

Homily based on the readings from September 9 (Colossians 2.6-15;
Luke 6.12-19)

There is often some confusion, even among lifelong Catholics, about two of the most basic words in our collective vocabulary: *disciple* and *apostle*. To be fair, we often use these terms interchangeably, but it is still important to understand the distinction between them. The English word *disciple* comes from the Latin *discipulus*, which simply means *student* – from which we also get the word *discipline*. The term *apostle* is derived from the Greek *apostolos*, which can best be translated as *ambassador* or *envoy*. The point here is that every human being is called to be a disciple, but relatively few are chosen as apostles. Every single one of us – man, woman, and child – is expected to be a *student* of Jesus. Only Christ himself, however, can identify the individuals who will be his *ambassadors*.

Today's Gospel reading shows Jesus – after spending the night in prayer – selecting twelve of his disciples to serve as his Apostles. It is

impossible to say how many disciples there were at the time, although a few chapters later Saint Luke refers to there being at least seventy. We will never know – nor do we need to know – what motivated Jesus to choose *these* specific individuals. All that matters is that they are representing *him*.

One of the bedrock tenets of the Catholic faith is that the Church is built on the witness of the Apostles. In fact, every Sunday, we confess that the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” This statement, in part, reflects an historical reality: the original Apostles (excluding Judas) spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the known earth, from Rome to Ethiopia to India. On a deeper level, though, the apostolic nature of the Church represents a timeless truth. Immediately after Christ’s Ascension, the remaining eleven Apostles prayed for his guidance in selecting a replacement for Judas – a responsibility that ultimately fell to Saint Matthias. As the Church spread throughout the world – and the original Apostles began to suffer martyrdom – more and more men were chosen to fill the apostolic ranks. These new apostles

were given a new title: *episkopos*, which is Greek for *overseer* – from which we get the English word *bishop*. Today there are more than five thousand bishops across the globe, each of whom is a successor to the original twelve Apostles – each of whom is an ambassador for Christ to the wider world.

We receive so many gifts from Jesus that it can be difficult to keep track of them all. It may never occur to us how utterly *amazing* it is that almost every acre of inhabited land is overseen by a bishop – by a modern-day apostle. Even the moon itself, at least in principle, is under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Orlando. When Christ chose the twelve Apostles, he was not just making a set of short-term appointments, but establishing a permanent foundation for the Church throughout the ages. Not many of us are called to be Christ's ambassadors, yet – nearly two thousand years after he instituted the ministry of apostleship – *all* of us are *unbelievably* blessed to have his representatives serving in our midst. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* – and so is his one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.