Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today the we give thanks to God for Saint Luke, the Evangelist. Luke was a physician, a companion of the apostle Paul, and the author of the Gospel that bears his name and the Book of Acts.

Tradition tells us that Luke came from Antioch in Syria. He accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys, sharing in the hardships and dangers of proclaiming Christ. And when Paul was imprisoned, and others had left, Luke remained faithfully beside him. Near the end of his life, Paul wrote those memorable words: **"Luke alone is with me."**

What became of Luke after Paul's death is uncertain. Ancient traditions place his later ministry in Greece. Some say he suffered martyrdom, while others report that he died peacefully at an advanced age. But whether Luke died a martyr's death or died in old age, his life was spent bearing witness to Jesus Christ.

And that brings us to today's Gospel.

Saint Luke records something found nowhere else in the New Testament: Jesus sending seventy-two disciples ahead of Him into the towns and villages **"where he himself was about to go."**

Notice those words. The disciples were not going on their own mission. They were preparing the way for Jesus. They were His messengers, sent with His authority, to proclaim His kingdom. They spoke His Word and represented His person. To hear their proclamation was to hear the Christ who sent them. *[pause]*

Jesus tells them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." The harvest belongs to God. It is His work, His kingdom, and His salvation. The disciples are laborers whom the Lord sends into His harvest.

But Jesus gives them a surprising warning: **"Behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."** *[pause]*

Lambs are vulnerable. They have no defense against wolves. Yet Jesus sends His disciples without moneybags or provisions, instructing them to depend upon the hospitality of those who receive them.

Their mission follows the pattern of His own. Jesus Himself is the Lamb of God who goes willingly to the cross. He does not establish His kingdom through worldly power, but through His suffering and death. There He bears the sins of the world, reconciling sinners to God.

Those whom He sends must expect rejection and suffering, just as He Himself was rejected. They go as lambs among wolves because they belong to the Lamb who was slain for them. Their suffering does not redeem the world. Christ alone has done that. But even in their weakness they bear witness to Him.

Yet consider what these vulnerable messengers carry. *[pause]*

Jesus instructs them, **"Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!'"**

This is no ordinary greeting. It is the peace of God's kingdom—the peace Christ accomplishes through His cross, where He bears our

sins and reconciles us to His Father. Through His messengers, Christ brings that peace to those who receive His Word, drawing them into fellowship with Himself.

Then Jesus tells them to proclaim, **"The kingdom of God has come near to you."** *[pause]*

Here is the remarkable truth Saint Luke places before us. The kingdom is not merely something that will come someday. It has already drawn near in Jesus Christ. When He sends His messengers with His Word, He Himself comes near through their proclamation. His kingdom may not impress the world. But faith recognizes the Lord at work through His Word. And we await the day when His kingdom will come in all its fullness.

And this remains our comfort today.

Christ continues to send His Word into the world. Through the preaching of His Gospel, He comes to sinners with the forgiveness and peace He won upon the cross.

Consider how ordinary the ministry of the Church often appears. A pastor stands before a congregation and preaches. The people listen. There may be no great excitement, no remarkable display of power, nothing that would impress the world. Just a man speaking the Word of God to people who have gathered to hear it. *[pause]*

Yet something extraordinary is happening. Christ Himself is addressing His people through His Word. The authority of the Gospel does not rest upon the man who preaches it, but upon the Lord who sends him. The same Lord who sent the seventy-two

with His peace continues to send His Gospel into the world. And through that Gospel, He brings forgiveness to troubled consciences, comfort to those who suffer, and peace to sinners who know their need for mercy.

The power is not in the man who speaks, but in the Christ whose Word he proclaims.

The messenger may be weak. The congregation may be small. The world may be hostile. *[pause]* But the power of the Gospel does not depend upon the strength of the messenger. It rests upon Christ, who sends him.

Saint Luke understood this. His life was devoted to bearing witness to Christ. And through the Gospel he recorded, that witness continues among us today. The same Jesus who sent the seventy-two, who suffered and died upon the cross, and who rose again from the dead, is the Lord who comes to you through His Word. He comes not to condemn you, but to forgive you. *[pause]* Not to burden you, but to give you His peace.

For the kingdom of God has come near to you. *[pause]* And where Christ comes with His Word, there is forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Amen.