

Both Settlers and Strangers

Amos 7:12-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13
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The Good News spread abroad whenever the members of the early communities found themselves forced by diverse circumstances to leave their places of origin and take the risk of looking for other places to live.

What we know of Amos' calling reflects the beginning of a prophetic mission impelled by circumstances of crisis in the countryside. The mission originates in a peasant— "I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores," Amos declares— about to lose his livelihood and his land. So he rises up as a prophet convinced that the social and religious situation that produced this crisis must be transformed.

But it was perhaps in even more difficult circumstances, under the heavy hand of the Roman Empire, where the Christian community associated with Mark developed its own mission. The members lived without power and without resources. Even so, by forming a network of volunteers obliged to flee persecution, they ceaselessly wove together the communities that incarnated Jesus' newfound church.

Disciples, male and female, became an alternative group to the dominant society. It was a marginal group, composed both of men and women, sinners, and the sick.

Many of these early communities evinced a distinct way of living: an independent way, without property, without security, without attachments, and in critique both of wealth and possessions. Their living in this way was not the result of mere contrariness or adventurism, but rather of bold choice, the only choice that could offer hope to people without dignity and excluded from Roman society.

Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, inspirer of pastoral service to migrants in the Catholic church, writes: "The children of poverty and labor, who in human and sociological terms appear to be a mass of failed and exploited people, are in fact the builders of a new society and the special site and instrument for the Kingdom of God and the union of peoples...." (see Scalabrini's *A Living Voice*. Missionaries of St. Charles Publications, 1987.)

Among today's migrants are disciples like those from Mark's Gospel, who announce and already live the advent of a "universal citizenship." Their lives and their challenges are new symbols of a humanity in transition and of the force of a humanizing global ethic that promises to fill and make fruitful the ethical barrenness of the global marketplace. They are the incarnation of those believers described in the letter of Diognetus: "Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers."

Mark's text describing the sending of the disciples is not an isolated anecdote. Rather, it evokes every true believer's style or mystical disposition— his or her way of living within the structures of the world, as one sent, on mission, without attachments, free of every security unless it be the conviction of having found the treasure of the Kingdom.