



# Fifteenth Sunday in ordinary time: Armed with disarming beauty

Community

Religion

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Today's readings: Amos 7:12-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13

It is no news that Europe is undergoing a crisis of values. Pushbacks and rows between countries on whether to accept refugees hit the headlines periodically, spurring Pope Francis last month to dub the Mediterranean Sea “Europe’s largest cemetery”.

Meanwhile, the recent EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report revealed that terrorist and far-right organisations have taken advantage of the pandemic to spread propaganda

and mistrust in democratic structures, further fuelling the European phenomenon of home-grown radicalisation.

Faced by these and many other disheartening cultural trends we might be tempted to question whether Europe has indeed lived up to promise of being a community of freedom and mutual respect as envisaged by Robert Schuman, one of its foremost founding fathers, now on the path to sainthood.

Speaking at the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1949, Schuman had asserted that the “European spirit signifies being conscious of belonging to a cultural family and to have a willingness to serve that community in the spirit of total mutuality, without any hidden motives of hegemony or the selfish exploitation of others”.

External structures designed to protect these European values are necessary, but they would be void if authentic freedom is lacking.

It is here that the Church has an indispensable part to play in, even in secular Europe.

Jesus’s sending his disciples on a mission of evangelisation in today’s gospel models the Church’s timeless mandate, that is, of liberating the hearts of women and men through an authentic encounter with Christ, by being his witnesses. These missionary disciples are to go forth unarmed: unencumbered by earthly possessions and relying on no human security but only on God’s providence.

It is curious to note that Mark’s recounting of this episode has a unique detail which is not found in the other gospels. While Matthew (10:10) and Luke (10:4) quote Jesus as saying that they are to carry neither sandals nor a staff, Mark has him saying that they are to have both (6:8-9).

Some scripture scholars claim that here lies a subtle exodus motif, evocative of Moses's instructions to the Israelites. On the night of the Passover, they were to be shod in sandals and carry a stick, ready for their fleeing from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land (Ex 12:11).

Christ's missionaries, therefore, are the harbingers of freedom from the "Egypt" of oppression which Christ has won over through his passion, death and resurrection.

This freedom is born out of an authentic encounter with Christ, reorienting hearts, recalibrating moral compasses.

To use Benedict XVI's words to the Latin American and Caribbean bishops at the inauguration of their regional conference, in Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007, and echoed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the truth of the good news is proclaimed not through proselytising, but through "attraction" just as Jesus "draws all to himself".

This is the kind of beauty that Julián Carrón has in mind in his thought-provoking collection of essays *Disarming Beauty*, on the evangelising mission of the Church for our times. The beauty of radical freedom does not require the defence of sophisticated arguments but only the sheer force of authentic witnesses. This encounter with the captivating beauty of the experience of God, in turn attracts to this way of life those whom we meet.

In a Europe that is said to be post-Christian, values cannot be imposed, but space must be made for freedom so that truth may sprout through authentic encounter and sincere dialogue. Sandals in feet and staff in hand, we are being sent as missionary disciples armed with nothing else but a beauty that disarms.

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