

Homily based on the readings from June 14, 2026 (Exodus 19.2-6a; Romans 5.6-11; Matthew 9.36-10.8)

Most people here, at some point, have probably received a visit from a pair of Mormon missionaries. Just to be clear – while I have the utmost respect for individuals who dedicate their lives to this kind of work – their theology is fundamentally incompatible with Catholic Christianity. If you spend some time talking with them – which I wholeheartedly encourage – you will realize that they have developed a few standard strategies for engaging people in conversation.

One of the Mormons' main talking points, which I have heard several times over the years, has to do with the Apostles. “What would you say,” they ask, “if we told you that there are successors to the original twelve Apostles who are alive and well today, ministering on behalf of Jesus Christ?” In their minds, this question pertains to a group known as the *Quorum of the Twelve* – who oversee the Mormon Church from Salt Lake City. Nevertheless, whenever this particular topic comes up, it

provides *us* with a unique opportunity to engage in our *own* evangelization. As Catholics, we know that there *are* modern-day Apostles in the world today – not just in Utah, but across the globe. At this point, in fact, there are not just twelve of them – but closer to 5600. The individuals we are speaking about, of course, are the bishops of the Catholic Church.

Today's Gospel reading describes Jesus' call to the original twelve Apostles. Before going into the list of names, Saint Matthew takes a moment to explain why Christ chose to select Apostles in the first place:

At the sight of the crowds, Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.

As flawed and feeble human beings, we are all prone to wandering about, like a herd of wayward sheep – always on the verge of falling off a cliff or being devoured by wild beasts. Jesus, of course, *is* and always *will* be our Good Shepherd, but he also decided to *delegate* that role to

others – people who could discuss and debate, who could administer the sacraments, who could carry the Gospel to the farthest ends of the earth.

The mistake many people make, when they encounter such passages from the New Testament, is to view them as belonging to a distant and inaccessible past. While 2000 years is a long time from a human perspective, it is practically nothing from God’s vantage point. In terms of salvation history, we are still living in the same era as Peter, Andrew, and all the other Apostles. The Church – as we know it now – was born at Pentecost. Nothing substantive has changed since then. This is still the age of apostolic ministry – which is why, every Sunday and solemnity, we continue to profess our belief in “one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” The *vocabulary* we use today may be somewhat different, but the *vocation* is exactly the same. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reminded us:

[I]n order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, “handing

over” to them “the authority to teach in their own place.” This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see him as he is, face to face. (*DV 7*)

In other words, the existence of bishops is not an historical accident or an administrative convenience, but an absolute *necessity* to the life of the Church – as essential to our Christian identity as the Bible itself. The bishops we have today – Bishop Reidy, Archbishop Coyne, Pope Leo – are quite *literally* the Apostles of the modern age. There is *no* distinction between them and the men who were selected by Christ himself. The next time our Mormon friends come pay us a visit, we can *confidently* reply that the successors to the original twelve Apostles *are*, in fact, alive and well today – ministering on behalf of Jesus Christ. We can go see them any time we want – in Norwich, or in Hartford, or in Rome.

When we think about the first generation of Apostles, we need to remember that they were often weak and cowardly – just like the rest of us. Every single one of them forsook his commitment to Christ, abandoning him at the moment of his Crucifixion. Nevertheless, all but one of them returned to Jesus in due time – witnessing his Resurrection and Ascension, and receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. *That* is the apostolic legacy we have inherited as Catholic Christians – a *priceless* gift, coming directly from the hands of Christ himself. For the vast majority of us – those who have *not* been called to bear this *immense* responsibility – our task is simple: pray for our bishops, serve them in whatever ways we can, and receive with joy the fruits of their apostolic labors.