

July 7, 2013 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Isaiah 66:10-14c; Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20; Galatians 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

The technological divide between the U.S. and countries still struggling with poverty, lack of opportunities, and poor access to quality services is rapidly disappearing, creating on the one hand a misleading sense of progress and development, and on the other hand greater possibilities of global intercultural awareness and interaction. In Puno, Perú, I have noticed the growing obsession with virtual social networks, such as Facebook, in which a large segment of the population (primarily young adults) dedicate more and more of their time online gaining “friends” and sharing opinions about any topic that arises.

Telecommunications companies are making it easier for customers to get “smart phones” which allow connection to the internet almost anywhere and anytime, and many people make sacrifices to own one, leveling the playing field in the quest to “achieve” personal and professional success and reach broader horizons.

The possibilities for virtual communities, professional networks, and instant communication across borders, cultures and economic classes are numerous, in ways never before imagined. We live in a postmodern technological reality that has the potential to create intercultural dialogue, tolerance and understanding, leading to a more peace-filled world. Yet, unfortunately, the increase of communication technology has, to some extent, decreased the person-to-person, face-to-face, heart-to-heart dialogues necessary in forming healthy families, communities and relationships conducive to nonviolent conflict resolution.

Not long ago, a teenager in the sprawling commercial center of Juliaca, near Puno, committed suicide as she wrote about it on Facebook. Though I lack formal research statistics, intuition leads me to wonder if the more we are absorbed by our virtual networks, the less intimacy we develop in our relationships. This new paradigm may be a result, or perhaps a cause, of our striving to be more self-sufficient (fooling ourselves that we don’t need others), while paradoxically seeking our security in being connected, having immediate access to a global sea of faces and names that have become our “friends” but who do not really satisfy our true needs.

Jesus, in today’s gospel, challenges our skewed sense of security. The tools of our mission discipleship—of our being sent forth—are not in the accessories we carry with us, nor in what we believe are essentials for our travels, nor in our networking capabilities. Jesus sends us with only one security: humble, simple trust. It is trust that, as Paul proclaims, reveals itself when we place our confidence in the cross of Christ and become a new creation. As we surrender the tendency to place our security in the refuge of the day (circumcision for early Christians who could then pass as Jews to avoid persecution, or, in our day, realigning our priorities to reflect the “values” and expectations of society), we encounter the freedom and peace that naked, unadorned love can bring.

The disciples of Jesus are not sent forth with fancy gadgets, nor a “Survivor” backpack, nor materials to convince others of their cause ... they are “missioned” in complete vulnerability

— with their need for others, in the reciprocal kindness of strangers making room in their homes, around their tables, in their hearts. Jesus' disciples are sent with one word in their mouths – PEACE – which is both *fruit* of a spirit lived in trusting confidence in Christ and *seed* of new, nonviolent, relationships – a new creation.

This new creation is the Kingdom of God at hand, characterized by its stability and presence with others ... sharing the abundance of life, even if only in the silent tenderness of compassion, with those who are weak and vulnerable ... combating the demons that uproot people from their interior grounding and destroy their relationships ... boldly proclaiming a creative word amid the constant babble of text messages, criticisms, and superficial comments numbing our deep hunger for the intimacy to love and be loved authentically.

Then we will be able to cry out to God with joy, rejoicing in the new creation of the Kingdom of God where we find all our needs satisfied with the love and intimacy that a mother has for the child nursing at her breast. Our mourning will be transformed into joy, when we place our confidence in the security of a peaceful, trusting spirit that Jesus has planted within. Only then, can we relate to one another as co-laborers harvesting the wheat of life, not allowing the grain to be scattered aimlessly by uncontrolled winds of virtual networking that distract and absorb our vision. Rejoice, for our names are written in heaven.

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