

# Lesson 7

## Proper 7

### The Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:5a, 21–33

This Holy Gospel continues Jesus' instructions to the Twelve when He sent them out for fieldwork experience in their training for their apostolic mission. In addition to giving them their basic message and authority to heal in His name, Jesus had warned them that many would not be responsive to their mission. In fact, He said they would be like “sheep in the midst of wolves” and would experience rejection and betrayal, hatred and persecution (vv. 16–20).

98. Why does Jesus' message that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v. 7) cause His messengers to be rejected and betrayed, hated and persecuted by many?

Jesus related such experiences to their ties to Him as their Teacher and Master—and encouraged their faithfulness even in the face of deadly opposition. (See John 15:18–25.)

99. Why should a disciple expect to elicit the same reaction from people as his teacher does and a servant as his master? What would such experiences say about the disciple and the servant?

Martin Franzmann wrote in *Follow Me*, “The kingdom of heaven [must] . . . shake man out of all his settled secular serenity, including religious and ethical serenity. The Christ and his apostles are walking question marks to all secular securities. Therefore the Kingdom and the Christ arouse contradiction and persecution.” The derivation of *Beelzebul* is still in question. It evidently had become a name used by the Jews for Satan.

100. How do Jesus' words about the covered being revealed and the hidden being made known apply to the world of evil? What do these words of Jesus say about the truths of the Kingdom?

101. What was Jesus encouraging with His “say in the light” and “proclaim on the housetops”?

With “fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell,” Jesus was encouraging the apostles to holy seriousness about their mission, even under threat of death.

102. With what positive statements did Jesus follow His warning in order to help His disciples rise above fear?

Identification with Jesus in faith is personal, but it is not private. No one can do it for us, but it is essential that others hear our testimony of faith and see it evidenced in our lives. Many early Christians accepted a martyr's death rather than negate their witness—and still today Christians are facing persecution and death because of their testimony to the Lord. We American Christians, however, who live in a deliberately pluralistic society, are not yet confronted with that choice—though the possibility of it is growing. Our tests, however, generally are subtler.

103. In our world, what might compromise or contradict a Christian's public declaration that he or she belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ? When might such circumstances become a public rejection of the Lord? (See Matthew 18:15–18; Luke 9:26.)

104. It is easy to be timid when it comes to our faith. How is your identification with Jesus Christ being heard and seen publicly?

## The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 20:7–13

Jeremiah was God's prophet during the last years of the Kingdom of Judah. To a people who were being told by their religious and political leaders that the presence of the temple guaranteed their safety, Jeremiah steadfastly brought the Lord's word of judgment and destruction. This pericope is part of Jeremiah's complaint. He had prophesied in the temple that Jerusalem and the surrounding villages were doomed. Pashhur, the chief officer of the temple, had had him beaten and placed in stocks for twenty-four hours near the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the temple, making him an object of scorn and ridicule. When Pashhur had released him the next day, Jeremiah had told him, "The Lord's name for you is *Magor-Missabib* ['Terror on Every Side']," and had again prophesied Jerusalem's destruction and Pashhur's death in exile in Babylon. "Terror on Every Side" may have become the nickname the people gave Jeremiah himself because of his doleful messages. In his complaint, he heard them whispering it in cynical rejection of him and his prophecy. Even his friends were hoping that he and his message of God's judgment would be discredited.

Jeremiah suffered much, even death threats, because of the unpopular message he had to proclaim. His complaint, the last and most bitter of his six "confessions," reveals his inner struggle. Jeremiah's complaint was voiced because of mistreatment at the hands of those who rejected his message. Nevertheless, it leads to a section of his writing in which he declared Judah and Jerusalem to be irrevocably doomed. The fire burning in Jeremiah that brought him so many troubles, including eventual exile to Egypt, would not be quenched.

Jeremiah was a priest. He had not become a prophet of his own volition. The task that brought him so much unanticipated suffering had been "forced on him" by the Lord, so he complained that the Lord had \_\_\_ him and that the word of the Lord he was given had brought him \_\_\_ and \_\_\_. Yet he had to speak it!

105. How did Jeremiah describe the compulsion inside him that drove him to speak the prophecy the Lord had assigned him? (Compare 1 Corinthians 9:16–17.)

106. Jeremiah awakened his faith with an acknowledgment of the Lord's ability to help him like a mighty warrior. What did Jeremiah invite God to do as the one who "tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind"?

Jeremiah's committing his cause to the Lord led to a confident song of praise. But the recurring ups and downs that tormented Jeremiah are shown again in the depression expressed in verses 14–18.

107. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

## **The Epistle for the Day: Romans 6:12–23**

Paul talks a lot here about the body: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body," "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness," and "You once presented your members as slaves to impurity."

108. What part does our physicality, our bodies, have to do with our sinning? If we work hard at controlling our bodies, will we learn to stop sinning?

109. In the matter of our not letting sin reign in our bodies and instead offering our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness, how is living under grace effective in producing this result while being under the Law is not?

110. What resources are available to us to help us and enable us when we make it our aim to offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness and thus be led to sanctification?

111. What is the essential difference between "wages" and a "gift"?

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*O God, because Your abiding presence always goes with us, keep us aware of Your daily mercies that we may live secure and content in Your eternal love; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

### **The Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:5a, 21–33**

98. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v. 7) is a summary statement of the Gospel, pointing to the One who brought it near through His incarnation and His redemptive life and death and resurrection. It makes those who hear it immediately responsible for an either/or decision about Jesus as Savior. Many, in their self-righteousness or in their disinterest, don’t want to hear about needing a Savior.

99. A disciple who not only brings the message of Jesus but also displays the spirit he has caught from Jesus can expect the same reaction Jesus experienced. Some will receive him and be blessed; others will reject him and even oppose him. The disciple accepts this willingly because he has chosen to imitate his teacher in every way. The servant (slave) has no choice but to represent his master as the master requires. Both pictures apply to a Christian as he represents Jesus. When the world responds to the disciple or servant in the same way it would respond to Jesus Himself, it indicates that the disciple or servant is being a faithful representative of Jesus.

100. The truth will come out. Evil deeds done in secret eventually will be exposed; evil teachings will eventually be known for what they are. Many have found this to be true in human society, to their chagrin. How much more will it be true when the glorious Son of Man exposes all evil with His divine judgment! The truth of the Gospel is hidden from natural human understanding, but it is revealed as God’s own truth as the Holy Spirit opens the hearts and minds of those who believe—and it will receive its ultimate revelation when the King appears for all to see in His full glory.

101. “Say in the light” and “proclaim on the housetops” encouraged the disciples, who had been instructed by Jesus largely in private, to see that their message was to be broadcast publicly. To us today it would say, “Don’t engage in ‘God-talk’ only when you are safe in church; the message of Jesus needs to be part of your daily conversation in all of life, with your family and, as the Spirit gives opportunity, with your friends and co-workers.”

102. Jesus offered His apostles positive assurance through hyperboles: not a sparrow falls except by God’s will; the hairs of their heads were numbered.

Help your group see the difference between “personal” and “private” and explain that the Greek word for “witness,” *marturia*, has come into English word as our word *martyr*.

103. A Christian’s public declaration of belonging to Jesus is compromised when anything and everything is allowed to become a reason for not joining the Christian fellowship in public worship on the Lord’s Day or when his lifestyle and language are not consistent with the faith he professes. Such circumstances become a public rejection of the Lord when they persist despite warnings and admonitions of fellow Christians or when invitations to be personally involved in the congregation’s life of worship, witness, and service are continually rejected. At some point, the body of Christians, a congregation, may have to declare publicly that the way of Christ has been rejected or forsaken by such individuals and that they are no longer acknowledging Christ or

being recognized as members of the church. Church discipline always aims at helping church members respond to the either/or call of Christ in a consistent, participatory life as members of the Body of Christ.

104. Give your group a chance to offer personal testimony about how their identification with Jesus is seen and heard. Be ready to participate yourself.

## The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 20:7–13

**Fill-in Answers:** Jeremiah complained that the Lord had deceived him. The Hebrew word may also be translated “seduced” or “enticed.” The word of the Lord that he had to proclaim had brought him only reproach and derision. Jeremiah was blaming the Lord for his problems.

105. Jeremiah described his compulsion, which would not let him rest until he proclaimed the Lord’s message, as a burning fire in his heart and in his bones.

106. Jeremiah invited the One who tests the righteous and sees the heart and the mind, examining motives and thoughts, to see that he really desired to serve the Lord, and he asked the Lord to recognize the evil motives that prompted his opponents. Could we be that bold in inviting God’s scrutiny of our discipleship?

We can all relate to Jeremiah’s ups and downs—though his situation surely was more extreme than what we experience as we try to represent the Lord to our world. Take the time to read verses 14–18 with your group. They are a classic statement of someone so depressed that he wishes he had never been born. It helps us to see that we, too, may openly acknowledge also our down times as we communicate and plead with the Lord. Even more significant is the fact that the only relief Jeremiah felt was when he got the “fire” out of his system by proclaiming his prophetic message. When our faith is at a low ebb, that can be part of our recovery too—getting ourselves to do what we should be doing in Jesus’ name, even if we don’t feel like doing it at the time.

107. Jeremiah’s experience relates directly to the rejection and opposition Jesus predicted His apostles would experience. Jeremiah’s words of faith and hope relate to Jesus’ assurance of His Father’s care and His own acknowledging before His Father of those who acknowledge Him publicly.

## The Epistle for the Day: Romans 6:12–23

That we live in a state of grace, won for us through the suffering and death of our Lord for our sins, in itself has to compel us to take the new life of discipleship seriously and not let it become a “cheap grace.” We are to kill our sinful desires. We should not fool ourselves, however—the sinful nature does not die easily. We make progress as we live in Christ, continually plugged into the Word and Sacrament, through which the Holy Spirit works in us to lead us to live out our forgiveness and renewal by catching more deeply the spirit of our Master as His disciples.

108. We are physical people, and our bodies have their needs and desires that bring a sense of satisfaction when fulfilled—and they pursue that satisfaction of needs and desires. In a sense, our bodies are very selfish as they see to it that we are feeling good and satisfied. Because of our sinful nature, this pursuit of satisfaction can become *the* purpose in life. Materialism (pursuit of things) and hedonism (pursuit of pleasures) can indeed become our gods. Bodily discipline is encouraged by Paul as a way to avoid serving sin and living always with a view toward God. Focusing on the positive is vital in overcoming the negative in this regard. Ascetics soon discover that staying away from the world does not solve the problem and that a severe regimen of bodily discipline may itself become a god that seeks to earn righteousness and thus takes the focus away from God and His supply of all things to enjoy properly.

109. Being under the Law and turning to it for help in not letting sin reign in our bodies may influence some of our outward performance, but it will not give us the new hearts that we need to do this effectively. The Law will continually expose our failure and may even lead to the point at which we say, “What’s the use of trying?” Living under grace, on the other hand, frees us from the burden of sin and its consequences and gives us ready access to our heavenly Father with the assurance that He will receive us and bless us continually. Only the grace of God and the love of Christ will effectively break the rule of sin by leading us to something better—offering ourselves in responsive love to God for the new life to which He calls us and in which He blesses us.

110. In the final analysis, only the power of the Holy Spirit can enable us to make progress toward our goal of offering ourselves in willing slavery to righteousness and thus lead us to holiness. The Holy Spirit works in our lives by testifying to Jesus Christ, our Savior, through the Good News. It is as we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament, as we remember our Baptism and its significance, as we are encouraged in faith and life by fellow Christians, and as we devote ourselves to the Word and to prayer that the Spirit's dynamic is at work in our lives to accomplish God's purposes in us. (See Romans 8:9–14; 2 Corinthians 3:17–18; Ephesians 4:11–16; Colossians 3:16.)

111. Wages are earned and lead to a focus on the wage-earner. A gift, in order to remain a gift, must be received freely, and it focuses on the giver. Sin makes us focus on ourselves—our wants and our will. Receiving the gift of salvation from God lifts our sights to focus on the heavenly Giver, so that whatever we do, we do it to His glory.