

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Early Days of Jesus' Ministry First Week of Advent Saturday, December 7, 2013
8:15 AM Is 30:19-21, 23-26; **Mt 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6-8** St. Ambrose, bishop, doctor
(Point one: People need a shepherd. Point two: They are under attack. Number three: The kingdom of heaven is at hand.)

Today **Matthew is giving us a purview of the early days of Jesus' ministry**, and he draws some very striking pictures. First of all, people are without leadership. They are headless like sheep without a shepherd. They don't know where to go. They don't know where to turn. This is actually not a description merely of people at the time of Jesus; it is a description of people all the time. **People do not know where to go**, where to turn. **People are like sheep without a shepherd.** People need a shepherd. Point number one: **People need a shepherd.** The idea that people are so smart, so clever, so well formed and educated that they can decide for themselves what is right, what is wrong, what is good, what is bad is stupid. People need a shepherd—point number one.

Number two: **People are under attack.** What is discussed here is not simply the condition of frail humanity suffering from diseases, viruses, and bacteria. What is described here is attack **from the evil empire**, if you will, the true evil empire, the kingdom of darkness. So when Jesus gives authority to his disciples, it's authority not only to cure every disease and every illness, but first it's **authority over unclean spirits to drive them out.** This is a very important aspect of Jesus' ministry and of the Church's ministry to drive out evil. **If we don't drive out evil, the root cause of all the trouble will remain.** We will be simply putting Band-Aids on ulcers that will never heal and cancers that will continue to grow.

Jesus says, **"Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** First and foremost, his concern was with his own people. The whole idea of a chosen people was **they were chosen to be an**

example of thriving, of health, of holiness, of righteousness. So he was sent to bring that about. As it turns out many of the leaders decided that was not going to happen, and of course everyone has free will. So Matthew is setting the stage here for some dramatic movements, but what actually happened was different from what was intended.

“As you go,” he says, “make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

That’s point three. Point one: People need a shepherd. Point two: They are under attack.

Number three: “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” There are all kinds of people that know

how to observe what’s wrong, but they don’t know how to help anything. They are great

critics. They are great at describing what’s wrong, but then what? Well, then what is “the

kingdom of heaven is at hand”? The kingdom of heaven, **the power of God in human life, is**

actually at arm’s reach. That’s what that means: *anikin*, “at arm’s reach.” **So if we want**

the kingdom of heaven, we have to reach out.