

June 2020

**“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” (Mt. 10:40)**

This chapter of Matthew’s Gospel contains the accounts of Jesus selecting the twelve Apostles and sending them out to preach the good news.

They were appointed one by one. This was a sign of the personal relationship they had built with their master, having followed him from the beginning of his mission.

They had learned his style — he was close to the sick, to sinners, to those considered to be possessed by evil spirits and to people on the margins of society who everyone else avoided and condemned. Only after giving these tangible signs of love for his people did Jesus himself prepare to announce that the Kingdom of God was near.

The Apostles were, therefore, sent in the name of Jesus as his “ambassadors.” It is Jesus who must be welcomed through them.

Often the great characters of the Bible receive a visit from God himself because they have opened their hearts to an unexpected guest.

Even today, especially in cultures that maintain a strong sense of community, the guest is considered to be a sacred visitor and given a place of honor even if he or she is unknown to the host.

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Jesus instructed the Apostles to set out barefoot and with little baggage: a light bag, a single tunic ... They were to regard themselves as guests, willing to humbly accept the hospitality of others. They were called to freely offer care and support to the poor and leave the gift of peace with everyone they met. Like Jesus, they were to be patient when faced with misunderstanding and persecution, and remain sure that the Father’s love would help them.

In this way, those who were fortunate enough to meet them would truly experience God’s tenderness.

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Like the disciples, all Christians have a mission; they should bear witness to the love of God that they have encountered. They should do this firstly through their actions and then through their words, while maintaining an attitude of meekness so that God’s love becomes a joyful reality for many, indeed for all.

And because they have found acceptance with God, in spite of their human fragility, the first witness they can give is to warmly welcome their neighbor.

In a society often marked by the search for success and selfish autonomy, Christians are called to show the beauty of fraternity, which recognizes the needs of all and sets mutual love in motion.

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This is what Focolare’s founder Chiara Lubich wrote in a Gospel commentary in December 1992 about welcoming, as understood in the evangelical sense:

*“Jesus was the manifestation of the heavenly Father’s totally welcoming love for each one of us and of the love which, consequently, we should have for one another ...*

*“We can begin to live this Word of Life within our families, associations, communities and places of work. We can eliminate any sense of judgment, discrimination, prejudice, resentment or intolerance toward our neighbors that we may harbor within. We often and easily acquire such attitudes that can undermine relationships; they are like a layer of rust that blocks mutual love ...*

*“The acceptance of the other person, who may be very different from us, lies at the basis of Christian love. It is the starting point, the first step in the construction of that civilization of love, that culture of communion to which Jesus calls us today.”*

*Letizia Magri*