14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

There's a saying in the world of media: "Good news is no news. No news is bad news. Bad news is good news." It's a cynical spin on how we interpret the world. We are drawn to bad news the way drivers slow down on the highway to gawk at an accident slowing up traffic. When there's no news to share between two individuals, a conversation falls flat. When there's good news, it doesn't land with the same impact as any bad news that mars its beauty.

But when good news happens to us, we want to share. The bigger the news, the more we want the world to know. This spirit underlies today's responsorial, several verses from Psalm 66, where the news was so good people set it to music. It recalls the Exodus from Egypt. God's chosen people had been oppressed there until Moses led them away from Pharaoh through the Red Sea and into the Promised Land. Our cantor sang about God and his people, "He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot." Not only did Israel gain its freedom, but it did so in a most dramatic way—the complete parting of so much water that what remained was dry dirt. In writing this song, the people decided the news was so big they had to share it. Across the centuries, we joined them in the refrain, "Let all the earth cry out to God with joy."

We sang this after a first reading about another pivotal moment in history—Israel's freedom from exile in Babylon and the coming reconstruction of fallen Jerusalem. We heard the Lord inviting people to rejoice the way a parent fosters happiness to an injured child: "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her…. Lo, I will spread prosperity over Jerusalem like a river…. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you."

These passages prepared us for the gospel, which brims with even more good news. Jesus sent seventy-two disciples on reconnaissance to various towns he intended to visit. He gave them these instructions: "Cure the sick," and say, "The kingdom of God is at hand for you." I would be like, "Really?" They were astonished at the results. Luke reports, "The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name.'"

My brothers and sisters, we too are disciples of Jesus. We don't all visit towns, cure the sick, and proclaim the kingdom. But we have many opportunities to share good news. When we travel, we often think of ourselves and pray for safety on the road, but we could also pray that we might bring Christ to all we meet. When at home, in public spaces where we are just one more anonymous person, some Christians look burdened by confusion or anger. They wear bad news on their face. But we have heard good news: Christ is risen. If more of us just smiled in public, in praise of creation and the marvels of another day, we could spread joy. Whether driving our cars or walking the streets, some of us harbor annoyances when we could own good news.

Bad news is fascinating, but everyone truly loves good news, and we hold the best of it. You've probably heard it said, "If you're happy, let your face know." Sometimes crying out to God with joy meets sarcasm. Jesus knew this; he said to the seventy-two, you'll be "like lambs among wolves." But those disciples were amazed at what the name of Jesus can do. We will be too.