



Matthew 9:36 – 10:8

36 When Jesus saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.’ 10:1 He summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness. 2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: ‘Do not turn your steps to pagan territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; 6 go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. 7 And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. 8 Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.’

The Gospel of Matthew contains five major speeches of Jesus, designed by the evangelist, so it seems, to reflect and to outshine the five books of Moses. Jesus is the new Moses, who comes to bring the Law and the Prophets to fulfilment.

We hear today the beginning of the second speech, which is known as the Missionary Discourse. The opening words of our gospel passage tell us that the motivation of Jesus in his preaching is compassion for those who are lost. This must be our motivation too in offering the good news to others.

Jesus selects his twelve apostles. They are chosen from among those who have left everything to follow him. It may come as a surprise that with his first words to them Jesus apparently limits the mission of the apostles. The first priority of the mission must be the people of Israel, who are described as ‘the lost sheep’. Later the mission will be extended to all the nations. The message is the one that Jesus has preached from the outset: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ The message and the healings, which the disciples are to work in imitation of Jesus, are to be given freely.

Does my attitude to those who are lost imitate the compassion of Jesus?

Do I encourage and support those who are called to work for the spread of the gospel?

We pray that the Church may maintain its fidelity to the gospel of Jesus.

We pray that the Jewish people may be faithful to God’s covenant.