

President Clinton returns this Independence Day weekend from a mission to China where he has preached a doctrine of democracy and human rights. In making this trip the president did what everyone who holds principles has to do: If we believe something strongly, we tell it to others. If they approve, we believe it even more. The president represents our hopes and beliefs for a just society, where freedom of expression balances with respect for others. In our country, people may have disagreements, but we hold the common opinion that everyone can have their own opinion. Whether you are President Clinton, Pope John Paul II, or a low-level accountant in a firm that makes Pakistani bathroom fixtures, if you believe in something, you'll go on a mission to tell people about it.

In today's passage from Luke, Jesus sends seventy disciples on mission, the same number of elders Moses chose to share in leadership and prophecy. That number makes Jesus a new Moses, leading people to the promised land, and it makes the disciples new elders, to lead and prophecy the word of God. Jesus wants them to prepare the way for him, and to preach and heal as they go. Walking from Galilee to Jerusalem, they will pass through Samaria. Samaria is hostile territory, so he gives them a pep talk: he tells them to pack light, talk to no one on the road, and to expect some confrontation. Families may turn them away. They may get thrown out of town. If so, "Take off your shoes before you leave," Jesus says, "shake out the dust, and tell them, 'We don't want your *dirt* on our shoes.'" But it doesn't end in spite; Jesus says, "Announce that the kingdom of God has come near." Ultimately, the seventy are not doing their own work; they're doing his work. What looks like failure may not be failure at all, because God's kingdom has come near even if people don't recognize it or don't accept it.

My sisters and brothers, we are all disciples on mission for Jesus whenever we go out into the world. When we preach peace, freedom, and human rights, people may not always accept it, but God's kingdom is still drawing near. The reason we call mass "mass" is that it relates to our word "mission". It has to do with sending forth. Once communion has brought us together, we go forth as one, sent on our mission to the world. This is one reason why it offends so many when people leave mass early. We remain in order to accept the mission with the community. The work we do in the world is just as important as that of a president in China. We preach the doctrine we believe, the coming of the kingdom of God.