

Sunday 15 July 2018: Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



He called the Twelve, and began to send them out

...We who take part in this liturgy have all been called to share in Christ's great mission to the whole world. As we ponder this we should recall that God's call is mysterious, originating in the eternal designs of the Father – as Paul writes, 'Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ'. God's call does not match our human expectations. Amos, the 8th century prophet, was a farmer who found himself charged with the daunting task of challenging the hypocrisy evident in the worship of the northern shrine of Bethel. The Twelve Apostles called by Jesus were an unlikely group, with backgrounds as varied as fishing, tax collecting and terrorism. Jesus sends them out with instructions that make very clear the seriousness of the task he is sharing with them: absolute reliance upon the 'authority' they have received from him, and an unselfishness and single-mindedness that will commend them to their listeners. Their mission reflects the mission Jesus has been engaged in: the call to a 'repentance' which is open to what God is about to do, 'casting out devils' and healing the sick. (The modern reader should not be distracted by the gospels' frequent references to exorcism. The culture of the society in which Jesus lived assumed – as many cultures do, even today – that ills and maladies, physical and psychological, are due to the influence of evil spirits. Jesus' mission to triumph over all evil was inevitably seen as a conflict with evil powers.)...

Extract by John Thornhill sm - read more at [The Emmaus Series](#) | Image courtesy of [Herman oleon Clipart](#)

Anniversary of Spanish Flu (1918-2018)

2018 is the centenary of the Spanish Flu epidemic. In 1918 it took many lives than did the four years of war just ended that year. July came in a lull after its violent onset, before it's even more lethal and dispiriting return later in the year. Its virulence reflected its power, but also testified to the connection between the injustices and inequalities of human society and the victims of epidemics.

It is easy to think of medical science in 1918 as relatively ignorant of ways to block and treat a dangerous virus. Yet previous experience and medical discoveries had taught that the virus was spread by air, and so from the nose, mouth and hands of people infected by it. Its spread could

be limited by washing, masking one's nose and mouth, and avoiding the opportunities for people to meet in crowds.

Governments, however, shrunk from enforcing these measures, under pressure from businesses that would lose profit and from workers who needed money to live. People who were poor often lived in squalid and overcrowded quarters with poor sanitation, an ideal environment for the spread of the disease. The death toll in India and other colonies which were deprived of food and medical resources in order to support European wars was particularly high.

The spread of the disease was also facilitated by soldiers returning from war. Often ill fed and vulnerable to infection, they carried the infection to their homelands. In Europe, too, the war had led to rationing of food and the lack of basic services, leaving people open to infection. Flu was yet another of the evils inflicted on their people by rulers who went lightly to war.

More people died of pneumonia and other complications after the flu than from the flu itself. The people most vulnerable were those whose health was already weakened by inadequate food, shelter and access to medical care. The flu virus sowed death; poverty and inequality reaped the harvest.

The flu epidemic reminds us that the way in which bad relationships feed the destructive power of epidemics, hurricanes and other so called acts of God. The safety of human beings depends on the quality of the network of relationships that connect them to one another and to the world. When inequality and violence and reign, people are vulnerable.

In churches and in organisations like Jesuit Social Services building good and respectful relationships is the foundation of our work. It enables people who are disadvantaged to connect with society and draws attention to effects of gross inequality on health and the human spirit.

Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ