

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – July 7, 2019
Reverend Robert W. Marshall, Jr., Pastor

As you may know, I returned from vacation last Wednesday morning. I travelled to the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area, which means I spent a lot of time in my rental car. No one walks in southern California. Indeed, I'm not sure anyone actually leaves their car in southern California – they just seem to ride around at a fast pace for one mile and then at a snail's pace for three or four. At no time during my week there did the freeways have less than heavy traffic. Fortunately, there is a GPS on my phone – I depended upon it as I would have never been able to navigate a city that travels only by the number: Take the 60 to the 57 to the 10 sounded like a locker combination to me, but it was what passes for directions in California. I kept my brother's address plugged into the maps app of my phone. Normally, I am able to navigate in unfamiliar cities based on a landmark or the variations in the streets, but in southern California, one freeway looks just like another, and one palm tree looks just like another. I was happy to be home.

In our gospel today, Jesus sends seventy-two of his disciples out on a journey, on a mission to proclaim the kingdom of God. With such good news, such historically powerful news, we might expect that Jesus would guarantee his disciples an easy, a successful journey. Yet his words are anything but encouraging – I am sending you like lambs among wolves – he tells them. Gee, thanks, you can almost hear them reply. Lambs among wolves don't really stand a chance – especially when these travelers can't bring along any provisions – no money bag, no sack, no sandals. Jesus expects his disciples to be completely dependent upon the generosity of those with whom they will come in contact – in other words, for their very survival they must be completely dependent on the value of what they do carry – on the value of the word he has entrusted to them. Jesus knows – and his disciples undoubtedly discovered – that if these disciples charted their own course – if they started to preach their own message, then they would most assuredly fail. They would indeed be a mutton dinner for some hungry pack of wolves. Oh, sure, they might make it work for a while. They might spread a message designed to ensure that they would be popular or famous or both. But without substance, without the truth that comes only in the authentic word of God, then their new-found popularity would vanish just as quickly. Their mission would fail. By staying true to the word of God – by allowing the message to be that of Christ and themselves merely the messengers – then God indeed would be with them, to protect them, to guide them. In any journey we undertake – and

particularly in this journey we call life – God must be our point of reference, the GPS system that keeps us headed in the right direction, the landmark that keeps us honest.

Our first reading comes from the last chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. Remember that throughout the Old Testament, Jerusalem is represented by two conflicting images. As an earthly city, Jerusalem is often depicted as unjust and riddled with sin. It is the place where the people of Israel reject God – and where their defeat by foreign armies is most acutely felt. By contrast, Jerusalem is also a frequent image of the kingdom of God. Here, the city is described in more comforting language – as in today’s reading where Jerusalem is a mother caressing her infant, a loving, nursing, nurturing parent. That dichotomy, that tension between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem – between the here and now and the desires of our hearts – that duality is often present in our journeys. Oh, sure, we want to be faithful disciples – those sent out to proclaim the kingdom as were the seventy-two in our gospel today. We want to travel light, to rely completely upon God. But our experiences, our lives get in the way. Too often, we cannot hear God among the voices of this world that clamor for our attention. Too often, we cannot see God because we have erected our own buildings and landmarks that block our view. In many of the cities of Europe, cathedrals stand on the highest hill. They represent the tallest structure in the city or town. Is Jesus Christ the landmark to and from which we measure our steps? Is God the highest, the most important point in our hearts? Is he visible from all angles, or has our own sin erected tributes to ourselves, buildings of selfishness and desire that dwarf God’s place in our lives? As we go forth this week, may we resolve anew to proclaim **God’s kingdom, not our own**, to rely upon him more than upon ourselves. May we see ourselves less as trailblazers striking our own path, and more as a child nurtured in the arms of our mother, as one who follows our parent who loves us abundantly.