

SEPTEMBER 4 2024 FATHER SALASAR

I heard a story about a village where there was a severe drought that had ravaged the land. Crops had failed, and the people were suffering. A villager sought the aid of a guru in a far land, asking for one of his disciples to come and give confidence and hope to his people.

The guru summoned four of his disciples and explained the seriousness of the situation. It was confusing for the disciples as to why the master was sending four when only one had been requested. However, they had no courage to ask or challenge the wisdom of the guru.

With their mission in view, they traveled and came to their first stop—a small village suffering from an epidemic. Many were sick, and there was a shortage of medicine. One disciple, who had studied herbal medicine under the guru, felt a strong pull to help. “I can’t leave these people without aid,” he said. “They need me here; you go on.”

The remaining three continued their journey until they reached another village, which was plagued by bandits who terrorized the people and stole their food. The disciple who was a skilled warrior felt compelled to intervene. “These people need someone to fight for them. I must stay and help them.”

The remaining two arrived at another village where the children had no access to education. Their religious school had been destroyed in a storm, and there were no teachers to guide the young minds. One of the remaining two, who had a passion for teaching, decided he could not abandon these children. “I will stay and rebuild the school. The children need education for a better future,” he said.

After many days of travel, the last disciple reached their destination and understood the wisdom of the guru in sending four people for the mission of one. If we are not careful, we could get caught up in the moment and fail to focus on our mission. What the three disciples did was good, but they were sent on a different mission.

In the Gospel, Jesus states, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to other cities also. For I was sent for this purpose.” The scenario is simple. We heard yesterday that Jesus was in the synagogue in Capernaum and healed a man with an unclean spirit. The people were amazed.

In today’s reading, we hear that Jesus goes to Peter’s house that same evening. He enters the home and is informed that Peter’s mother-in-law is sick, and he heals her. This act of compassion and power sets the tone for the rest of the evening. As the sun sets, people bring all who are sick or demon-possessed to Jesus. He lays hands on each one and heals them.

Naturally, as Jesus heals and casts out demons, his popularity soars. The people of Capernaum are eager to keep him there. They see the immediate benefits of his presence—healing, deliverance, and hope. They try to persuade him to stay, recognizing the profound impact he has on their community.

This moment is critical. Jesus could easily have stayed in Capernaum, where he was adored, appreciated, and where his ministry was visibly effective, compared to his own hometown. If you remember a few days back, he was in his hometown, where he was not appreciated. Yet he does not succumb to the temptation of popularity or the demand of the people. Instead, he states, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to other cities also. For I was sent for this purpose.”

Jesus understood his purpose. While healing and miracles are significant, his primary mission is to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. He came for a particular purpose, and he is very much aware of this purpose. His response teaches us a profound lesson about the purpose and focus of our call, too.

Even good things, like healing and miracles, can become distractions if they divert us from our God-given mission. As we heard in the story, what the three disciples did were good and timely actions. They were important, but that was not their call. Jesus exemplifies the importance of staying true to one's calling, even when faced with the allure and temptations of immediate success and popularity.

In our times, many people equate good works to a belief in God. The good works are important and wonderful, but when we forget the role of God in them and the purpose of our creation, then it becomes an issue. Jesus' compassion drove him to heal and help those in need, but he never lost sight of his primary mission.

We, too, are called to serve others with love and compassion. However, we must ensure that our acts of service align with our greater purpose and calling.

So, dear brothers and sisters, as we celebrate this Eucharist, let us ask ourselves: Are we focused on our God-given purpose, or are we distracted by the many demands and distractions of the world? What the world presents oftentimes seems very appealing. The successes that we hear about and the glorification that comes with our successes are very enticing. But we have to remind ourselves: What is my purpose? What is my call? Where am I going?