

Pilgrims of Hope in Communion:

A Reflection by a Pilgrim

*By Fr. Warren Brown, OMI
General Councillor for Canada-United States*



In the dictionary, a pilgrim is defined as “One who travels to foreign lands”, or “One who travels to a shrine or a holy place.” The Latin root for the word “pilgrim” comes from a word for ‘foreigner’, “peregrinus”, taken from the Latin words per (through) + agr-, ager (land), as one who goes through the land. As a missionary congregation, we Oblates are pilgrims by our very nature, coming from our charism, chosen by Jesus to evangelize the poor and most abandoned, especially at the peripheries of society. To reach these people, we must travel and go to where they are, to become pilgrims.

Like the other synoptic gospels of Matthew and Luke, the Gospel of Mark (Mk. 6: 7-13) contains an account of Jesus sending the twelve apostles on mission. All three accounts of sending the apostles contain a similar discourse but with some subtle differences, probably owing to the gospels’ author and audience. From the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, just like in other Gospel narratives, Jesus moves from place to place, teaching and encountering people. The immediate context of the sending in Mark’s Gospel is that “Jesus went about among the villages teaching” (Mark 6:6b). In essence, the apostles are sent as pilgrims to become like Jesus, the Pilgrim of the Father. As successors of the apostles, we are pilgrims with the Pilgrim, sent by the Father. The sending account of Mark, which is the earliest Gospel, can give some important indications for the requirements of a contemporary Oblate pilgrim.

In Mark’s Gospel the apostles are not sent alone but are sent out two by two, showing the necessity of community in the missionary task. As Oblates, mission through the apostolic community is a crucial component of our Oblate charism. One may note here that Mark’s Gospel, unlike the other two gospels, does not contain an explicit demand by Jesus that the apostles are to proclaim the kingdom. While the preaching of repentance is key to the proclamation of the kingdom in Jesus’ mission from chapter one in Mark’s Gospel, the proclamation of the kingdom is to be done through a practical ministry of healing and renewal. The apostles in Mark’s Gospel are sent for three

principal tasks: to heal unclean spirits, preach repentance, and anoint the sick with oil. These vital ministries combined are the means to lead to holiness in a holistic way: spiritually, mentally, and physically. For ourselves as Oblate pilgrims and for those to whom we are sent, attainment of holiness is the goal, or as articulated by St. Eugene: to become saints.

Jesus warns the apostles not to bring with them food, extra clothing, or money; they are to depend upon those to whom they will be sent. Nor are they to move from one house to another. God's providence and the generosity of others are to sustain them in the mission. They are not to shop around for the best accommodation or the most generous hosts. Poverty of spirit and detachment are necessary for the success of their work. As Oblate pilgrims we, too, are called to live this detachment from material wants and to learn to collaborate with those to whom we are sent.

Strikingly in Mark's Gospel, in contrast to the other two synoptic gospel accounts, Jesus explicitly tells the apostles that they are to bring a walking staff and sandals. There is no restriction of where they are to go, whether it is Samaria or visiting in foreign territory. The apostles sent by Jesus in Mark's Gospel are free to cross borders, to go where they are needed, to be present to those who need healing and holiness wherever they are. The Oblate pilgrim as well is called to travel where necessary for the good of the mission to bring holiness and healing.

The sending account in Mark's Gospel can be a guide for us Oblates of Mary Immaculate in our vocation as missionaries and pilgrims. God has chosen us and called us for a special mission. We bring with us our charism, seeking to attain healing and holiness for ourselves and those to whom we are sent in an integral way: mental, spiritual, and physical wholeness and holiness. We are to do this missionary work in the context of community; collaborating with one another is a necessary ingredient to our apostolate. We are to do this in a spirit of poverty, knowing that it is God's work we are doing, and that God will provide us with what we need. Finally, we are to be resourceful and wise, knowing that those who need the presence of Christ are everywhere in the world and without borders.

Reflection questions:

- Can I identify or believe that I am a pilgrim journeying in life?
- How do I see my Oblate life as the journey of a pilgrim?
- Do I imagine my pilgrimage of life alone or in a community?
- Where am I as a pilgrim traveling in my life of faith in God?