvation. Jesus says of them: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20.21); and also that "he who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (Mt 10.40).

But why these particular men and not some others? Why should faith have to rely on the testimony of such unimpressive men as these? Would it not have been simpler for our Savior to have manifested his glory in some unmistakable way to the whole world? That very question was asked by one of the Twelve themselves, at the Last Supper. Jude, who is also called Thaddeus, said, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" (Jn 14.22).

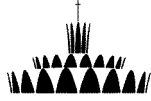
Jesus answered the question in this way: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (Jn 14.23-24).

In his answer to Jude's question, Christ makes two points. First, that he does not wish to overwhelm human freedom by sheer power, in the way that many expected the long-expected Messiah to do. Second, that in the Bible, from beginning to end, God saves the many through his choice or election of a faithful remnant. The choosing of the Twelve fits into this pattern, which we can see already in the call of Abraham and the call of Moses. As elsewhere in the Scriptures, the chosen are not particularly impressive by the world's standards; yet it is through them that salvation comes to God's people.

It is not the way of God's grace to nullify our freedom; if Christ had manifested himself to all in unmistakable power, then faith would be a free self-surrender but something almost forced upon us. In becoming man, God veiled his majesty, leaving the possibility of a genuinely free response on our part. Many of us are impatient with the notion that we need any kind of human mediation before God, but the inner logic of that sort of thinking leads to a rejection of Christ, as well.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen once wrote as follows about this:

"Many think they would have believed in Christ if they had lived in His day. But actually, there would have been no great advantage. Those who do not see Him as Divine living in His Mystical Body today would not have seen Him as Divine living in His



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physical Body. If there are scandals in some cells of His Mystical Body, there were scandals too in His physical Body; both put forward a human appearance which in moments of weakness or Crucifixion require moral strength to see Divinity... To redeem men, Our Lord... had to be ‘lifted up on the Cross; to sanctify men in the Spirit, He had to be ‘lifted up’ to heaven in the Ascension.”

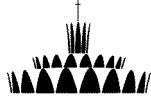
So, in other words, both now and in the days of Our Lord’s earthly life, faith and love have always been needed in order to know the person of Christ and his hidden glory. The betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, the scattering of all the rest except for the youngest one, John: yes, these were the flawed and fearful men whom Jesus called to his side, to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. It was to these that Christ said, “You are those who have continued with me in my trials; as my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so did I appoint you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk 22.28-30). In his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed for his apostles in these words: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in the truth. I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, O Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17.17-21).

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the earliest Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” There are many people in our time who claim to feel drawn to Jesus but reject any sort of human mediation: Church, sacraments, priesthood, authoritative teaching, all dismissed in favor of a gospel that is allegedly purer or higher or deeper or more universal. The trouble with this line of thinking is that it leads ultimately to a rejection of Jesus Christ himself. Those who proclaim that one can dispense with the apostolic tradition and with its mediation have betrayed the gospel of Christ.

I have often thought about the human tensions among the Twelve. The most famous example was when St. Paul rebuked St. Peter, the first Pope, to his face because Peter was in the wrong. I think also of St. Simon the Zealot and of St. Matthew the repentant tax collector. Since the Zealots were violent fanatics who wished to overthrow both the Jewish establishment and Roman rule, I assume that Simon gave up most of these notions when he became an apostle, at least in part. At any rate, Simon and Matthew must have had precious little in common, other than the disdain with which the rest of society regarded them. One wonders how on earth the Apostles got along at all! Such is the human reality of the Church in every age.

Even so, one who wishes to be in the company of Christ must be in the company of his apostles, hearing their teaching, and breaking the Eucharistic Bread with them.

In just a few moments, you will hear the words of that ancient prayer known as the Roman Canon. It is the most ancient and venerable of our Eucharistic



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Prayers. There are two lists of saints in the Roman Canon. The names are significant: first come the names of Mary, the Mother of God and Queen of all saints, and of St. Joseph; then the twelve apostles and then twelve early martyrs, among whom are bishops, clerics, and laymen. This order reflects the order in which God's redemptive purpose unfolded: beginning in the tiny cell, so to speak, of the Holy Family, it branches out to include the Twelve Apostles, and then the saints of all times who have followed Christ. The second list of saints is also composed of martyrs: seven men and seven women, who represent the holy men and women of every age: the number seven represents fullness and perfection. These believers in every age have answered the call of Christ and believed the testimony of the apostles, regardless of the apostles' human limitations or of the world's opinion. As we go to offer this holy and living sacrifice of Christ's body and blood, remember that we are following in the steps of those very apostles and martyrs.