14th Sunday in Ordinary Time: 7/3/22—5:00 PM, 7:30 and 11:30 AM

In the spirit of full transparency, I must admit to you I had some confusion late last week when I first began to think about this homily. I looked at the first reading from the prophet Isaiah which paints the beautiful picture of an infant nursing at its mother’s breast, of that infant being carried and nestled in its mother’s arms, and of that infant being tenderly caressed and comforted by that same mother. But then I looked at today’s Gospel where Jesus is sending out seventy-two disciples, sending them, as he says, as lambs among wolves with no money bag, sack, or sandals, greeting no one along the way, knocking the dust of those who don’t receive them off their feet. My puzzlement was: what’s the link between these two readings? I knew that the Ordinary Time first reading is always chosen in light of that Sunday’s Gospel so I knew that there had to be a connection, but the contrast between these two pictures was so stark that it left me scratching my head until I realized their very dramatic connection. That connection is that those seventy-two disciples are like that nursing, nestled, tenderly caressed, carried, comforted child, that our God looks over and supports us all when we are sent to be laborers in the harvest, that is, when we are sent to proclaim his Son, Jesus, to every corner of the world.

As the people who are those seventy-two disciples of today, it strikes me that there are two very central points that we need to keep in mind.

The first is this: **“Don’t Be Afraid!”** I understand from Scripture scholars that this phrase, Do Not Be Afraid, winds up the Old Testament and New Testament a total **of** 365 times, in a sense, once per day because it is so easy for us to fall into fear. While we don’t directly hear that phrase in these readings today, they all but shout it to us. As people sent by Jesus to proclaim him to every corner of the world, you and I are also that infant, nursing, nestled, caressed, carried, and comforted by a God who loves us like a mother loves her infant. Therefore, why need we be afraid? “Don’t Be Afraid” is the first of those two central points we need to keep in mind.

The second is this: **“Don’t Carry Baggage!”** While not as clear as the statement, Don’t Be Afraid, isn’t this what Jesus is cautioning or stating when he directs them not to carry a money bag or sack or sandals? A modern day disciple walking in the sandals of those seventy-two, of course, needs money and clothing and shoes, but his caution is “Don’t let them distract you from your mission!” But they can. What might be that baggage of the 21st century which can weigh us down? It’s fear. It’s our grudges. It’s our memories which can paralyze us. It’s the question of what will people think of me? Plus a whole list of insecurities. The caution from Jesus about baggage which most intrigues me is his direction to knock the dust of those who don’t accept us from our feet. How easy failure can weigh us down. Jesus is saying to us, just let go of that failure lest it incapacitate us. To realize the power of baggage to weigh us down, all we need to do is to think about how to get better gas mileage for our cars. We do so by emptying our car’s trunk by removing those golf clubs or tool boxes or bike carriers that only rob us of mileage. So too when it comes to being our being sent on mission like those seventy-two: we too need to get rid of the baggage of our fears, our grudges, our insecurities, our worries about what people will think, but especially our holding onto bad memories of the past.

Jesus’ words are as timely and as important to us, the seventy-two disciples of the 21st century, as they were to the seventy-two disciples of the 1st century: “Don’t Be Afraid” and “Don’t Carry Baggage” because our God is nursing, nestling, tenderly caressing, carrying, and comforting us as a mother nurses, nestles, tenderly caresses, carries, and comforts her infant child.