

**Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – July 15, 2018**  
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When I was a child, I spent most of the summer barefoot. I was barefoot in the house, of course, but also in the yard and throughout the neighborhood. Yes, the hot concrete was a little challenging the first week or so – but eventually, my feet toughened up and I was set for the whole summer. I think that the only time that I put on shoes was to go somewhere in the car – a store or to church – and even then I couldn't wait to get home to take them off again. It was, of course, a simpler time. As long as you didn't step on a nail, running around barefoot did not seem to pose very many dangers back then. Shoes were for special occasions or for traveling long distances – not for the everyday play of a 5 or 6 or 7 year old.

Footwear seems to have been important in Biblical times as well. We don't exactly know why, in today's gospel, Jesus felt it was necessary to instruct his disciples to wear sandals. Were they normally barefoot? Was the fashion of the day to wear fancy designer shoes which would have been inconsistent with the lifestyle of one travelling to preach the Good News? Indeed, the passage we read today was from Mark's gospel. In the versions of the same story found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, we hear Jesus tell the disciples to take with them no sandals. Commentators have assumed that the discrepancies between the gospels have hidden Jesus' true meaning – just as he instructed his disciples not to take a second tunic, so he instructed them not to take an extra pair of sandals – the ones on their feet would do just fine.

In the modern world, we might have needed this admonition against over-packing, before the airlines started charging for every bag, that is. We are a people who hold on to too much. There were no television shows about “hoarding” in the ancient world. True, people had no televisions, but they also had almost nothing to hoard. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have too often placed our trust in the things that we have accumulated – not in the God who created us. Jesus undoubtedly wanted his disciples to demonstrate – in the words they spoke and in the way they lived – that they placed their absolute trust in the living God. They were coming to town to announce the gospel, not to set up shop. They were in the village or town to cure the sick and cast out demons, not to impress the villagers with a lavish wardrobe or to dazzle them with bling. A disciple should lead others to God, not to draw attention to himself. But the admonition to wear sandals, I suggest to you, is more than an instruction to be humble – it is a directive to walk.

The terrain of Galilee and Judea was probably just as rocky in Jesus' time as it is today. There were some well-worn dirt paths and some more modern roads

that the Greeks and Romans had constructed – but nothing like the paved roads we have today. Walking was treacherous and, unlike East Memphis in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, no one went barefoot for very long. So Jesus was just being practical – wear sandals, not elaborate boots – but wear something on your feet because you need to walk. You need to encounter people to share the Good News, to preach and to anoint. And that encounter needs to be face-to-face.

In some ways, Jesus' instruction to wear sandals is even more important for our generation of disciples than it was for the Twelve he sent out two-by-two. None of them would have thought of going out without shoes – but none of them would have been tempted to stay at home and log on to the computer and live only a virtual life. For too many of our contemporaries, the screen of their laptop or tablet or phone has become their primary connection to the rest of humanity. Even a phone call is rare in this age of text messaging and tweets. And in some ways, this internet has drawn us together. We are connected to people who are in the same room and those who are continents away. We are made instantaneously aware of a rescue in Thailand or tension at summit meetings in Brussels and London. But we also learn of the latest Kardashian fashion statement or Bieber transgression. And if we are not careful, we will be absorbed into this virtual world – into watching and texting life rather than living it, into the loneliness of a computer screen.

So when Jesus tells us to wear sandals, he is reminding us of our need for real human interaction. We encounter God in our brothers and sisters and they will encounter him most perfectly in our own face-to-face witness of faith. Oh, modern technology can help us spread the truths of the faith, can provide Christians and people of good will throughout the globe with information about God and about his Church. Just as the internet has opened new doors in education in general, it is also becoming a valuable tool in catechesis, in religious education. Yes, we Christians need to be digitally connected these days in order to instruct others in the faith and to catch the attention of those whom we will reach only by those means. But as important as modern technology has become, it is no substitute for a real human encounter. We bring Christ to others not just in a positive tweet, but in a kind smile and a helping hand and a supportive shoulder. And in order to do that – in order to proclaim the gospel to others – we need to leave our homes and our devices and have real conversations. So, brothers and sisters, let us put on our sandals or our walking shoes, and bring the healing light of Christ to those in darkness, to those who are lost, to those who may be virtually connected but who are spiritually alone.