

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### FIFTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

#### Psalm 84 (85)

This week's psalm is the second half of Psalm 84 (85). Part I focuses on the return from the Babylonian exile and asks for God's help in the difficulties the people met on their return.

The response line is the end of the previous section.

Today's verses are spoken by the Temple Leader or Prophet as an oracle proclaiming words of hope. God will come back to his people bringing peace. The word 'peace', repeated four times, means more than an absence of conflict: it also includes a sense of well-being.

The psalmist lists the qualities of God, here including mercy, faithfulness, justice, and peace. He also chooses words linked with human activities (meet, embrace) to make them more immediately relevant.

Heaven and earth meet in an image reminiscent of creation (see Genesis 1), where the sky forms a dome above the earth. God is present among his people – those who at the time saw material prosperity as an outcome of spiritual well being, of God's favour resting on them.



#### Gospel Mark 6: 7–13

Today's passage follows on immediately from last week. So far, Jesus has been preparing his disciples for their mission: in chapters 4 and 5 he taught them about God's Kingdom, performing miracles they could witness. They were also able to experience unexpected rejection.

Now Jesus commissions them to go out and proclaim God's Kingdom in word and deed, thus fulfilling his original purpose when he appointed the twelve: *'they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach, with power to cast out devils'* (Mark 3: 14–15).

#### He began to send them out in pairs

It was dangerous in first-century Palestine to travel alone, since the roads were not safe from brigands. Having a partner was also a form of moral support and encouragement.

#### 'Take nothing for their journey ... no bread, no haversack'

At that time, the only way to propagate news, religious or philosophical ideas was through itinerant missionaries. It could also be seen as a way of challenging the static social status of a people where the seat of power was linked to land and family. The apostles bring a new set of values.

Travelling light with few material comforts also emphasises their need to trust in God's providence. Some scholars see Mark's emphasis on the disciples carrying no bread as a means of preparing us for the fact that Jesus himself is the one who will shortly be giving bread to the people. (The Feeding of the 5000: Mark 6: 37–44.)

#### 'If any place does not welcome you ... shake off the dust from under your feet'

Jesus reminds his disciples that they might be rejected, as indeed he himself has been recently, and as he will be again in Jerusalem.

They are not to respond violently, but simply by the gesture (common at the time) of shaking the dust off their sandals. This shows disapproval by letting others know how they have been received.

#### They anointed many sick people with oil

Anointing with oil was associated with healing. Olive oil was a common remedy for many ailments. It is possible to see in this act the very beginning of what was to become the sacrament of the sick.



ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH  
IN THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE