

Homily based on the readings from July 8, 2026 (Hosea 10.1-3, 7-8, 12; Matthew 10.1-7)

Twice over the past month, once on June 14 and once today, we have gotten to hear Saint Matthew's roster of the original twelve Apostles. What is happening, of course, is that Jesus is selecting the *emissaries* who will be representing him to the wider world. As you may be aware, the Greek word *apostle* literally means *ambassador* or *envoy*. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council described the event as follows:

The Lord Jesus, after praying to the Father, calling to himself those whom he desired, appointed twelve to be with him, and whom he would send to preach the Kingdom of God; and these apostles he formed after the manner of a college or a stable group, over which he placed Peter chosen from among them. (LG 19)

The term *college*, which will come up again momentarily, may be a bit confusing – as we typically associate it with a certain type of academic institution. What is meant here, though, is simply a group of people who

work together for a common cause. At this point in Matthew's Gospel, the College of Apostles still does not have a head – it is not until six chapters later that Jesus declares to Simon, son of Jonah, that “you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.” As soon he is granted this authority, Peter assumes the role – for which he will be remembered throughout the rest of human history – as the first head of the College of Apostles.

One of the foundational principles of Catholic Christianity is that the College of Apostles still exists, still exercising the same responsibilities that were *entrusted* to it by Christ himself. To quote the Council Fathers once again:

Just as in the Gospel, the Lord so disposing, Saint Peter and the other apostles constitute one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together. (*LG 22*)

In other words, the Church today is governed and instructed by the College of Bishops – the direct successors to the first twelve Apostles. The role of our Holy Father, Pope Leo, within the College of Bishops is *identical* to Saint Peter's among the original Apostles.

One of the greatest tragedies of the past 2000 years is that – on countless occasions – large numbers of Christians have willfully separated themselves from the ministry of the Holy Father and the College of Bishops. The most obvious examples, at least in this part of the world, are our Protestant brothers and sisters – who refuse to accept the bishops' God-given authority, instead choosing to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts. Most recently (in fact, exactly one week ago today), a group of former Catholics, known as the Society of Saint Pius X, decided to follow suit, expelling themselves definitively – through a *flagrant* act of disobedience – from the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

In such situations, while our first impulse must always be *love*, we also need to remember that love cannot exist apart from *truth*. It is helpful to recall the words of Saint Augustine, who had to contend with a wide variety of heretical groups during his own lifetime:

We entreat you then to pray for them, for they are weak, given to the wisdom of the flesh, to fleshly and carnal things, but yet they are our brothers. They celebrate the same sacraments as we, not indeed with us, but still the same. They respond with the same Amen, not with us, but still the same. And so pour out your hearts for them in prayer to God.

As Catholics, we must never be *prideful* about our precious heritage – after all, we did nothing to earn it. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore our *indispensable* obligation to share the priceless treasure we have received – going out to *all* of the lost sheep of the world, Christians and non-Christians alike, *joyfully* echoing the proclamation of the original Apostles: “The Kingdom of *heaven* is at hand.”