

Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples  
Pontifical Mission Societies



# THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD

EXTRAORDINARY MISSIONARY MONTH

October 2019





Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples  
Pontifical Mission Societies

# **BAPTIZED AND SENT: THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD**

EXTRAORDINARY MISSIONARY MONTH  
OCTOBER 2019

October  
2019



SAN PAOLO



# Baptised and sent

October  
2019

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# INTRODUCTION TO THIS GUIDE

## OCTOBER 2019

Following extensive consultation with the local churches, we are pleased to present this guide for the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019, entitled *Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world*. It is a gift made up of contributions from Christians all over the world and addressed to Christians all over the world. It is truly a work of ecclesial communion, made possible thanks to the cooperation of the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) around the world. This resource grew out of a “synodal” desire to serve the local churches in their need for missionary formation and inspiration, and to prepare and live the Extraordinary Missionary Month called for by Pope Francis on the occasion of the centenary of promulgation of Pope Benedict XV’s Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (November 30, 1919).

The texts presented here will serve to inspire the creativity of the local churches and the Christians who make them up by confronting the challenges of evangelization, starting from the *missio ad gentes* and the context in which it happens. Since this is a resource and not a textbook, this guide does not pretend to be exhaustive in its content or structure, nor does it wish to be a complete study of the theology of or catechesis on the *missio ad gentes*. We tried to respect, as much as possible, the simplicity, the contents, and the style of the many contributions received in different languages. This is not a prescriptive text; our true intention is to inspire, to offer suggestions, and to stimulate local creativity. In this way, we believe that we can faithfully fulfill the role that the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (CEP) and the Pontifical Mission Societies carry

out at the service of the universal ministry of the Pope, who, as Successor of Peter, has at heart the faith and mission of all the churches scattered throughout the world.

The parts of this guide correspond to the spiritual dimensions indicated by the Holy Father Pope Francis when he called for this Extraordinary Missionary Month: the personal encounter with Jesus Christ alive in the Church, the witness of saints and martyrs of the mission, the catechetical formation in mission and missionary charity. The text is being published simultaneously in English, Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. The edition of reference, with regard to content, is the Italian one.

Following a collection of official texts of the Holy Father Pope Francis and Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, readers will find an essay on mission by Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, Adjunct Secretary of the CEP and PMS President. My initial considerations on the *missio ad gentes* are open and non-exhaustive reflections intended to help us better understand this topic, its foundations, its crisis, and its paradigmaticity for the whole Church.

PART ONE, “Encountering Jesus Christ,” offers spiritual meditations of a missionary nature on the Lectionary readings of daily Mass for the thirty-one days of October 2019. They can be used as part of one’s celebration of Holy Mass or in other moments of prayer and formation.

PART TWO, “Mission Testimonies,” provides brief biographies of many women and men, saints and martyrs, canonized or not, that various local churches throughout the world have proposed to us as models and intercessors in faith and mission. For more information on any of these figures, readers should feel free to contact the national offices of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the countries of reference.

PART THREE, “Thoughts on Mission,” presents a series of important essays, offered by the local churches and the national directors of their Pontifical Mission Societies, for formation and pastoral guidance in mission. Without attempting to offer a comprehensive theology or complete

proposals, these texts contain ideas and suggestions for formation meetings on mission.

We invite readers to undertake a full and contextualized reading of the prophetic contents on the *missio ad gentes* offered by the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*. Moreover, for our commitment to prayer, reflection, and missionary formation, we also suggest a reading of other magisterial texts such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, *Nostra Aetate*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, *Deus Caritas Est*, *Evangelii Gaudium*, as well as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

Having reviewed and approving the contents, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Mission Societies are pleased to offer the texts published here to those who wish to make them a part of their preparation for and implementation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019.<sup>1</sup> This guide is the work of many hands (not a single author), and it has been produced through the careful work of collection, analysis, and selection done by the October 2019 Working Team. Anyone can feel free to use all or parts of it, according to ecclesial circumstances and local needs. For further information, please refer to the following websites, where additional material can be found: [www.october2019.va](http://www.october2019.va), [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org), and [www.ppoomm.va](http://www.ppoomm.va).

We offer our thanks to all those who helped to compose and prepare this Guide.

Vatican City, November 30, 2018

FR. FABRIZIO MERONI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This team consisted of six members, two representatives of the Pontifical Mission Societies, two from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and two from the Pontifical Urbaniana University.

<sup>2</sup> Missionary priest of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU), Director of the International Center for Missionary Animation (CIAM) and of the Fides News Agency at the Pontifical Mission Societies and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.



LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE PROMULGATION  
OF THE APOSTOLIC LETTER  
“MAXIMUM ILLUD” ON THE ACTIVITY  
OF MISSIONARIES IN THE WORLD

*To my Venerable Brother*

*Cardinal Fernando Filoni*

*Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*

On 30 November 2019, we will celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* with which Pope Benedict XV sought to give new impetus to the missionary task of proclaiming the Gospel. In 1919, in the wake of a tragic global conflict that he himself called a “useless slaughter,”<sup>3</sup> the Pope recognized the need for a more evangelical approach to missionary work in the world, so that it would be purified of any colonial overtones and kept far away from the nationalistic and expansionistic aims that had proved so disastrous. “The Church of God is universal; she is not alien to any people,”<sup>4</sup> he wrote, firmly calling for the rejection of any form of particular interest, inasmuch as the proclamation and the love of the Lord Jesus, spread by holiness of one’s life and good works, are the sole purpose of missionary activity. Benedict XV thus laid special emphasis on the *missio ad gentes*, employing the concepts and language of the time, in an effort to revive, particularly among the clergy, a sense of duty towards the missions.

That duty is a response to Jesus’ perennial command to “go into the

<sup>3</sup> *Letter to the Leaders of the Warring Peoples*, 1 August 1917: *AAS IX* (1917), 421-423.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, 30 November 1919: *AAS XI* (1919), 445.

whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). Obeying this mandate of the Lord is not an option for the Church: in the words of the Second Vatican Council, it is her “essential task,”<sup>5</sup> for the Church is “missionary by nature.”<sup>6</sup> “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity; she exists in order to evangelize.”<sup>7</sup> The Council went on to say that, if the Church is to remain faithful to herself and to preach Jesus crucified and risen for all, the living and merciful Savior, then “prompted by the Holy Spirit, she must walk the same path Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice.”<sup>8</sup> In this way, she will effectively proclaim the Lord, “model of that redeemed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire.”<sup>9</sup>

What Pope Benedict XV so greatly desired almost a century ago, and the Council reiterated some fifty years ago, remains timely. Even now, as in the past, “the Church, sent by Christ to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all men and nations, is aware that there still remains an enormous missionary task for her to accomplish.”<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Saint John Paul II noted that “the mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion,” and indeed, “an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.”<sup>11</sup> As a result, in words that I would now draw once more to everyone’s attention, Saint John Paul exhorted the Church to undertake a “*renewed missionary commitment*,” in the conviction that missionary activity “renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!* It is in commitment to the

<sup>5</sup> Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7 December 1965, 7: AAS 58 (1966), 955.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: AAS 58 (1966), 948.

<sup>7</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, 14: AAS 68 (1976), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Decree *Ad Gentes*, 5: AAS 58 (1966), 952.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8: AAS 58 (1966), 956-957.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 10: AAS 58 (1966), 959.

<sup>11</sup> Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, 1: AAS 83 (1991), 249.

Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support."<sup>12</sup>

In my Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, drawing from the proceedings of the Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which met to reflect on the *new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith*, I once more set this urgent summons before the whole Church. There I wrote, "John Paul II asked us to recognize that 'there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel' to those who are far from Christ, 'because this is the *first task* of the Church.' Indeed, 'today missionary activity still represents the *greatest challenge* for the Church' and 'the missionary task must remain foremost.' What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church's activity*."<sup>13</sup>

I am convinced that this challenge remains as urgent as ever. "[It] has a programmatic significance and important consequences. I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion that cannot leave things as they presently are. 'Mere administration' can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission.'"<sup>14</sup> Let us not fear to undertake, with trust in God and great courage, "a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to *go forth* and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: AAS 83 (1991), 250-251.

<sup>13</sup> Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* 15: AAS 105 (2013), 1026.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 25: AAS 105 (2013), 1030.

Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II told the Bishops of Oceania, ‘All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion.’”<sup>15</sup>

The Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* called for transcending national boundaries and bearing witness, with prophetic spirit and evangelical boldness, to God’s saving will through the Church’s universal mission. May the approaching centenary of that Letter serve as an incentive to combat the recurring temptation lurking beneath every form of ecclesial introversion, self-referential retreat into comfort zones, pastoral pessimism and sterile nostalgia for the past. Instead, may we be open to the joyful newness of the Gospel. In these, our troubled times, rent by the tragedies of war and menaced by the baneful tendency to accentuate differences and to incite conflict, may the Good News that in Jesus forgiveness triumphs over sin, life defeats death and love conquers fear, be proclaimed to the world with renewed fervor, and instill trust and hope in everyone.

In the light of this, accepting the proposal of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I hereby call for an Extraordinary Missionary Month to be celebrated in October 2019, with the aim of fostering an increased awareness of the *missio ad gentes* and taking up again with renewed fervor the missionary transformation of the Church’s life and pastoral activity. The Missionary Month of October 2018 can serve as a good preparation for this celebration by enabling all the faithful to take to heart the proclamation of the Gospel and to help their communities grow in missionary and evangelizing zeal. May the love for the Church’s mission, which is “a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people,”<sup>16</sup> grow ever stronger!

I entrust you, venerable Brother, the Congregation which you head, and the Pontifical Mission Societies with the work of preparing for this event, especially by raising awareness among the particular Churches, the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and among

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 27: AAS 105 (2013), 1031.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 268: AAS 105 (2013), 1128.



associations, movements, communities and other ecclesial bodies. May the Extraordinary Missionary Month prove an intense and fruitful occasion of grace, and promote initiatives and above all prayer, the soul of all missionary activity. May it likewise advance the preaching of the Gospel, biblical and theological reflection on the Church's mission, works of Christian charity, and practical works of cooperation and solidarity between Churches, so that missionary zeal may revive and never be wanting among us.<sup>17</sup>

*From the Vatican, 22 October 2017*

*XXIX Sunday of Ordinary Time  
Memorial of Saint John Paul II  
World Mission Sunday*

Baptised  
and sent  
Francisco

October  
2019

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 80: AAS 105 (2013), 1053.



ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
**AUDIENCE WITH PARTICIPANTS  
IN THE ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

*Clementine Hall*  
*Saturday, June 3, 2017*

*Dear Cardinal,*  
*Dear brothers and sisters,*

I welcome you with joy at the end of your General Assembly and I thank Cardinal Fernando Filoni for his words. With him I greet all the Superiors, the General Secretaries, the National Director and all of you present here.

You well know my concern about the Pontifical Mission Societies, very often reduced to an organization that collects and distributes, on behalf of the Pope, economic aid for the neediest Churches. I know that you are seeking new ways, more suitable and more ecclesial methods to carry out your service to the universal mission of the Church. Let us allow ourselves to be sustained, in this process of urgent reform, also by the intercession of the Saints Charles Lwanga and companions, martyrs of Uganda, whose liturgical memory we celebrate today.

To renew ardor and passion, the spiritual motor of the apostolic action of countless missionary saints and martyrs, I have very favorably received your proposal, formulated together with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, to announce an extraordinary time for prayer and reflection on the *missio ad gentes*. I will ask all the Church to dedicate the month of October of the year 2019 to this aim, as in that year we will celebrate the centenary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*, of Pope Benedict XV. In this very important document of his Magisterium on the mission, the Pope

recalls how necessary the holiness of life is to the efficacy of the apostolate, he recommends, therefore, an ever stronger union with Christ and a more convinced and joyful involvement in his divine passion for announcing the Gospel to all, loving and employing mercy towards everyone. Men and women, “distinguished by zeal and holiness”, are increasingly necessary to the Church and to the mission. “May he who preaches God be a man of God,” exhorted Benedict XV (cf. Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*, 30 November 1919; *AAS* XI [1919], 449).

Renewing oneself requires conversion, and it requires living mission as an ongoing opportunity to proclaim Christ, to let Him be encountered by bearing witness and making others participants in our personal encounter with Him. I hope that your spiritual and material assistance to the Church makes it increasingly based upon the Gospel and the baptismal involvement of all the faithful, lay and clerical, in the single mission of the Church: bringing God’s love to every man, especially those most in need of His mercy. The extraordinary month of prayer and reflection on the mission as first evangelization will serve for this renewal of ecclesial faith, so that the Easter of Jesus Christ, the only Savior, Lord and bridegroom of His Church, always be and remain in her heart.

May the preparation for this extraordinary time dedicated to the first proclamation of the Gospel help us always to be a Church increasingly in mission, following the words of Blessed Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, *magna carta* of the post-Conciliar missionary effort. Pope Montini wrote: “The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the ‘mighty works of God’ [41] which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh

by Him and reunited. In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelized, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigor and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel”.

In the spirit of the teaching of Blessed Paul VI, it is my wish that the celebration of the centenary of *Maximum illud*, in the month of October 2019, be a favorable time for prayer, the witness of many saints and martyrs of the mission, biblical and theological reflection, catechesis and missionary charity to contribute to evangelizing, first and foremost, the Church, so that having rediscovered the freshness and zeal of the first love for the crucified and risen Lord, she may evangelize the world with credibility and evangelical efficacy.

I bless you all in this day before the Solemnity of Pentecost. I ask the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, always to inspire us with the testimony of her faith and the reassuring guarantee of her motherly intercession. May the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, the holy martyrs Carlo Lwanga and his companions, and Blessed Paolo Manna never cease to pray to God for all of us, His missionaries.

October  
2019



ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
**TO THE NATIONAL DIRECTORS  
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

*Clementine Hall  
Friday, June 1, 2018*

*Your Eminence,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am happy to offer you a cordial greeting and warm welcome on the occasion of your General Assembly. I thank Cardinal Filoni for his kind words of introduction and I greet the new President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, who is taking part in this annual meeting for the first time. To all of you I express my deep gratitude for your efforts to raise missionary awareness among the People of God, and I assure you of my closeness in prayer.

A fascinating journey lies ahead of us: the preparation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, which I announced during last year's celebration of World Mission Day. I heartily encourage you to see this preparatory phase as a great opportunity to renew missionary commitment throughout the Church. It also represents a providential occasion for renewing our Pontifical Mission Societies. Things always need to be renewed: hearts, activities and organizations, because otherwise we end up turning into a museum. We have to renew things, lest we become a museum! You are well aware of my concern about the risk of your work being reduced to the merely financial aspect of material assistance (important as this is) so that the Societies – despite their Christian inspiration – become agencies just like so many others. This is certainly not what their founders and

Pope Pius XI wanted when they instituted and structured the Pontifical Societies in the service of the Successor of Peter. For this reason, I have once again proposed as timely and urgent for renewing missionary awareness in today's Church a grand and courageous insight of Pope Benedict XV in his Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*: the importance of an evangelical approach to the Church's mission in the world.

This shared goal can and must help the Pontifical Mission Societies to grow in a sense of spiritual communion, reciprocal cooperation and mutual support. If the renewal is to be authentic, creative and effective, the reform of your Societies will entail a genuine re-founding and reshaping in accordance with the demands of the Gospel. This does not simply mean rethinking your motivations in order to do better what you already do. The missionary conversion of the structures of the Church (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27) calls for personal holiness and spiritual creativity. It is not merely about renewing the old, but about letting the Holy Spirit create newness. It is not about us, but the Holy Spirit. We need to make room for the Spirit and to allow the Spirit to create newness, to make all things new (cf. Ps 104:30, Mt 9:17, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:5). He is the principal agent of mission: he is the “boss” of the Pontifical Mission Societies, not ourselves. Do not be afraid of the new things that come from the crucified and risen Lord: these are beautiful novelties. But be on guard against other novelties that are unacceptable. Novelties that do not come from him! Be bold and courageous in your mission, always cooperating with the Holy Spirit in communion with Christ's Church (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 131). This boldness means pressing forward with courage, with the zeal of those who first proclaimed the Gospel. Your regular book for prayer and meditation should be the Acts of the Apostles. Go there to find your inspiration. And the protagonist of that book is the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean that you, the Pontifical Societies along with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, are organizing the



Extraordinary Missionary Month, to “recalibrate” yourselves evangelically? I believe it simply means *missionary conversion*. We need to recalibrate – this was the insight of Benedict XV – starting from the mission of Jesus. To reassess our efforts to collect and distribute material aid in the light of our mission and the formation that it requires, so that missionary integrity, awareness and responsibility can once again be part of the ordinary life of the entire holy and faithful People of God.

*“Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World.”* This is the theme chosen for the Missionary Month of October 2019. It emphasizes that the call to mission is a call rooted in Baptism and addressed to all the baptized. Mission is a “being sent forth” that brings about conversion both in those who are sent and in those who receive their message: in Christ, our life is a mission! We *are* mission, because we are God’s love poured out, God’s holiness created in his own image. Mission, then, is our own growth in holiness and that of the whole world, beginning with creation (cf. Eph 1:3-6). The missionary dimension of our Baptism thus becomes a witness of holiness that bestows life and beauty on our world.

Renewing the Pontifical Mission Societies, then, means taking to heart, with a serious and courageous commitment, the holiness of each individual and of the entire Church, as family and community. I urge you to renew the nature and the activities of the Pontifical Mission Societies with genuine creativity, placing them at the service of the mission, so that our primary concern is the lived holiness of missionary disciples. Indeed, to cooperate in the salvation of the world, we need to love the world (cf. Jn 3:16) and to be ready to give up our lives to serve Christ, the one Savior of the world. We do not have a product to sell. It has nothing to do with proselytizing; we are not selling a product. We have a life to communicate: God, his divine life, his merciful love, his holiness! It is the Holy Spirit who sends us, accompanies us and inspires us. He is the source of our mission. It is he who guides the Church forward, not us. Not even the Pontifical Mission Societies! Let us ask ourselves: do I let him take the lead? Or do I want to

domesticate him, put him in a cage, in all those worldly structures that, in the end, make us think of the Pontifical Mission Societies as a business firm, something we own, albeit with God's blessing? No, this must not be the case. We have to ask ourselves this question: Do I let him be the one, or do I put him in a cage? He, the Holy Spirit, does everything; we are simply his servants.

As you know, in October 2019, the Extraordinary Missionary Month, we will celebrate the Synod for the Amazon. In response to the concerns expressed by many of many faithful, laity and pastors alike, I wished to convoke this meeting in order to pray and reflect on the challenges faced in the evangelization of these South American lands that are home to important particular Churches. I hope that the conjuncture of these two events may help us fix our gaze on Jesus Christ while addressing problems and issues, resources and needs; may it also help us renew our commitment of service to the Gospel for the salvation of the men and women living in those lands. We pray that the Synod for the Amazon can help provide a more evangelical approach to missionary work in this area of the world that is so troubled, so unjustly exploited and so much in need of the salvation of Jesus Christ.

When Mary went to Elizabeth, she did not do so on her own, as a missionary. She went as a servant of that Lord whom she carried in her womb. She said nothing about herself; she simply brought the Son and sang the praises of God. One thing, though, is true; she went in haste. She teaches us this faithful *haste*, this spirituality of haste. The haste born of faithfulness and adoration. Mary was not the protagonist, but the handmaid of the sole protagonist of mission. May this image help us. Thank you!

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
FOR WORLD MISSION DAY 2018

*Together with young people, let us bring the Gospel to all*

Dear young people, I would like to reflect with you on the mission that we have received from Christ. In speaking to you, I also address all Christians who live out in the Church the adventure of their life as children of God. What leads me to speak to everyone through this conversation with you is the certainty that the Christian faith remains ever young when it is open to the mission that Christ entrusts to us. “Mission revitalizes faith” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 2), in the words of Saint John Paul II, a Pope who showed such great love and concern for young people.

The Synod to be held in Rome this coming October, the month of the missions, offers us an opportunity to understand more fully, in the light of faith, what the Lord Jesus wants to say to you young people, and, through you, to all Christian communities.

*Life is a mission*

Every man and woman *is* a mission; that is the reason for our life on this earth. To be *attracted* and to be *sent* are two movements that our hearts, especially when we are young, feel as interior forces of love; they hold out promise for our future and they give direction to our lives. More than anyone else, young people feel the power of life breaking in upon us and attracting us. To live out joyfully our responsibility for the world is a great

challenge. I am well aware of lights and shadows of youth; when I think back to my youth and my family, I remember the strength of my hope for a better future. The fact that we are not in this world by our own choice makes us sense that there is an initiative that precedes us and makes us exist. Each one of us is called to reflect on this fact: “*I am a mission* on this Earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 273).

### *We proclaim Jesus Christ*

The Church, by proclaiming what she freely received (cf. Mt 10:8; Acts 3:6), can share with you young people the way and truth which give meaning to our life on this earth. Jesus Christ, who died and rose for us, appeals to our freedom and challenges us to seek, discover and proclaim this message of truth and fulfilment. Dear young people, do not be afraid of Christ and his Church! For there we find the treasure that fills life with joy. I can tell you this from my own experience: thanks to faith, I found the sure foundation of my dreams and the strength to realize them. I have seen great suffering and poverty mar the faces of so many of our brothers and sisters. And yet, for those who stand by Jesus, evil is an incentive to ever greater love. Many men and women, and many young people, have generously sacrificed themselves, even at times to martyrdom, out of love for the Gospel and service to their brothers and sisters. From the cross of Jesus we learn the divine logic of self-sacrifice (cf. 1 Cor 1:17-25) as a proclamation of the Gospel for the life of the world (cf. Jn 3:16). To be set afire by the love of Christ is to be consumed by that fire, to grow in understanding by its light and to be warmed by its love (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). At the school of the saints, who open us to the vast horizons of God, I invite you never to stop wondering: “What would Christ do if he were in my place?”

*Transmitting the faith to the ends of the earth*

You too, young friends, by your baptism have become living members of the Church; together we have received the mission to bring the Gospel to everyone. You are at the threshold of life. To grow in the grace of the faith bestowed on us by the Church's sacraments plunges us into that great stream of witnesses who, generation after generation, enable the wisdom and experience of older persons to become testimony and encouragement for those looking to the future. And the freshness and enthusiasm of the young makes them a source of support and hope for those nearing the end of their journey. In this blend of different stages in life, the mission of the Church bridges the generations; our faith in God and our love of neighbor are a source of profound unity.

This transmission of the faith, the heart of the Church's mission, comes about by the infectiousness of love, where joy and enthusiasm become the expression of a newfound meaning and fulfilment in life. The spread of the faith "by attraction" calls for hearts that are open and expanded by love. It is not possible to place limits on love, for love is strong as death (cf. Song 8:6). And that expansion generates encounter, witness, proclamation; it generates sharing in charity with all those far from the faith, indifferent to it and perhaps even hostile and opposed to it. Human, cultural and religious settings still foreign to the Gospel of Jesus and to the sacramental presence of the Church represent the extreme peripheries, the "ends of the earth", to which, ever since the first Easter, Jesus' missionary disciples have been sent, with the certainty that their Lord is always with them (cf. Mt 28:20; Acts 1:8). This is what we call the *missio ad gentes*. The most desolate periphery of all is where mankind, in need of Christ, remains indifferent to the faith or shows hatred for the fullness of life in God. All material and spiritual poverty, every form of discrimination against our brothers and sisters, is always a consequence of the rejection of God and his love.

The ends of the earth, dear young people, nowadays are quite relative and always easily “navigable”. The digital world – the social networks that are so pervasive and readily available – dissolves borders, eliminates distances and reduces differences. Everything appears within reach, so close and immediate. And yet lacking the sincere gift of our lives, we could well have countless contacts but never share in a true communion of life. To share in the mission to the ends of the earth demands the gift of oneself in the vocation that God, who has placed us on this earth, chooses to give us (cf. Lk 9:23-25). I dare say that, for a young man or woman who wants to follow Christ, what is most essential is to seek, to discover and to persevere in his or her vocation.

### *Bearing witness to love*

I am grateful to all those ecclesial groups that make it possible for you to have a personal encounter with Christ living in his Church: parishes, associations, movements, religious communities, and the varied expressions of missionary service. How many young people find in missionary volunteer work a way of serving the “least” of our brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25:40), promoting human dignity and witnessing to the joy of love and of being Christians! These ecclesial experiences educate and train young people not only for professional success, but also for developing and fostering their God-given gifts in order better to serve others. These praiseworthy forms of temporary missionary service are a fruitful beginning and, through vocational discernment, they can help you to decide to make a complete gift of yourselves as missionaries.

The Pontifical Mission Societies were born of young hearts as a means of supporting the preaching of the Gospel to every nation and thus contributing to the human and cultural growth of all those who thirst for knowledge of the truth. The prayers and the material aid generously given

and distributed through the Pontifical Mission Societies enable the Holy See to ensure that those who are helped in their personal needs can in turn bear witness to the Gospel in the circumstances of their daily lives. No one is so poor as to be unable to give what they have, but first and foremost what they are. Let me repeat the words of encouragement that I addressed to the young people of Chile: “Never think that you have nothing to offer, or that nobody needs you. Many people need you. Think about it! Each of you, think in your heart: many people need me” (*Meeting with Young People*, Maipu Shrine, 17 January 2018).

Dear young people, this coming October, the month of the missions, we will hold the Synod devoted to you. It will prove to be one more occasion to help us become missionary disciples, ever more passionately devoted to Jesus and his mission, to the ends of the earth. I ask Mary, Queen of the Apostles, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and Blessed Paolo Manna to intercede for all of us and to accompany us always.

*From the Vatican, 20 May 2018*

*Solemnity of Pentecost*

Francisco

October  
2019





LETTER OF CARDINAL FERNANDO FILONI  
**TO BISHOPS**

**To the Eminent and Most Excellent Ordinaries**

Vatican City State, 3 December 2017

*Saint Francis Xavier*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopacy,

In response to the personal invitation of the Holy Father in his letter dated 22 October 2017, I would like to share with you and with the Churches entrusted to your care some reflections and proposals regarding the celebration of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019.

At the heart of this initiative, which involves the Universal Church, will be prayer, testimonies, and reflections on the centrality of the *missio ad gentes* as a permanent state of being sent out for the first evangelization (Mt 28:19). The obligation of personal and communal conversion to Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and alive in the Church, will renew the fervor and the passion for giving witness to the Gospel of life and the joy of Easter, through both words and actions (Lk 24:46-49). The mission of the Church in those human, religious, and cultural contexts not yet permeated by the Gospel requires that the transmission of the faith bring about a personal way of life, a culture, and a way of living in communion that are forged by the joy of the Gospel and Christian values. The Christian faith manifests its authentic mission when it is completely dedicated to the salvation of the world. The witness of charity, commitment to justice and peace, and intercultural dialogue with Religious Traditions in mutual respect for human life and its dignity, especially that of the poorest of society, all serve to

orient the mission of the Church around the proclamation of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The *missio ad gentes*, identified in *Evangelii Gaudium* as the paradigm of the ordinary pastoral action of the Church (EG 15), represents that which Pope Francis asks us to place at the heart of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of his predecessor Pope Benedict XV (30 November 1919). In other words, we are “to place the mission of Jesus at the heart of the Church, making it the criterion for measuring the effectiveness of her structures, the results of her labors, the fruitfulness of her ministers and the joy they awaken. For without joy, we attract no one.”<sup>18</sup>

The Holy Father indicated four dimensions,<sup>19</sup> or ways to prepare for and live out the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, in order to overcome divisions and opposing views between ordinary and missionary pastoral work, and between the challenges of evangelization in previously Christian areas that are now secularized and indifferent to religion and the *missio ad gentes* among cultures and religions to which the Gospel is still foreign (EG 14). These four dimensions are:

1. a personal encounter with Jesus Christ alive in His Church: Eucharist, Word of God, personal and communal prayer,
2. the witness of the Saints, the Missionary Martyrs, and the Confessors of the Faith, who are unique expressions of the Churches throughout the world,
3. biblical, catechetical, spiritual, and theological formation regarding the *missio ad gentes*,
4. missionary charity as a material support for the immense work of evangelization, especially the *missio ad gentes* and Christian formation in Churches that are most in need.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, *Meeting with the Executive Committee of CELAM*, Apostolic Nunciature in Bogotá, 7 September 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, *Speech to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, gathered in General Assembly, Vatican City State, 3 June 2017.

In a way appropriate and suited to the Christians of the area, I suggest that each particular Church and each Episcopal Conference determine how to live out and be molded by these dimensions, so as to bring about a renewed conversion to the mission of Jesus. Additionally, I ask you to inform and invite, as active participants in this missionary initiative of the Holy Father, any local members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, as well as those of the associations and ecclesial movements present in your Dioceses.

In this time of remote preparation, I propose that each one of your particular Churches commits itself to prayerful reflection, engaging the local contemplative monastic and cloistered communities in this same spirit of prayer. In the midst of the world, these brothers and sisters of ours, thanks to the baptismal radicality of their contemplative vocation, are efficacious signs of the sonship of every man and woman of God. They live, in the ordinary, daily rhythm of their monasteries and communities, the essential elements of Christianity that represent the heart of the mission, the heart of every Gospel proclamation and witness. It is necessary to make reference to them, so that indeed all throughout the world may be transformed and conformed to the mission of Christ and of His Church, to the glory of God the Father. I am certain that every particular Church will be able to find the ways and times, properly suited to each unique context, to involve monks and cloistered Religious in this initiative of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019.

The Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) together with this Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples are directly involved in the work of preparing and implementing the Extraordinary Missionary Month. The national and diocesan PMS Directors, present and active in your particular Churches, are asked to work together with you so that this initiative of the Holy Father may indeed bring about renewed passion for the Gospel, greater zeal, and missionary fervor within our Churches. I have asked the International Secretariat of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) to coordinate the preparation,

formation, and implementation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month. Collaborative efforts are also underway with our Pontifical Urban University to organize moments of reflection and theological-missiological formation at the international and continental level.

Furthermore, in order to assist the creative action of particular Churches, some suggestions and indications will be offered by way of texts and reflections, the fruit of a wide consultation of Christians from throughout the whole world. In due time you will also be informed about the celebrations over which the Holy Father will preside, proposed as events of the Universal Church that will directly involve the Church in Rome.

Finally, I kindly ask you to identify particular examples from among the sons and daughters of your particular Churches who have witnessed to the mission, who are known for their Christian example and enjoy the recognition of holiness in your Christian communities. It would be most helpful if their biographies could be forwarded to the email address noted below. I would also be grateful if you could identify some members of your Churches who might be able to compose spiritual and missionary reflections based on Sacred Scripture. I kindly ask you to forward these and other suggestions and proposals to the International Secretariat of the PMU (october2019@ppoomm.va).

Attached you will find a copy of the Holy Father's Letter to me, dated this past 22 October, as well as the text of his Speech given to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies on 3 June 2017.

During this season of Advent, we entrust these preparations to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles, to St. Francis Xavier and St. Thérèse, and to Blessed Paolo Manna. I extend to you my heartfelt greetings, with hopes of abundant fruits of conversion to Christ for the benefit of the missionary work of the Church.

  
FERNANDO CARDINAL FILONI

*Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples  
and President of the Supreme Committee of the Pontifical Mission Societies*

LETTER OF CARDINAL FERNANDO FILONI  
TO RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS

Vatican City State, 3 December 2017

*Saint Francis Xavier*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
Superiors General of Institutes  
of Consecrated Life  
and Societies of Apostolic Life,

In response to the personal invitation of the Holy Father in his letter dated 22 October 2017, I would like to share with you and your communities some reflections and proposals regarding the celebration of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019.

At the heart of this initiative, which involves the Universal Church, will be *prayer, testimonies, and reflections* on the centrality of the *missio ad gentes* as a permanent state of being sent out for the first evangelization (Mt 28:19). The obligation of personal and communal conversion to Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and alive in the Church, will renew the fervor and the passion for giving witness to the Gospel of life and the joy of Easter, through both words and actions (Lk 24:46-49). The mission of the Church in those human, religious, and cultural contexts not yet permeated by the Gospel requires that the transmission of the faith bring about a personal way of life, a culture, and a way of living in communion that are forged by the joy of the Gospel and Christian values. The Christian faith manifests its authentic mission when it is completely dedicated to the salvation of the world. The witness of charity, commitment to justice and peace, and

intercultural dialogue with Religious Traditions in mutual respect for human life and its dignity, especially that of the poorest of society, all serve to orient the mission of the Church around the proclamation of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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The Holy Father indicated four dimensions,<sup>21</sup> or ways to prepare for and live out the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, in order to overcome divisions and opposing views between ordinary and missionary pastoral work, and between the challenges of evangelization in previously Christian areas that are now secularized and indifferent to religion and the *missio ad gentes* among cultures and religions to which the Gospel is still foreign (EG 14). These four dimensions are:

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4. missionary charity as a material support for the immense work of evangelization, especially the *missio ad gentes* and Christian formation in Churches that are most in need.

With due respect for the charisms of your respective communities, I suggest that you determine suitable and appropriate ways to live out and be molded by these dimensions, so as to bring about a renewed conversion to the mission of Jesus.

In this time of remote preparation, I propose that contemplative monastic and cloistered communities commit themselves to prayerful reflection, which can be of help to particular Churches, the lay faithful and pastors in their work of conversion and mission. In the midst of the world, you, our brothers and sisters, thanks to the baptismal radicality of your contemplative vocation, are efficacious signs of the sonship of every man and woman of God. You live, in the ordinary, daily rhythm of your monasteries and communities, the essential elements of Christianity that represent the heart of the mission, the heart of every Gospel proclamation and witness. It is necessary to involve our brother monks and cloistered sisters in this initiative, so that indeed all throughout the world may be transformed and conformed to the mission of Christ and of His Church, to the glory of God the Father.

The Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) together with this Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples are directly involved in the work of preparing and implementing the Extraordinary Missionary Month. The national and diocesan PMS Directors, present and active in local Churches, are asked to work together with you so that this initiative of the Holy Father may indeed bring about renewed passion for the Gospel, greater zeal, and missionary fervor within our Churches. I have asked the International Secretariat of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) to coordinate the preparation, formation, and implementation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month. Collaborative efforts are also underway with our Pontifical Urban

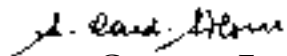
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Finally, I kindly ask you to identify particular examples from among the sons and daughters of your Institutes and Societies who have witnessed to the mission, who are known for their Christian example and enjoy the recognition of holiness in your communities and in the Churches where they provided their exemplary service. It would be most helpful if their biographies could be forwarded to the email address noted below. I would also be grateful if you could identify some members of your communities who might be able to compose spiritual and missionary reflections based on Sacred Scripture. I kindly ask you to forward these and other suggestions and proposals to the International Secretariat of the PMU (october2019@ppoomm.va).

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LETTER OF CARDINAL FERNANDO FILONI  
TO BISHOPS

To the Most Eminent and Most Excellent Ordinaries

Vatican City State, 8 April 2018  
*2nd Sunday of Easter*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopacy,

May the Peace of the Risen Lord be our hope!

Following my letter of 3 December 2017, I am once again writing with regard to the missionary initiative that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, announced to the entire Church on Sunday, 22 October 2017. The Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 is truly a unique opportunity for all of us; the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV helps us to reignite our ardor and passion for the mission of Jesus Christ. Renewing the mission of the Gospel, as Pope Benedict stressed many years ago, on 30 November 1919, is still relevant today if we consider the current state of the world and the Church.

The spiritual, pastoral, and theological goal of this extraordinary missionary month consists, above all, in recognizing that this mission is and must become more fully the paradigm of life and work for the whole Church, and thus of every Christian, so that we can then live it out with conviction. Converting our hearts and minds, as missionary disciples, the Spirit urges us to go out into the world and announce Christ, Crucified and Risen. Placing the *missio ad gentes*, with its various facets, at the center of the life of the Church and recognizing the mission of Jesus as Her heart

and identity helps us to rediscover the genuine, yet challenging relationship that God establishes with the world that He created, redeemed, and loves (cf. Jn 17, Eph 1).

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has shared with us the theme for October 2019:

### BAPTIZED AND SENT: THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD

Prayer, reflection, and action will help us to live this dimension of the Extraordinary Missionary Month. In fact, “We, by Baptism, are immersed in that inexhaustible source of life which is the death of Jesus, the greatest act of love in all of history; and thanks to this love we can live a new life, no longer at the mercy of evil, of sin and of death, but in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters.”<sup>22</sup> We are invited to confirm our baptismal identity in a personal encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ, who invites us to be his witnesses in the world.

The Church carries on the mission that Jesus received from the Father in the Spirit. By announcing Jesus Christ, in Word and Sacrament, the Church responds to the thirst for an authentic life and a sense of purpose that resides in the heart of every woman and man. By offering Baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:19) to the inhabitants of this world and in breaking the bread of the Eucharist with them, the very life of God, which saves us from evil and death (cf. Jn 6:48-51, 10:10), is made manifest and communicated to the world. In water and Spirit, Jesus Christ, through his Blood (cf. 1 Jn 5:1-13), redeems us, gives us faith, and offers us to the world for the salvation of souls. The grace that frees and saves is truly announced to the poor and

<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday, 8 January 2014

to those of us imprisoned by sin (cf. Lk 4:14-22). Nothing and no one is excluded from the merciful love of God, who invites us to go on mission, so that all may be drawn to the Lord.

We are grateful to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for leading us and entrusting us with a fitting theme on this journey toward the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019. With this in mind and in a spirit of fraternal communion between the particular Churches served by the ministry of the Successor of Peter, the Universal Pastor, I would like to propose some initiatives for the celebration of this important ecclesial event. I am aware that I am writing over a year in advance, but I believe this will provide the necessary amount of time for each local Church to begin prayerfully reflecting on how to live out the Extraordinary Missionary Month. It is our hope, as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Mission Societies, that the following proposals will help stimulate the creativity of the local Churches entrusted to your care. These suggestions are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather are some ideas and examples that are intended to facilitate local celebrations, which are to accompany those that will take place on a universal level.

1. Organize a Diocesan or national celebration for the Opening of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019.
2. Celebrate the Missionary Vigil, focusing on the theme given to us by the Holy Father.
3. Celebrate the Most Holy Eucharist at the Diocesan level on World Mission Sunday.
4. Propose that small groups of people or families gather in each other's houses to pray the Holy Rosary for the missionary work of the Church, drawing inspiration from the original intuition of Venerable Pauline Jaricot, foundress of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith.
5. Promote a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine or to that of a missionary saint or martyr.

6. Promote the collection of funds to support the apostolic work of the *missio ad gentes* and missionary formation.
7. Propose a public activity by which young people are involved in proclaiming the Gospel.
8. Organize a Diocesan or national celebration for the Closing of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019.

With regard to these suggestions, you should find in the National and Diocesan Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, present in your local Churches, helpful references for ideas and collaboration. In fact, with their help we are putting together important reflections to serve as an aid for local Churches. This Guide, which will be completed and distributed before the end of this year, is the fruit of the faith of many of our brothers and sisters from around the world. I am sincerely grateful to all those who are making generous and valuable contributions to help promote this important work of missionary animation.

I hope and pray that all we are called to live and prayerfully reflect upon in preparation for the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 will contribute to a genuine, missionary conversion to Christ. With Mary, Queen of the Apostles, united in the Upper Room, we remain united in prayer for a special outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Please know of my gratitude and fraternal best wishes for you and your ministry.

Sincerely in Christ,

  
FERNANDO CARDINAL FILONI

*Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples  
and President of the Supreme Committee of the Pontifical Mission Societies*

LETTER OF CARDINAL FERNANDO FILONI

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TO RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS

Vatican City State, 8 April 2018

*2nd Sunday of Easter*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
General Superiors  
of Institutes of Consecrated Life  
and Societies of Apostolic Life,

May the Peace of the Risen Lord be our hope!

Following my letter of 3 December 2017, I am once again writing with regard to the missionary initiative that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, announced to the entire Church on Sunday, 22 October 2017. The Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 is truly a unique opportunity for all of us; the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV helps us to reignite our ardor and passion for the mission of Jesus Christ. As Pope Benedict stressed many years ago on 30 November 1919, renewing the mission of the Gospel is still relevant today if we consider the current state of the world and the Church.

The spiritual, pastoral, and theological goal of this extraordinary missionary month consists in recognizing, living, and convincing ourselves that this mission is and must become more fully the paradigm of life and work for the whole Church, and thus of every Christian. Converting our hearts and minds, as missionary disciples, the Spirit urges us to go out into the world and announce Christ, Crucified and Risen. Placing the *missio ad gentes*, with its various facets, at the center of the Church's life and recognizing the mission of Jesus as Her heart and identity helps us to rediscover the

genuine, yet challenging relationship that God establishes with the world that He created, redeemed, and loves (cf. Jn 17, Eph 1).

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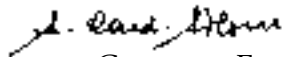
<sup>23</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday, 8 January 2014.

We are grateful to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for leading us and entrusting us with a fitting theme on this journey toward the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019. With this perspective and in a spirit of communion, I would like to propose a way to grow in greater awareness of our baptismal missionary vocation. In addition to any initiatives that may be implemented by the Bishops in the particular Churches of which you are members, I would like to propose that each of you initiate a process of reciprocal listening, in such a way that all may be able to cooperate in the missionary conversion of the entire ecclesial team so often insisted upon and hoped for by Pope Francis (cf. EG 25, 27, 30, 32 and 33). Listening to one another in the Spirit converts us and helps us grow in the very communion that comes from and is necessary for authentic missionary activity.

Through their different charismatic forms, consecrated virginity and ordained ministry in service to Christ and his Church can be sources of communication, through listening and sharing, which develop from your experiences of the Christian life and your missionary apostolate in the Spirit. Therefore, we are called to be more aware of the gifts of Baptism, the Eucharist, and the Church, while striving to better realize our specific call to live the *missio ad gentes*. In order to build toward the theme given to us by Pope Francis, I propose that we begin reflecting on the following: “Proclamation, Sacrament and Christian Witness in the *Missio Ad Gentes*.” The tenor of the reflection, which is both the fruit of prayer and lived experience, could be of a theological-experiential type. It would involve coming together to recount individual missionary experiences with a robust theological and spiritual base. Jesus Christ and the Church, in the Scriptures, in the Sacraments, in charity, and in dialogue with the world and its cultures and religions, represent the heart of that which we would like to communicate, listening to one another, discerning and sharing. It is our hope that each of your Institutes would organize this reciprocal listening, prayer, and reflection, according to your particular means, circumstances, and needs.

As the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Mission Societies, we propose that some members of your Community be designated to organize this process of listening, spiritual discernment, and sharing, together with our missionary formation organizations, the International Secretariat of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) and the International Center for Missionary Animation (CIAM). One concrete proposal would be to arrange a meeting at the CIAM for shared reflection between members of the same or different Institutes, depending on what is most opportune. The fruit of this work of faith and discernment about the *missio ad gentes* will help all of us to breathe new life into the missions, starting with that which the Spirit provides for us according to our various roles within the one Church of Christ. I have asked Father Fabrizio Meroni, Secretary General of the PMU and Director of CIAM, to make himself available to receive any responses and inquiries about the aforementioned proposal (email: [fabrizio.meroni@ppoomm.va](mailto:fabrizio.meroni@ppoomm.va); PMU +39 0669880228; CIAM +39 0669882484). Also, our National and Diocesan Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies present in your local Churches can be a possible reference for collaboration. Thanks to them, we are gathering important reflections for the publication of a Guide that will be sent to you upon completion.

I hope and pray that our preparation for the Extraordinary Mission Month of October 2019 will contribute to a genuine, missionary conversion to Christ. With Mary, Queen of the Apostles, united in the Upper Room, we pray for a special outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. I cordially greet you and thank you,



FERNANDO CARDINAL FILONI

*Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples  
and President of the Supreme Committee of the Pontifical Mission Societies*



LETTER OF CARDINAL FERNANDO FILONI  
TO INTERNATIONAL LEADERS  
OF ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS,  
NEW COMMUNITIES,  
AND LAY ASSOCIATIONS

Vatican City State, 8 April 2018

*2nd Sunday of Easter*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
International Leaders  
of Ecclesial Movements, New Communities,  
and Lay Associations,

May the Peace of the Risen Lord be our hope!

Following my letter of 3 December 2017, which was sent to all Bishops, I now write to each of you directly with regard to the missionary initiative that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, announced to the entire Church on Sunday, 22 October 2017. The Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 is truly a unique opportunity for all of us; the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV helps us to reignite our ardor and passion for the mission of Jesus Christ. As Pope Benedict XV stressed many years ago, on 30 November 1919, renewing the mission of the Gospel is still relevant today if we consider the current state of the world and the Church.

The spiritual, pastoral, and theological goal of this extraordinary missionary month consists in first recognizing that this mission is and must become more fully the paradigm of life and work for the whole Church, and thus

of every Christian, so that we can then live it out with conviction and joy. Converting our hearts and minds, as missionary disciples, the Spirit urges us to go out into the world and announce Christ, Crucified and Risen. Placing the *missio ad gentes*, with its various facets, at the center of the Church's life and recognizing the mission of Jesus as Her heart and identity helps us to rediscover the genuine, yet challenging relationship that God establishes with the world that He created, redeemed, and loves (cf. Jn 17, Eph 1).

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has shared with us the theme for October 2019:

### BAPTIZED AND SENT: THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD

Prayer, reflection, and action will help us to live this dimension of the Extraordinary Missionary Month. In fact, “We, by Baptism, are immersed in that inexhaustible source of life which is the death of Jesus, the greatest act of love in all of history; and thanks to this love we can live a new life, no longer at the mercy of evil, of sin and of death, but in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters.”<sup>24</sup> We are invited to confirm our baptismal identity in a personal encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ. He invites us to be his witnesses in the world.

The Church carries on the mission that Jesus received from the Father in the Spirit. By announcing Jesus Christ, in Word and Sacrament, the Church responds to the thirst for an authentic life and a sense of purpose that resides in the heart of every woman and man. By offering Baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:19) to the inhabitants of this world and in breaking the bread of the Eucharist with them, the very life of God, which saves us from evil and

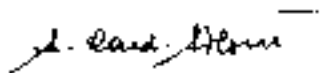
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death (cf. Jn 6:48-51, 10:10), is made manifest and communicated to the world. In water and Spirit, the Blood of Christ (cf. 1 Jn 5:1-13) redeems us, gives us faith, and offers us to the world for the salvation of souls. The grace that frees and saves is truly announced to the poor and to those of us imprisoned by sin (cf. Lk 4:14-22). Nothing and no one is excluded from the merciful love of God, who invites us to go on mission, so that all may be drawn to Him.

We are grateful to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for leading us and entrusting us with a fitting theme on this journey toward the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019. It is particularly relevant that our Holy Father emphasized Baptism as the point of departure of our common mission. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, many movements and new communities within the Church have emerged, with particular charisms, for the renewal of our unity with Christ through Baptism. With this perspective and in a spirit of communion, I invite each of you to take part in this initiative of Pope Francis by reflecting on the ways that you can live the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, so that it may be a font of new missionary activity within your ecclesial realities and in service to the whole Church.

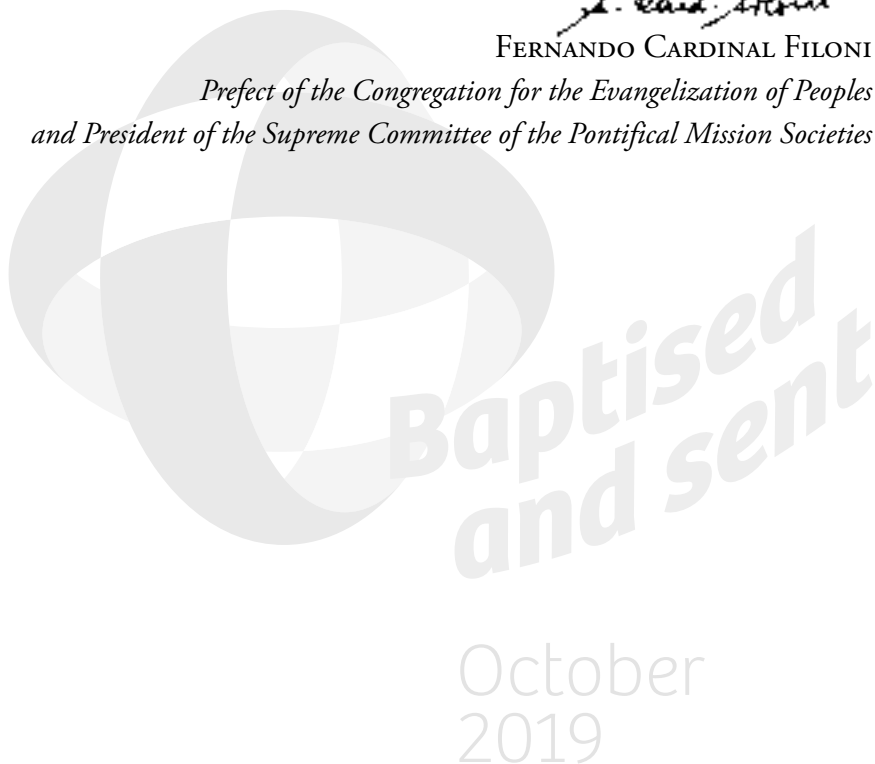
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LETTER OF CARDINAL FERNANDO FILONI

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TO RECTORS AND FORMATORS  
OF MAJOR SEMINARIES

Vatican City State, 8 April 2018  
*2nd Sunday of Easter*

Dear Rectors and Formators  
of Major Seminaries,

May the Peace of the Risen Lord be our hope!

Following my letter of 3 December 2017, which was sent to all Bishops, I now write to each of you directly with regard to the missionary initiative that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, announced to the entire Church on Sunday, 22 October 2017. The Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 is truly a unique opportunity for all of us; the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV helps us to reignite our ardor and passion for the mission of Jesus Christ. Renewing the mission of the Gospel, as Pope Benedict stressed many years ago, on 30 November 1919, is still relevant today if we consider the current state of the world and the Church.

The spiritual, pastoral, and theological goal of this extraordinary missionary month consists in first recognizing that this mission is and must become more fully the paradigm of life and work for the whole Church, and thus of every Christian, so that we can then live it out with conviction and joy. Converting our hearts and minds, as missionary disciples, the Spirit urges us to go out into the world and announce Christ, Crucified and Risen. Placing the *missio ad gentes*, with its various facets, at the center

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of souls. The grace that frees and saves is truly announced to the poor and to those of us imprisoned by sin (cf. Lk 4:14-22). Nothing and no one is excluded from the merciful love of God, who invites us to go on mission, so that all may be drawn to the Lord.

We are grateful to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for leading us and entrusting us with a fitting theme on this journey toward the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019. With this in mind and in a spirit of communion, I would like to propose a way to grow in greater awareness of our baptismal missionary vocation. In addition to any initiatives that may be implemented by the Bishops in the particular Churches of which you are members, I would like to propose that each of you initiate a process of reciprocal listening, in such a way that all may be able to cooperate in the missionary conversion of the entire ecclesial team so often insisted upon and hoped for by Pope Francis (cf. EG 25, 27, 30, 32 and 33). Listening to one another in the Spirit converts us and helps us grow in the very communion that comes from and is necessary for authentic missionary activity.

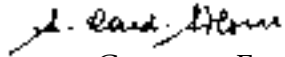
We are called to be more aware of the gifts of Baptism, the Eucharist, and the Church, while striving to better realize our specific call to live our priestly ministry, serving the mission of Christ and his Church. This call, when realized, can be a valuable source of communication, through listening and sharing, which develop from our experiences of Christian life and priestly formation. In order to build toward the theme given to us by Pope Francis, I propose that you begin reflecting on the following: “Proclamation, Sacrament and Priestly Ministry in the Mission of the Church,” with particular reference to the *missio ad gentes*. It would involve coming together to recount individual experiences of faith and one’s personal call to the priesthood. Jesus Christ and the Church, in the Scriptures, in the Sacraments, in charity, and in dialogue with the world and its cultures and religions, represent the heart of that which we would like to communicate, by listening to one another, discerning and sharing. The aforementioned reflection, theological and spiritual in nature, should take into consideration,

in a particular way, that which pertains to the *missio ad gentes* and the new challenges of evangelization, as indicated in the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* of 8 December 2016 (nn. 30-34, 61, 69, 97, 98, 121, 171, and 175). It is our hope that each of your formative communities would organize this reciprocal listening, prayer, and reflection, according to your particular means, circumstances, and needs.

Please know that our National and Diocesan Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, present in your local Churches, can be a valuable reference for collaboration. Thanks to them, we are gathering important reflections for the publication of a Guide that will be sent to you upon completion.

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Sincerely in Christ,



FERNANDO CARDINAL FILONI

*Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples  
and President of the Supreme Committee of the Pontifical Mission Societies*



## MISSIO IN THE TRINITY: ORIGIN OF THE *MISSIO* OF THE CHURCH

The theme of mission is obviously quite extensive and complex, especially in today's cultural context. For this reason, we want to consider it especially from the point of view of *missio*, with particular reference to the Second Vatican Council. The Council, in fact, dedicated its attention to this topic in its Decree *Ad Gentes*. This document must be read in the broader context of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, since it is only in the light of a reflection on the Church's essence that one can truly understand its missionary task. Joseph Ratzinger expressed this as early as 1967, when he wrote that "the central text of the Council on the essence, duty, and method of mission, which supports all the other conciliar texts on mission, including its full document on mission, and provides the starting points, is found in sections 13 through 17 of the Constitution on the Church."<sup>26</sup> A glance at that text helps us to understand first of all the universality of the call to be part of the People that is the Church (see LG 9): God wants all people to be saved, to participate in the redemption that Christ won for us with his death and resurrection, through the action of the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation (see LG 1).

This universality, or catholicity, does not mean, however, the limitation or exclusion of the identity of anyone, nor does it mean identification with a lived form of faith, but rather it indicates the gift and the task, the grace and the duty, the already and the not yet of a call that the Church is obliged

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7/2 (Freiburg 2012), 920ff.

to offer in the service of all people and, I dare say, of all creation. And so in the reflections that follow, after a brief description of mission in our day, we will consider, through the lens of the conciliar text, the Trinitarian origin of mission and delineate its fulfillment in Christ and in the Church.

## 1. The situation of mission today

What exactly do we mean by “mission”? This question is extremely relevant in the context of our constantly changing world. In theology, the term “mission” is not univocal; this is clear when we recall that, from the semantic point of view, the Church’s mission has become synonymous with its purpose. While the conviction that *mission* is the true purpose of the Church lies behind this evolution of terminology, we can also say that this identification has allowed us to lose the specific connotation of mission as a proclamation of faith in the crucified and risen Christ Jesus. This is the understanding of the missionary mandate provided by the Council: “The mission of the Church, therefore, is fulfilled [*missio ergo Ecclesiae adimpletur*] by that activity which makes her, obeying the command of Christ and influenced by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, fully present [*pleno actu*] to all men or nations, in order that, by the example of her life and by her preaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace, she may lead them to the faith, the freedom and the peace of Christ; that thus there may lie open before them a firm and free road to full participation in the mystery of Christ” (AG 5). The Council’s Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (17) and its Decree *Ad Gentes* (6) both also point out that this mission is fulfilled especially through preaching, from which new churches are born, upon whom the duty to continue the work of evangelization, proclaiming the Gospel for the salvation of the listener, is incumbent.

But is the concept of *ad gentes* – the call to proclaim Christ to all peoples and nations – still relevant? More than fifty years have passed since the

historical phase of the Council, during which the Church has effectively reached all the ends of the earth and has established its presence in every place through a local hierarchy and various institutions. Is the call to mission *ad gentes* still valid? A glance at the reality of the Church and the world today reveal not only its relevance, but an ever greater need for it. We can therefore distinguish at least four levels of this *missio ad gentes*.

The first level is the classic meaning of Christian proclamation in mission lands, which are still far from being fully evangelized. John Paul II affirmed in 1995, during World Youth Day in Manila, “As the dawn of the Third Millennium draws near, it is particularly in Asia, towards which the Church’s mission *ad gentes* ought to be chiefly directed.” Among almost five billion Asians, only 300 million are Christians. This missionary horizon is still wide open.

Second is the continuation and completion of the evangelization of the mission territories, through a still unfinished *implantatio Ecclesiae*, which means above all an ever-deepening adherence to Christ by the individual faithful, as well as an inculturation of the faith, in the sense that faith becomes culture, transforming a people’s ways of living, thinking, and relating.

Third – and ever more necessary – is mission understood as the proclamation of the faith for the first time in the continents of ancient Christian culture, where the number of those who do not know Christ, especially among the young, grows ever greater.<sup>27</sup> Secularization has thoroughly taken root in the vital substratum of our Western civilizations, which is demonstrated not only in the decreasing numbers of those who associate themselves with the Church, but especially in the widespread lack of religious culture and knowledge. The phenomenon of the growth of paganizing rites highlights the religious void that has been created over the past fifty years

<sup>27</sup> According to research conducted by the Pew Research Center, published on May 29, 2018, in Western Europe only 27% of those surveyed believe in the God presented to us in the Bible, while 38% simply believe in a higher entity and 26% do not believe in any higher power.

in the countries of ancient Christian tradition. It is not surprising that already in 1943 H. Godin and Y. Daniel published the famous book, *La France, pays de mission?* [France: Mission Country] and in 1958 J. Ratzinger drew criticism from many with his prophetic article, “Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche” [The New Heathens and the Church]. These two texts anticipated the troubling process of the shrinking of the Church that had already begun in the West – the first by taking note of the huge numbers of workers who had lost contact with the Church, the other by drawing attention to the new consumerism that was widely imposing itself.

A fourth level of the *missio ad gentes* is the presence in the lands of ancient Christianity of populations of other cultural and religious contexts that are alien to the Christian faith.

All the phenomena listed here show that, far from being complete, the *missio ad gentes* remains relevant today.

When, in the sixteenth century, the discovery of new continents raised the question of evangelization of previously unknown peoples, Pope Gregory XV founded, in 1622, the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*. An explosion of missionary zeal in the nineteenth century led to the foundation of countless missionary institutes and societies. At that time, much missionary activity went hand in hand with colonization, so much so that a colonial power determined, in principle, the religious identity of the people it colonized. Benedict XV opposed this in 1919 with his Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, in which he outlined a clear distinction between national interests and ecclesiastical interests. In 1957, Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical *Fidei Donum*, promoted missionary efforts, inviting priests of dioceses with numerous clergy to dedicate themselves to mission. This document was the occasion of a great, new missionary impulse in the Church. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree *Ad Gentes* arose in this same context of urgent commitment to mission.

It is important to recall these historical landmarks of the *missio ad gentes*, albeit briefly, because today we are experiencing a crisis of mis-

sionary thought that strongly opposes the evangelizing impulse that the Church has known over the centuries. How did this come about? Why has there been a marked decline in vocations to missionary activity? Why is mission no longer considered interesting, and often reduced to a mere diffusion of the so-called values of the Kingdom of God or even to mere cooperation in development? Obviously, the reasons are many, but we can mention a few.

From a philosophical and social point of view, a major reason is that religion is increasingly relegated to the margins, as if it were irrelevant to the lives of individuals and of society, if not a barrier to the peaceful coexistence of peoples. The Rousseauian concept of the *homme sauvage*, which suggests that the human person lives best when separated from any society, culture, and religion, remains strong. However, there are also reasons rooted deeply in the Catholic Church itself. There is still an inadequate understanding of the Church's relationship with other religions, as well as a need for a fuller synthesis of mission, a theological understanding of religions, and interreligious dialogue. But more profoundly, the understanding of Jesus as the universal mediator of salvation leads to a simple but significant question: Does humanity need the Gospel? We can't go into great detail on these questions here, but mentioning them helps us to place mission in a broader and more critical context.

Faced with these problems, however, the magisterium has consistently and vigorously emphasized the importance of mission. John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Missio* (n. 2) that the crisis of mission is a crisis of faith, thus indicating the intrinsic relationship between faith and mission: they mutually enrich, nurture, and strengthen one another. *Simul stant et simul cadunt*. Reminding Catholics of the missionary essence of the Church reaches a particular intensity in the current pontificate of Pope Francis. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), he presents missionary activity as the paradigm of all the Church's work (n. 15) and he appeals to us: "Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'" (n. 25).

This invitation has a programmatic significance for Pope Francis. The Church is not an end in itself; a courageous missionary option is needed which is “capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself” (EG 27).

This theme is central, then, in the current pontificate. From here, we can turn to consider the Church’s mission in light of its true origin in *missio*, taking up again the approach of the Council, which reconnected the task of mission to its Trinitarian origin.

## 2. *Missio* in the Trinity

At first glance, the theme of mission seems purely pastoral, having nothing to do with speculative Trinitarian theology. However, more careful observation shows us that exactly the opposite is the case. The Church, in its origins, is born of mission and experiences itself as driven by a missionary dynamic; there can therefore be no purely pastoral understanding of mission. Instead, the concept of “*missiones*” expresses how the Trinity opens itself up to the world from within, with the sending of the Son and the Spirit.

It was the great Protestant systematic theologian Karl Barth who, as the first theologian of the modern age, recalled this original Trinitarian root of the concept of “mission.” He wrote in 1957, “Isn’t it important that the most faithful missionary or the most ardent supporter of the

missions is aware of the fact that in the early Church the term *missio* is a concept derived from the doctrine on the Trinity, the term for the sending of God's own self, through the sending of the Son and of the Spirit, into the world?"<sup>28</sup>

Barth strived to show that the origin of mission is not in humanity, nor in the Church, but in God himself. He wanted to point out that the foundation of the missionary effort lies in the deepest dimension of the divine being, that is, in the sending of the Son into the world, which is the source, archetype, and model of all mission. The lesson inherent in this theological reconnection is that mission, therefore, is not a human work but a divine one.

In the Catholic context, Trinitarian theology developed a few years later, particularly by Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose theological work gives ample attention to the Trinity.<sup>29</sup> His whole Christology is based on the concept of sending, of *missio*.<sup>30</sup> He deals in an original way with the highly speculative themes of scholasticism, in which the divine processions, the so-called "*processiones*," continue in the "*missiones ad extra*," that is, the generation of the Son in the Incarnation/Easter and the sending of the Holy Spirit into the world. Balthasar restores space and life to the theological-Trinitarian themes by constantly insisting that the "mission" of the Son is founded on his internal procession from the Father.<sup>31</sup>

The achievement of Balthasar and other Trinitarian theologians of the modern era (Klaus Hemmerle, Walter Kasper, Gisbert Greshake, Leo Scheffczyk, and Joseph Ratzinger) is to have understood the Trinity as a dynamic relational structure of the one and only divine Being. The Trinity

<sup>28</sup> K. Barth, "Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart," in *Theologische Fragen und Antworten: Gesammelte Vorträge*, vol. 3 (Zollikon 1957), 125ff.

<sup>29</sup> Obviously, Balthasar was not the only one. A similar feature is found in the work of Klaus Hemmerle, whose Trinitarian theological heritage persists in the Focolare movement. Karl Rahner wrote several fundamental works on the topic. Finally, Walter Kasper, Gisbert Greshake, and Leo Scheffczyk must also be mentioned.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik* II/2, 136-238; Id., *Theologik* III, 22; Id., *Schleifung der Bastionen*, 17; Id., *Theologie der drei Tage*, 21; and several other of his works.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Id., *Theodramatik* II/2, 140; *Theodramatik* III, 332; Id., *Homo creatus est*, 35.

represents the dynamic communal foundation of God himself, which allows his opening *ad intra* and towards the world. If the Son's "*missio*" is actually an expansion into the world of the divine "*processio*," then the whole history of salvation can be seen as the place in which the dynamics of the eternal Trinity unfold. In this view, Trinitarian thought is never merely theoretical and speculative, and certainly not far from the world; rather, it is a guide to practical action for the Church and every Christian. Just as in God the *Logos* receives everything from the Father, and then returns everything back to the Father through his being sent for the salvation of the world, so there is no true Christian apart from this dynamic of giving everything back to the Father. Christ manifests his gratuitous love of the Father, makes the invisible Father visible, thus opening access to the Trinitarian life. Christ, then, is the first and greatest "missionary," because he reveals to us the greatest mystery: who God is and who (in light of this) humanity is.<sup>32</sup> This provides a profoundly richer understanding from the theological-missionary point of view, since here God is much more than a sort of "external client" for the missionary conquest of the world. The trinitarian God himself flows towards the world, to open for us the way to salvation.

### 3. The *missio* of Christ

This consideration of the intra-Trinitarian origin of mission points to another theme, which is more important than ever today: that of fullness and universality. Since, just as the fullness of the one and only divinity within the Trinity is "constituted" by the generation of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit, so the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the world take place in order to make all people participants

<sup>32</sup> Cf. W. Löser, *Kleine Hinführung zu Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Freiburg 2005), 110.



in this fullness of divine love. “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10b). Christ, the one sent by God, therefore the “first missionary,” does not come, in his work of salvation, for some but for all. God “wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4). For this reason, his sending is prolonged in the sending of the Church through the Holy Spirit, who in turn has a central role in the incarnation of Christ. The Church is intended to fruitfully carry on the dynamic of the sending of Christ.

On the eve of his passion, Jesus describes an essential characteristic of this sending of the Church when he says, “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain” (Jn 15:16). This means, on one hand, that the origin of the mission of the disciples is inherent in God himself and that, consequently, God is the source of the grace of their fruitfulness.<sup>33</sup> What we know of God we learn thanks to the revelation of Christ and to the work of his Spirit in us. He was sent into the world by the Father to save the world. This self-awareness that Christ has and reveals is expressed repeatedly in the Gospels: he comes from God, who is his Father, to fulfill his will, that is, to offer his life for the redemption of humanity. The sending of the Son in the flesh of a human being allows humanity to participate in the fullness of divine life. In fact, it is that Son who in turn sends the Church to bear fruit.

However, the Son sent by the Father through the Spirit manifests the one and triune God from the origins of creation. It is significant that first the book of Wisdom in the Old Testament and then both John and Paul in the New Testament all underline the ontological link between creation and Christ. In the book of Wisdom, it is said of divine Wisdom that “she spans the world from end to end mightily and governs all things well” (8:1), and asks, “who in the world is a better artisan than she?” (8:6). The wisdom of God, his *Logos*, in which everything finds order, permeates everything that

<sup>33</sup> Cf. H. Merkelbach, *Propter Nostram Salutem: Die Sehnsucht nach Heil im Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars* (Berlin 2004), 224.

exists. John writes at the beginning of his Gospel, “He [the Word] was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be” (Jn 1:2-3). Paul tries to describe this thinking from the point of view of creation when he writes, “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17). The Spirit that hovers over the waters (see Gen 1:1) takes on divinely revealed consistency in this design of love of his will that holds together creation and redemption.

This universal presence of Christ as the Father’s wisdom, his creative mediation, means there is an intelligibility to everything. It also means that the universe itself is incomprehensible apart from Christ and has always been destined for redemption in the blood of the Son (see Eph 1:7-10). Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes, “The world is a good thing and everything in it is invisibly ordered with wisdom and artfulness. Everything, therefore, is the work of the living and substantial Word, because it is the Word of God.”<sup>34</sup> This also means that everything that exists manifests – in its own way – an internal logic that yearns for him, since he is “fullness.” Creation has a sort of longing for the one in whom and for whom it was created. The *semina Verbi* not only indicate that wisdom leaves its traces everywhere, but also that such a seed would sprout into complete knowledge of the truth, which is Christ. It is no coincidence, then, that St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans refers to the expectation of all creation: “Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:19-21).

It is a great and fascinating sense of the meaning of all creation that sees in Christ the key to understanding of its full realization. Mission is therefore indispensable if the Church intends to open to all the reality of its true meaning and so “as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in

<sup>34</sup> Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *La grande Catechesi* (Rome 1990), 40.

Christ, in heaven and on earth” (Eph 1:10). We can therefore say that the root of that catholic (that is, universal) call that we referred to above is to be found in the universal wisdom in which everything has been created, Christ. This call is generally realized in the Catholic Church. Henri de Lubac, in this regard, compares the human person to an organ. He writes, “The Church can play on this organ because, like Christ, she ‘knows what is in man,’ because there is an intimate relationship between the dogma to which she adheres in all its mystery and human nature, infinitely mysterious in its turn. Now by the very fact that she goes to the very foundation of man the Church attains to all men and can ‘play her chords’ upon them.”<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. The *missio* of the Church

Even from these brief considerations, it becomes clear that the Church is not self-referential, but rather looks fundamentally outside itself. It is a Church *ad extra* and therefore is missionary by nature, no matter where it is located. Mission is essential to the Church, since the Church opens itself to all people, even to all of creation. The mission of the Church determines, through its Gospel mandate and its sacramental collaboration in the divine work, the form, in its historical and dynamic realization, of all creation.

In this regard it seems opportune to refer to the unchanging three-part division of the Church’s life: Word, Sacrament, charity. This was authoritatively reaffirmed by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (n. 25). This tripartition is directed, so to speak, within and articulates the activity of the Church even as it is to be lived in its smallest community. Such an articulation does not simply serve the self-preservation of the Church and must not lead us to confine our task to within our own walls. The Church proclaims, celebrates, and loves by orienting itself outward,

<sup>35</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco 1988), 49-50.

with a missionary vision, so as to be able to remain truly a sacrament, or sign and instrument of salvation for all. Even, so to speak, from the outside, ecclesial life must be a sign, a testimony. This gives the Church vitality, because it brings together its fundamental functions in a higher unity, towards which the Church is oriented, that is to say, the salvation in Christ of humanity and of all creation.

In an article entitled “*Deus caritas est* - Programmschrift für eine missionarische Kirche” [*Deus Caritas Est*: Program for a Missionary Church], Professor Klaus Baumann of University of Freiburg develops this thought specifically with regard to the Church’s ministry of service. In a paragraph with the eloquent heading “Charity for the love of the mission, or mission for the love of charity?”, Baumann asserts, among other things, that Benedict XVI’s encyclical is clearly in line with *Ad Gentes*, Pope Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio*. He concludes, “The work of charity is not carried out in the name of mission, but on the contrary, mission can only be done in the name of charity.... If one wonders what the missionary program of the encyclical is, the obvious answer appears in the Pope’s proposal for a credible witness of life by the faithful and by the Church as a basis for mission.”<sup>36</sup>

Another significant paragraph of the same article, in which the author describes the methodology of Pope Benedict’s encyclical, helps us take another step. The Pope begins with a direct proclamation of the divine message of faith and charity and then seeks to plausibly articulate this message in the context of a plurality of opinions, confident in the free acceptance of the listener. Professor Baumann asks, “Does the Pope in this way perhaps abandon the dialectical-theological method, so elementary for missionary activity, in order to reconnect with what the human person already bears within himself, to address contemporary humanity and its

<sup>36</sup> K. Baumann, “*Deus Caritas est* – Programmschrift für eine missionarische Kirche,” in J. Kreidler, Th. Broch, D. Steinfort, *Zeichen der heilsamen Nähe Gottes. Auf dem Weg zu einer missionarischen Kirche* (Ostfildern 2008), 462-463.

desire? Or does he, rather, follow this method precisely, in the conviction that faith comes from hearing, since the Christian message corresponds to a predisposition that is inherent in humanity, having been created in the image and likeness of God?”<sup>37</sup>

Here we touch upon a feature that is also strongly present also in the teaching of Pope Francis and that is becoming more and more decisive for mission today. Since faith consists of a personal encounter with God, the message must bear in mind the concreteness of the human person. This focusing on the anthropological dimension does not mean reducing the Christian message to a human reality, but rather that we must maintain an awareness of the questions that humanity asks and where its empty places lie; it means understanding what humanity longs for and what needs liberated and saved.<sup>38</sup> This is not a matter of calling into question the heritage of faith or the institution as such, but of understanding that, with the dissolution of the *Christianitas* and of a commonly accepted anthropology, the anthropological question becomes more and more vital, and with it the question of meaning. It is a question by which today’s culture, however anthropocentric, is rather intimidated. Who is the human person? And why does humanity need the gospel?

This starting anew from the anthropological question – that is, the return to a healthy anthropology and theology of creation and, further, to an awareness of the likeness of the human person to God and to the wisdom by which humanity was created – can help us to rediscover the connections between the Christian message and the longings of humanity. From this emerges the eternal modernity of the Gospel. Decades ago, Josef Pieper wrote in a small work entitled *The Christian Idea of Man*, “The essence of moralism, which many think is something specially Christian, consists in the violent separation of being and duty from one another and in proclaiming something as obligatory without seeing and making visible its link to

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 2.

being.”<sup>39</sup> What Pieper says here regarding ethics can be easily applied to our efforts at evangelization and to mission: the proclamation of the Gospel is addressed to the human person who, by his very essence and constitution, having been created through the Word of God, can only find his own fullness through it. Humanity, from the heart of its being, yearns for fullness in Christ, and after sin, for redemption, and this fullness and redemption in Jesus Christ represent the center of the Church’s mission. Christianity is not a moralism that is grafted in some way onto an already existent human being; it is the proclamation of a message in which humanity rediscovers what it has been seeking and continues to long for.

Today, missionary activity must reappropriate this understanding of humanity, that is, of the conviction that every person finds his or her fullness in the message of Christ. But where does the absence of such fullness in humanity come from? And why, despite all the signs of humanity’s unfulfilled longing, does one sometimes get the impression that Catholic theology struggles to identify this deep wound that continues to bleed in our hearts? A healthy anthropology – and therefore the Christian message – can never disregard the consideration of original sin. This truth that the Church has always presented, and that the Catechism of the Catholic Church has confirmed (CCC 396-403), deserves more attention. In fact, it is in the light of the sin of humanity and the suffering that this sin produces that the sending of Christ by the Father and the sending of the Church by Christ is fully understood. Christ came to cancel the sin of humanity, and the mission of the Church is to announce the end of humanity’s suffering through the victory of the risen Christ. The mission is universal, and therefore addressed to every person, precisely because every person must be reached by the merits of Christ who liberates her. A recent document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith points out, “The Faith confesses that we are saved by means of Baptism, which seals upon us the

<sup>39</sup> J. Pieper, *The Christian Idea of Man*, tr. Dan Farrelly (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2011), 15.

indelible character of belonging to Christ and to the Church, from which derives the transformation of the way of living our relationships with God, with other men and women, and with creation (cf. Mt 28:19). Thus, purified from original, and all other sins, we are called to a new existence conforming to Christ (cf. Rom 6:4)” (Letter *Placuit Deo*, 13).

This anthropological starting point can become in our day an important element of mission. From it also offers a method that takes humanity seriously and involves humanity directly. Pope Francis embraces this understanding of the *kerygma* in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the *kerygma*, which is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis, thereby enabling us to understand more fully the significance of every subject which the latter treats. It is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart” (n. 165).

As President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, I cannot but reaffirm that it is in this broad context of a missionary Church that the work of our organizations finds its place. As a network of faithful Christians who help the Pope to keep alive and support the missionary zeal, we wish to help every believer to rediscover the missionary dimension inherent in baptism. The gift received is a gift to be shared.

Vatican City, June 24, 2018

October  
2019  
ARCHBISHOP GIAMPIETRO DAL TOSO  
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## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH AND THE *MISSIO AD GENTES* SOME INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The conviction that mission represents not only the very nature of the Church (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 2), but also its origin, purpose, and life, requires us to consider its Trinitarian roots and its christological and pneumatological origins, so that God the Father may be glorified and his creation may have life. The intra-trinitarian relationships (processions and missions) mark out the theological context in which to understand the Church, from creation in Christ through the redemption accomplished in the Paschal Mystery up to its eschatological fulfillment. Mission makes the Church because it designates it to be much more than an instrument for salvation. It constitutes the Church as a community of the saved, since it is truly a family of God, sons and daughters in the only Son – an eschatological design of all creation (Easter, Baptism, and Eucharist). The Church, the universal sacrament of salvation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1, 9, 48; *Ad Gentes*, 1; *Gaudium et Spes*, 45), is much more than a means or a sign that will one day be discarded. The Church is the soteriological revelation of the full Truth about the world and our humanity in God. “The mission does not respond, in the first place, to human initiatives; the principal agent is the Holy Spirit, this project is his (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 21). The Church is servant of the mission. It is not the Church that makes the mission, but the mission that makes the Church. Therefore, the mission is not the instrument, but the point of departure and the goal” (Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, December 3, 2015). The Church’s mission must therefore be understood as an effective historical and sacramental

participation in the missions that God the Father entrusts to the Son and to the Holy Spirit in the world.

The Church is missionary in nature because it is born and is founded in the Passover of Jesus' death and resurrection. The cross, the historical and risen life of Jesus of Nazareth, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost establish the Church in a permanent state of mission, thus characterizing its intrinsic nature as the locus of salvation and the time of reconciliation with God within history and the world. The missionary mandate (see Mt 28:19, Acts 1:6-8) makes explicit its universal dimension (making disciples of all nations), its call to participate in the Passover of Jesus Christ in baptism (see Rom 6), and its permanence in time and in geographical space to the ends of the earth, without ever replacing its Founder and Lord Jesus Christ: "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

The *missio ad gentes* is the original form, the paradigm, and the model that configures the entire evangelizing mission of the Church, because it expresses the proclamation of the Gospel and the sacramental transformation of the world, calling all people to be missionary disciples of the Lord Jesus. What is unique about the *missio ad gentes* within the evangelizing mission of the Church is that it relates to reaching those who have not yet encountered Jesus Christ and his Gospel, places where the Christian faith is absent and not yet able to renew the culture, and women and men whose religions and nations still yearn for salvation from sin and death in the here and now of human history. To know Christ or not to know him, to be baptized or not to be, to embrace the Christian faith and belong to the Church, to live the Gospel of reconciliation and to experience God's forgiveness, or not to – these make the real difference. "To cooperate in the salvation of the world, we need to love the world (cf. Jn 3:16) and to be ready to give up our lives to serve Christ, the one Savior of the world. We do not have a product to sell. It has nothing to do with proselytizing; we are not selling a product. We have a life to communicate: God, his divine life, his merciful love, his holiness! It is the Holy Spirit who sends

us, accompanies us and inspires us. He is the source of our mission. It is he who guides the Church forward, not us” (Pope Francis, Address to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, June 1, 2018). Mission, conversion, baptism, faith, and love represent the will of the Lord Jesus for his Church. Selling a product for the purpose of religious profit or for increasing the number of followers, manipulating the freedom of people in their deepest material and spiritual needs for salvation, becoming connected to religious ideologies and opinions – these are proselytism. The mission of Jesus, the heart and the motivation of the Church’s mission, is a true communication of divine life, of eternal life, of the life of daughters and sons who have always been loved by him who created us and who is for us a Father in Christ. Giving the life of God the Father, offering the life of the Holy Spirit, and sacrificing oneself for life in Christ represents the origin and purpose of mission, from its original form of the *missio ad gentes* to its fulfillment in the Jerusalem of heaven, the dwelling place of God among humanity (see Acts 21).

The *missio ad gentes* – the first proclamation to people, places, and nations not yet transfigured by the Passover of Jesus – represents the evangelization of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit in its inalienable task of penetrating, converting, and transfiguring the world to the ends of the earth, so that all can be saved. The *missio ad gentes* corresponds, but cannot be reduced, to the natural need inscribed in the heart of every person to be saved, that is, to experience the fullness of life in the victory over sin, sickness, and death. In the *missio ad gentes*, the Church is led by the salvation of Jesus towards a world that the same Savior God had already created and constituted to be saved in his Son Jesus. In the proclamation, in the sacraments, and in love, the recipients of the *missio ad gentes* as well as the missionaries are all in need of the salvation of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the original project of humanity and life in full that was begun at the moment of creation and is always active in the course of its journey toward eternity. All creation, through the central anthropological

mediation of humanity's reasoned, bodily, and free life, seeks the eternity of the life of God.

*Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world.* This is the theme that Pope Francis chose for the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019. It emphasizes that being sent on mission is a call that comes with baptism and is for all the baptized. Thus mission means being sent for salvation that brings about the conversion of both the one who is sent and the one who receives the message: "In Christ, our life is a mission! We are mission, because we are God's love poured out, God's holiness created in his own image. Mission, then, is our own growth in holiness and that of the whole world, beginning with creation (cf. Eph 1:3-6). The missionary dimension of our Baptism thus becomes a witness of holiness that bestows life and beauty on our world" (Pope Francis, Address to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, June 1, 2018).

The Holy Father Pope Francis's magisterial and hortatory insistence upon mission – an insistence expressed through his pastoral expressions that refer to the Church as one that "ventures forth," as "a field hospital" and "the holy faithful People of God" – is by now well known. *Evangelii Gaudium*,<sup>15</sup> affirms that mission must become the paradigm of the life and daily work of the Church. It requires an authentic missionary conversion of the disciples of Jesus and of the structures of the ecclesial community (see *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25, 27) as a permanent state of intimate missionary communion with Christ, of personal encounter with Jesus alive in his Church. Quoting St. John Paul II, Pope Francis tells us that "the Church's closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; 'communion and mission are profoundly interconnected'" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 23). The mission of Jesus placed in the heart of the Church thus becomes the criterion of spiritual discernment to evaluate the effectiveness of its pastoral structures, the results of its apostolic work, the fruitfulness of its ministers, and the joy that we are capable of communicating, because without joy we are

not able to attract anyone (see Pope Francis, Meeting with the Executive Committee of CELAM, Bogotá, September 7, 2017).

This insistence of the papal magisterium on mission highlights, paradoxically, a profound crisis within the Church on the question, and particularly with regard to the *missio ad gentes*. There is among the baptized, both faithful and pastors, a certain widespread missionary weariness that the ecclesial self-referentiality of certain local Churches hides behind alleged forms of inculturation. In addition, the bureaucratic-clerical introversion of pastoral administrative activity seems to structure the life of many institutions and of some Christians dedicated to the maintenance of the status quo, according to the criterion of “it has always been done like this” (see *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33). The social and cultural irrelevance of Christians, together with the need to be accepted and perceived as commercially appealing in this technological-affective era, imposes upon us a sort of worldly and media-driven uniformity, which triggers a strong centripetal temptation. We seem more concerned with renovating the old than with being reborn from above in Easter newness. But new wine needs new wineskins, because it would destroy the old ones (see Mt 9:17). We are very tempted to reduce mission to an adjectival juxtaposition of already existing and perhaps frail structures, rather than having the apostolic courage and audacity necessary to allow ourselves to be re-created and reformed with new modes of Christian presence and witness (see *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 130-132).

“Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people’s hearts: ‘The missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death.

The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 265, quoting in the latter half St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*).

It seems to me that we should consider some essential points about ecclesial life with reference above all to the experience of faith and, therefore, to its theological understanding and its pastoral practice, in order for mission to become the existential form of life for all the baptized. The *missio ad gentes*, as the divine mandate of the Church to go to all peoples to the ends of the earth (see *Ad Gentes*, 1), remains the movement of the love of God that invites, sends, gathers, and attracts, a movement of love that measures and reveals the missionary authenticity of ecclesial life and action. Three issues seem to be particularly crucial for a renewal of awareness, ardor, and missionary responsibility.

First, we need to rediscover the intrinsic link between *mission and salvation* (see *Ad Gentes*, 7). Missionary disciples who are sent and those to whom they are sent, Churches that send and the peoples who receive them, cultures and religious experiences not marked by the Gospel of Jesus whose members desire fullness of life, are all in need of conversion and need to be understood again in the light of the universal need for salvation from sin and death. The Paschal Mystery and the historical mission of Jesus highlight how the need for love, the need for salvation from evil and death, sin and pain, hatred and division, is constitutive of the human person who, through creation in Christ, longs for divine sonship. Interest in dialogue, peaceful coexistence, social and economic justice, ecology, and otherness, must be profoundly configured and built upon the superabundant offer of salvation the heart of which is the Paschal Mystery (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). We are called to more consciously root ourselves in the universal salvific uniqueness of the Savior Jesus Christ and in the soteriological mission of the Church in the context of the theological challenges posed by the various religions and the new digital, technological world. To be preoccupied with the salvation offered by Jesus Christ, the only Mediator

between God and humanity, means wanting to make sure that all people have life, have it in abundance, and have it forever. To repeat the Pope's words, we have not been given a product to sell, but a life to be communicated – that of God, the fruit of his reconciling love, which is the eternal fullness of human life. Salvation and eternal life, the cross and its oblation sacrifice are somewhat absent from certain pastoral and missionary efforts that are too consumed by the present, by the self-gratification of numbers and exaggerated media exposure. The insistence of Pope Francis on holiness in the contemporary world, in the recent apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (March 19, 2018) and the document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith approved by the Holy Father, *Placuit Deo* (March 1, 2018), calls our attention back the topic of salvation in Jesus Christ by divine grace, as an experience of new life, conversion from sin, victory over death, and eternal life. The pilgrim Church, its purification, and its glory are experiences of communion of the saved, of the saints in the family of friends of God.

A second element that is crucial for a true renewal of the Church in a permanent state of mission is the need to recover *a relationship with the world* (see *Gaudium et Spes*) that includes each of us, the world around us, the world of matter, of the body, and of things, the world of time and space, of cultures and religions. We must learn from God that, to save the world, he loves it from its creation and offers us his divine life in the Son sent and sacrificed for us. God loved the world so much that he sent his Son so that we would have full life, Saint John tells us in his Gospel (see Jn 3:16; 10:10). The *missio ad gentes*, to evangelically renew the Church, requires a substantial revival of the baptismal centrality of the lay faithful and their secularity, of their being ordinarily in the world. Christian witness carries out the mission of baptism through holiness in the world, Pope Francis reminds us in *Gaudete et Exsultate*. Christian witness finds, in the ecclesial faith of the disciples of Jesus and in their professional competence, the articulation and effectiveness of being in the world despite not being

of the world or coming from the world. The faithful baptized layperson, by virtue of the common experience of conjugal love that generates life and family, together with her radical commitment to the world and to its transformation through her efforts, must be placed at the center of pastoral concerns related to evangelization, liturgical life, catechetical formation, and communal charity. In his Letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet (March 19, 2016), Pope Francis says strongly, “Looking at the People of God is remembering that we all enter the Church as lay people. The first sacrament, which seals our identity forever, and of which we should always be proud, is Baptism. Through Baptism and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, (the faithful) ‘are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood’ (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 10). Our first and fundamental consecration is rooted in our Baptism. No one has been baptized a priest or a bishop. They baptized us as lay people and it is the indelible sign that no one can ever erase.”

We need to remember here, following the teaching of St. John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici*, 59, that “a faith that does not affect a person’s culture is a faith not fully embraced, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived.” Our temptation to reduce the Church to its clerical element and to a certain clericalized pastoral ministry, our reduction of the human love between man and woman to some quick and questionable preparation for marriage and its canonical-ritual celebration, and our indifference towards the world of work, profession, and the transformation of the world, all suggest the need for a radical renewal of the way we understand what it means to live out our baptism and our faith. I believe that the elementary human experience of conjugal love between man and woman can represent the place of salvation for all,<sup>40</sup> respecting the essential dogmatic necessity of Christian faith, of baptism, and of the Church to be saved through the Passover of Jesus Christ (see *Lumen Gentium*, 14; *Ad Gentes*, 7; *Gaudium*

<sup>40</sup> Cf. F. Meroni, “Christ’s Salvation, Church and Other Religions in Light of Vatican II,” in F. Meroni (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church* (Rome: Aracne, 2017), 195-225; cf. F. Meroni, *Il mistero nuziale e le sfide del gender: Uomo e donna: è ancora possibile?* (Siena: Cantagalli, 2015).



*et Spes*, 22), on the one hand, and on the other, the Gospels' insistence that we will all be judged on love (see Mt 25).

If it makes sense at times to speak of a *missio inter gentes* – complementary to its *ad gentes* dimension but never in opposition to it or as a substitution for it – this should be understood as a mode of dynamic presence of proclamation and conversion of nations, cultures, religions, and people who encounter and open themselves to the Gospel of Jesus and his Church. The Christian faith that penetrates this interculturality opens new horizons, transforms relationships and peoples, transfigures matter, bodies, and the world for the glory of God and the full life of man and woman. Dialogue between people, cultures, and religions and the indispensable respect for each person's religious freedom represent the natural and necessary context of carrying out the Church's mission in the world. The peaceful and orderly coexistence of different and mutually respectful religious communities must always include the free possibility of mission, of conversion, and of religious and community membership. Significant and creative Christian presences in places that are predominantly indifferent or hostile to the faith, where Christian witness lives daily with the tragedy of the martyrdom of blood, ecclesial movements, lay associations, missionary institutes and new ecclesial forms of community life, are all ecclesial experiences to keep in mind in order to understand the *missio ad gentes* in a paradigmatic reconfiguration of the entire mission of the Church sent into the world for the salvation and transformation of the world.

A third element of vital importance in order for mission to determine the nature, life, and structures of the Church is the experiential and theological need to re-establish and better understand *the sacramental logic of the event Jesus Christ*, of his Incarnation, and of his Passover. Limiting mission to proclaiming and witnessing the values of the kingdom means not only making a true reduction, but also depriving the word of God and the kingdom of God of the concrete historical-eschatological reality of the Incarnation and of the saving and transforming effectiveness of the missionary work of the

Church founded on the Passover of Jesus. The Beatitudes, the precept of love, and the liberation of the poor are theologically concrete and pastorally effective only in the context of the sacramental foundation they all share. What was very clear to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council – namely, the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation (see *Lumen Gentium*, 1, 9, 48; *Ad Gentes*, 1; *Gaudium et Spes*, 45) and its necessity rooted in the necessity of theological faith and baptism for the salvation of all, baptized or not – seems tarnished and faded in some contemporary missiological reflections.

*Baptism* and *confirmation* as immersion in and pneumatological identification with the Paschal Mystery; the *Eucharist* as the communal form of the true and corporeal unity of God in Christ with our humanity in the order of sacrifice and oblation; *marriage* as a sacramental unity of God with his human creature and of Jesus Christ with his Church; *reconciliation* and the *anointing of the sick* as true liberation from sin and re-creation of full life; the *sacrament of order* as a ministry at the service of the Eucharistic form of the world and of redeemed humanity – these all need to be rediscovered in theological reflection and pastoral activity concerning mission. Without the sacrament, love and mercy remain vague intuitions of fraternity and reconciliation to be shaped by worldly criteria and treated as welfare programs and nongovernmental organizations, as Pope Francis often emphasizes. Only in the sacrament can one understand the true meaning of the world, of matter, and of the body which, sick in sin, yearns for the paschal newness of life. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us in the apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, “Catholic doctrine, in fact, affirms that the Eucharist, as the sacrifice of Christ, is also the sacrifice of the Church, and thus of all the faithful. This insistence on sacrifice – a ‘making sacred’ – expresses all the existential depth implied in the transformation of our human reality as taken up by Christ (cf. Phil 3:12). Christianity’s new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life” (nn. 70-71). The Church, then, is received by God and lived in the Spirit of the Risen

Lord as holy a faithful People of God, Body and Bride of Jesus Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit. To ignore the sacrament, a sacrificed and risen moment of the proclaimed and incarnate Word of God, risks excluding a large part of the ordinary pastoral work of many Christian communities, pastors, and missionaries, for whom reflection on mission today seems to have become meaningless. The thoughtful and wise articulation of proclamation, sacrament, and Christian witness in the *missio ad gentes* could help renew us and to radically reform in a missionary sense the whole life and activity of the Church.

Considering this urgent need for a missionary reawakening, Pope Francis's decision – made public on October 22, 2017, World Mission Sunday – to call for October 2019 to be observed as an Extraordinary Missionary Month is not surprising. The celebration of the hundredth anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's apostolic letter *Maximum Illud* is for Pope Francis the providential opportunity to ask the whole Church to renew itself and become ever more converted to Christ, evangelically renewing its mission. It is an opportunity whose celebratory quality of prayer, reflection, formation, and missionary charity will reveal the state of real interest and of the missionary dimension of the life and faith of Christians. Pope Francis entrusted the task of coordinating the preparation and celebration of this special month to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Mission Societies. The Extraordinary Missionary Month represents a providential opportunity to evangelically renew our service to the mission of the Church. Not a simple renewal of the old, but faithful creativity in the newness of the Spirit of God!

Vatican City, June 11, 2018

FR. FABRIZIO MERONI



## PART ONE

### ENCOUNTERING JESUS CHRIST

“The Church’s closeness to Jesus  
is part of a common journey.”

*(Evangelii Gaudium, 23)*

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019



EXTRAORDINARY MISSIONARY MONTH OCTOBER 2019

Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world



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OCTOBER 1, 2019

Tuesday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

*Memorial of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus*

Zec 8:20-23

Ps 87:1b-7

Lk 9:51-56

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The prophecy of Zechariah 8:20-23 nourishes the hope of the people of God, who await its fulfillment in the universal pilgrimage of peoples to Jerusalem at the end of time (see Zec 8:22). The book of Zechariah, located in the penultimate place among the Twelve Prophets, is attributed to one of the last active prophets, alongside Haggai, after the Babylonian exile during the time of the restoration of the religious and civil Jewish community in the “land of the fathers,” as the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem was completed.

The prophetic promise comes in the third part of the book (see Zec 8:12-14), but it is already anticipated in the first part, in Zec 2:10-11. It falls within a prophetic tradition that awaits the peaceful pilgrimage of all nations to Jerusalem, as we see in Is 2:1-4, a text that is almost completely identical to Mi 4:1-4. It is above all the tradition of the Isaian school to develop the theme of this hope, toward which Judaism definitively looks, together with the coming of the Messiah, at the end of time (see Is 49:22-23).

Regarding the final conversion of all the nations to the Lord, the prophetic tradition is unanimous in the conviction that this will not come as a result of missionary activity carried out by Israel. Such conversion will be a response to the action of the Lord himself in the hearts of all peoples at the end of time.

The Gospel reading on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem sheds new light on the prophets' words on the conversion of all peoples to the Lord using the image of the great pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the end of time. Luke's reference to "the days for his being taken up" (Lk 9:51) concerns not only Jesus' ascension into heaven (see Lk 24:50-51; Acts 7:46), but also the mystery of his passion and death in Jerusalem. Jesus had already said this to his disciples, when he explained to Peter the meaning of Peter's own profession of faith in him as Messiah. "The Son of Man," he said, "must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised" (Lk 9:22). He repeated this to the disciples after his transfiguration (see Lk 9:44) and a third time to the Twelve, before his final ascent from Jericho to Jerusalem (see Lk 18:31-33). On each of these occasions, he told the disciples that they could not understand the meaning of his words.

God's plan for universal salvation – for Israel as well as for all the nations – passes through Jerusalem as the place where Jesus was "raised up" (Jn 12:32). It is the profound, irresistible, and divine attraction of the mystery of the cross lived, witnessed to, and transfigured by Jesus to arouse, promote, and accompany the movement of the conversion of the nations to Jerusalem, the place chosen by the Lord for the mystery of salvation. Jesus involved in his mission first the Twelve and then the Church, which he had established by specific call. The disciples cannot but follow Jesus, though they had a hard time understanding, judging by their own words and deeds: it is a journey of conversion, which begins with a call and continues throughout one's life.

Jesus' passage through Samaria during his journey to Jerusalem is an episode that is emblematic of the conversion that the disciples of Jesus must continually undergo if they are to accompany him and support him in his mission of evangelization and salvation. When he sends messengers ahead to prepare for his arrival in a Samaritan village (see Lk 9:52), Jesus is perfectly aware of the hostility that divides Jews and Samaritans (see Jn 4:20), but this does not dissuade him; even the disciples, moreover, must



learn to manage this deep hostility differently. The reaction of James and John – whom Jesus, with a hint of irony, had nicknamed “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17) – to the negative response of the Samaritans of the village (see Lk 9:53) is angry and violent (see Lk 9:54). The two brothers are motivated by an imprudent conviction of being bearers, in some way, of a superior religious truth. Some early Gospel manuscripts, preserved in Greek, Syriac, and Latin, add a little explanatory note at the end of the question posed by the two disciples: “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them, as Elijah did?” (see 2 Kgs 1:10-12, Sir 48:3). To Jesus, it was an improper request and an inappropriate appeal to the authoritative-ness of the Holy Scriptures: “Jesus turned and rebuked them” (Lk 9:55). The same ancient variant of this passage that mentions Elijah also deepens Jesus’ reproach, for he tells them, “You do not know of what Spirit you are, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy but to save” (Lk 9:55-56). This Christian catechesis reminds us of the nature of Jesus’ mission, which is not about inflicting divine vengeance; the reference to the Spirit that is moving James and John is significant in the theology of the school of Luke, which includes the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. In the Gospel story, Jesus simply moves on to a different village (see Lk 9:56). It is a pastoral strategy (see Lk 10:10-11) that will also guide Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey to Antioch of Pisidia (see Acts 13:46). Jesus says nothing about the rejection of the Samaritans of that village; rather, one of the first missions of the Church of Jerusalem will be to the Samaritans. The deacon Philip, moved by the Holy Spirit, will begin the work (see Acts 8:5), and Peter and John will complete it (see Acts 8:14-17).

The Church’s mission is to conform itself to the person and the mystery of Christ. It is a conversion that engages one’s whole life, leaving to the Lord the task of opening the doors of mission and moving people’s hearts. The times and ways of the conversion of the nations are the Lord’s work; the task of the Church is to convert itself to the Spirit and to the person of the Lord Jesus.

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OCTOBER 2, 2019

Wednesday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

*Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels*

Neh 2:1-8

Ps 137:1-6

Mt 18:1-5,10

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The two readings of today's liturgy, Neh 2:1-8 and Mt 18:1-5,10, can be understood as fundamental expressions of a missionary spirituality for our time.

Nehemiah, previously introduced as the king's cupbearer (see Neh 1:11b) in the royal Persian court, bears in his heart a living and painful memory of the destruction of Jerusalem (see Neh 1:5-11); it is not a nostalgic patriotism, but a fundamental aspect of biblical prayer at the time of Babylonian exile and post-exile (see Ps 137:5-6). It is consistent with the message about the new exodus from this exile to return to the "land of the fathers" (see Is 40:9-11). It is part of the Lord's plan for his people, using even the authority of a pagan, Cyrus, king of Persia, one of the powerful of the earth at the time (see Ez 1:1-4). Nehemiah understands that in his position at the court of the Persian empire – around December 446 BC, during the reign of Artaxerxes I, almost a century after the edict of Cyrus – his vocation or mission must be to rebuild Jerusalem, in a broad understanding of that expression: to deal with the concrete problems of the Jews who must now rebuild the cultic and administrative community in the province of Judea with its epicenter in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah knows that while in the imperial court he cannot reveal his Jewish identity, because the Persian king might suspect his sorrow over the destruction and abandonment of Jerusalem to be the catalyst of a subversive

movement, a work in support of an ethnic-religious minority within the empire. The king's question to Nehemiah is direct: "What is it, then, that you wish?" (Neh 2:4), as though he is probing the reasons for Nehemiah's sorrow. This Jew in the Persian court is concerned he might say too much: "I prayed to the God of heaven" (Neh 2:4). The book of Proverbs, in fact, tells us: "Plans are made in human hearts, / but from the LORD comes the tongue's response (Prv 16:1). And in light of this faith, Nehemiah is able to ask permission to go to Judea to work to rebuild Jerusalem (see Neh 2:5).

In fact, everything now moves quickly in the way intended by the Lord. The king only asks Nehemiah how much time he needs for his mission in Judea; already his consent is clear (see Neh 2:6). Nehemiah continues in his prudent approach, necessary to carry out of his mission, but now it is the Lord who acts (see Neh 2:8).

This "missionary" acted with prudence in the hostile world in which he lived, but prudence and wisdom would not have been enough without the "guiding hand" of the Lord. He will now have to understand the Palestinian world within which he will have to move to carry out the mission to which the Lord calls him.

The Gospel passage, in which Jesus calls us to become like children, shines light on the depth of the work of conversion that is needed within the Church itself, in order to carry out our own mission. This mission can be spoiled from within the community of Jesus' disciples by the temptations of pride and power dressed up in religious language (see Mt 18:1). In the final lines of the same Gospel, which mention sins that prevent us from following Jesus in his ascent to Jerusalem, the last temptation and the hardest one to resist – after the disorderly use of sexuality (see Mt 19:1-12) and attachment to money (see Mt 19:16-26) – is power, which seems intractable even for the disciples of Jesus (see Mt 20:20-28).

To the spoiling of one's mission by sin, Jesus contrasts a meaningful gesture and a vital commitment: to make oneself small like children (see Mt 18:2-4). Anyone who feels called to mission needs of a profound conversion:

to become like a child. Not like children in the purely human sense. Nehemiah must have a specific and accurate awareness of both the world in which he moves and from which he departs, and the world he feels he must move into. In a similar way, every disciple of Jesus who feels called to a mission must have faith in God and trust fully in God. The missionary disciple must have the same immense trust that children have in their parents, sure of their love and their protection, and therefore confident in the present, that for them it is already the beginning of the future.

It is the same experience that Jesus has as the Son of his Father, fully aware of reality, totally confident and willing to surrender to him. Only in this way, conforming ourselves totally to Jesus, can we who are disciples approach the mission to which we are called. The Christian who has really become like a child, in the sense understood by Jesus, learns by experience that the fruitfulness of his mission is in the hands of the One who raised Christ from death and who sends him. Woe to that Christian community that considers such faith insignificant, despising or dismissing it: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father" (Mt 18:10).

Becoming like a child gives the missionary disciple the form of her relationship with Jesus, the Master and Lord. In him, the disciple discovers her filial vocation as a child of the Father and her free obedience as the fruit of belonging in faith and mission. As a son or daughter in the Son, every disciple is missionary because she is sent to proclaim good news, supported and accompanied by angels, divine messengers who keep her open to contemplation as the foundation of mission and to the challenges of the world to which she offers witness. Like the guardian angel to whom each of us is entrusted, the child disciple always sees in Jesus the face of the Father to discover always and in anyone the face of a brother, the existence of a sister, to love and to save.

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**OCTOBER 3, 2019**

Thursday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Neh 8:1-4a,5-6,7b-12

Ps 19:8-11

Lk 10:1-12

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The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe, in an epic of faith, important moments of the restoration of the community of the People of God in the ancient land of the fathers after the Babylonian exile. Amidst misfortunes and sufferings, the Lord's plan, already announced in Is 55:12-13, is carried out, even through the decisions of a pagan king, Cyrus of the Achaemenids of Persia; according to both 2 Chr 36:22-23 and Ezr 1:1-4, Cyrus's policy towards the Jewish ethnic-religious minority is the fulfillment of the word of the Lord himself. However, the return of even some of the exiles is not presented as an epic of cheap happiness. The Lord's plan is realized through the various caravans of exiles who return to the land of the fathers, in a "sacred history" that is modelled after the Israelites' return to the Promised Land centuries after their exodus from Egypt (see Neh 8:17). In the book of Nehemiah, the work of restoration of the temple and the city of Jerusalem finds its fulfillment in the reorganization of the community according to the precepts of the Law (see Neh 8:1-10, 40), in the broad participation of the members of the community (see Neh 11:1; 12:26), in the feast of the dedication of "the house of God" (see Neh 12:27-43), and in the people's rededication to the commitments of the covenant (see Neh 13:4-31).

The solemn celebration of the liturgy of the word for the Feast of Booths is a decisive step in the restoration of the worshipping community in the land of the fathers. On the first day of the feast, the liturgy of the word takes

place outdoors (see Neh 8:1-2), because the entire land of the fathers is a sacred space, especially the city of Jerusalem, and the Torah is even more significant than the temple and its sacrifices. Ezra, a priest and scribe, must be seen and listened to by all as he proclaims the Law of Moses (see Neh 8:4). Another group of people who are Levites have the task of reading the Law and explaining its meaning to the people (see Neh 8:7-8). Later Jewish traditions interpreted the meaning of the verb “to explain,” connected to “reading” the biblical text, as the beginning of the tradition of paraphrasing in Aramaic (the language best known by the exiles returned from Babylon) the biblical text read in Hebrew, that is, as the beginning of commenting (*midrash*) on the sacred text in order to seek the Lord through his word. The people respond to the word of the Lord with weeping (see Neh 8:9,11), a sign of true repentance, above all for the awareness of having sinned against the sanctity of the Lord himself, of having despised his love and mercy, according to the prophetic language. By a gift from the Lord, the Word has reached everyone’s hearts and moves them on the path of conversion. This liturgical celebration represents much more than the original historical event; it becomes an icon for every generation of believers. Sorrow and weeping are transformed into the joy of the rediscovered word of the Lord (see Neh 8:9); those who have explained that word to people can and must help transform repentance into joy (see Neh 8:11). According to the tradition of Dt 16:13-14, the occasion of the harvest festival – which becomes the Feast of Booths, celebrated in memory of the journey in the desert during the exodus – called for parts of the harvest to be offered to the poor people of the community. It is governor Nehemiah himself who, during the liturgy, calls for the festive banquet to be shared with those who have nothing prepared (see Neh 8:10). Sharing, as a sign of the communion of the feast, is a source of joy and testifies that the Word of the Lord has been understood in one’s mind, one’s heart, and one’s life (see Neh 8:12).

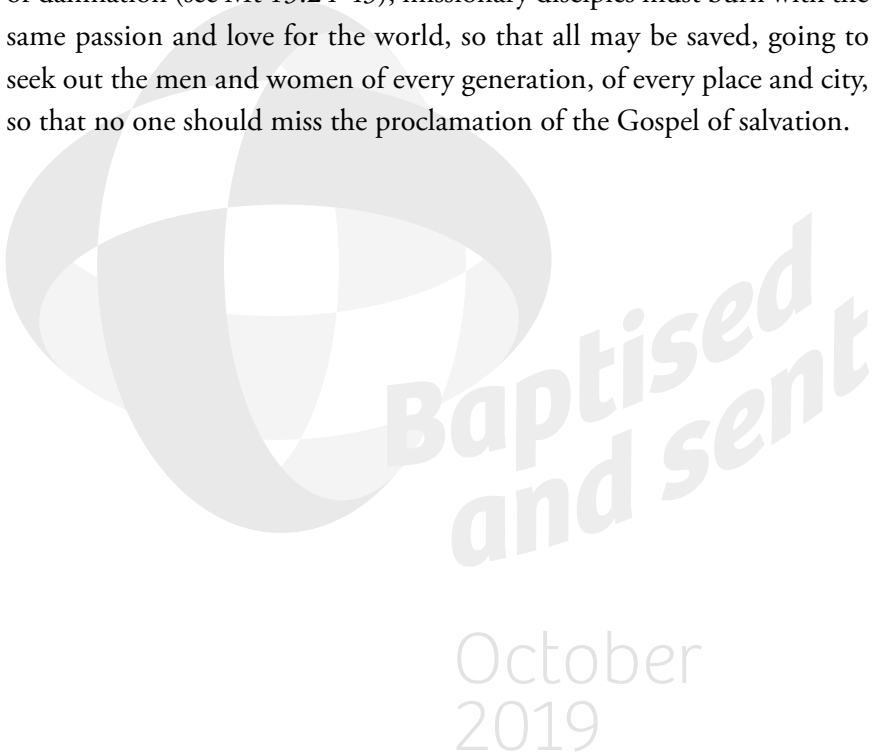
The call by Jesus of seventy or seventy-two disciples, who represent each of the twelve tribes of Israel, occurs after his call of the Twelve (see Lk 9:1-6).

Both missions are subsidiary and preparatory to Jesus' own personal journey. Preparation for mission consists in belonging to the community of the Jesus' disciples in the broadest sense of the term, even among non-Jews; the word of God is raised up in the very person of Jesus, as the Law of Moses was before the community at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (see Neh 8:1). In the original community of his disciples, Jesus himself begins to explain the Scriptures as a Gospel (see Lk 24:44-48), making the function of reading and explaining the Scriptures essential in the community of Jesus' disciples (see Lk 24:25-35).

In entrusting the disciples with the mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus also speaks of the methods of this mission: the equipment and the praxis (see Lk 10:1-11). He offers practical guidance, partly in keeping with the Judeo-Palestinian culture of the time, such as embracing the "protocol of hospitality" (see Lk 10:4-7; Gen 18: 1-8), but also insists on the urgency and the absolute priority of the mission with respect to the culture of the time (see Lk 10:4). The mission is carried out by a few, not by great numbers (see Lk 10:2), and they are exposed to dangers (see Lk 10:3). They bring a message of peace (see Lk 10:5, 24:36) that will prompt gestures in favor of both evangelizers and those being evangelized (see Lk 10:8-9a) and which has as its object the coming of the "kingdom of God" (Lk 10:9b): the arrival of the Lord Jesus, his journey (see Lk 10:1). As it was then in the Palestinian world, so it always shall be in every part of the world and in all times. Even Jesus' instructions about how the disciples are to behave when they are refused hospitality in their proclamation of the kingdom of God are guided by the priority of mission (see Lk 10:10-11); the same practice will be adopted by Paul and Barnabas when facing the opposition of the Jewish community (see Acts 13:44-51).

Jesus assures his missionaries that when they are rejected, it is not their concern but the Lord's (see Lk 10:12). Even the rejection and persecution of Jesus and because of Jesus can become opportunities for missionary disciples to conform themselves to the Passover of their Master, where the

message offered, the kingdom proclaimed, his divine-human person and his destiny as Messiah and Savior, become the only concern: to do the Father's will for the salvation of the world. The judgment regarding the salvation of the cities to which the saving coming of the Passover of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God made present in the person of the Son, is proclaimed remains the concern of God alone. No one can presume condemnation or damnation (see Mt 13:24-43); missionary disciples must burn with the same passion and love for the world, so that all may be saved, going to seek out the men and women of every generation, of every place and city, so that no one should miss the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation.





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OCTOBER 4, 2019

Friday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

*Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi*

Bar 1:15-22

Ps 79:1-5,8,9

Lk 10:13-16

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For a deeper understanding of the mission to which all Christians are called, it is useful to start from the words of Jesus in Lk 10:13-16, and then turn to the prayer of Bar 1:15-22, thus shedding light on the history of Israel of God, which is made up of those who belong to historical Israel and also those who join the Israel of God through faith in Christ and baptism.

The discourse with which Jesus sends off his disciples on mission is followed by a stern warning to the villages of Chorazin and Capernaum in Galilee (see Lk 10:13-15). These Palestinian villages had seen the miracles with which Jesus had accompanied his proclamation of the kingdom of God (see Mt 11:21). In Capernaum Jesus had taken the first steps in announcing his message (see Lk 4:23) and shown the power of the kingdom of God (see Lk 4:31-41), and it was there that he received the faith of the centurion of the Roman army (see Lk 7:1-10). From Bethsaida came Philip, one of the Twelve (see Jn 1:44, 12:21). The severe warning of Jesus to the Palestinian villages where he had worked miracles and where he had been met in response with a surprising lack of faith, was not a definitive, irreversible condemnation. At the end of his discourse to the disciples sent on mission, Jesus reaffirms the importance of the mission of evangelization: to evangelize and to be evangelized involves responsibilities that are inescapable before divine judgment, which is not anticipated in a precipitous condemnation without appeals, but points to the ultimate reference point

at the end of time (see Lk 10:14-15). Until then, the door to repentance and conversion is always open, through the mysterious paths of divine providence and mercy. Jesus identifies himself with those whom he sends and warns that rejecting them means rejecting God himself, whatever the reason or religious faith that may lead to it (see Lk 10:16).

The trauma of biblical Israel following the Babylonian exile is the context for understanding the long prayer attributed to Baruch (see Bar 1:15, 3:8) in the book bearing his name. Baruch's prayer starts from the observation that everything the prophet Jeremiah had announced to the exiles of the first Babylonian exile (see Jer 29:4-23) had been realized, and that this was the time to pray that the Babylonian rulers would live long lives, so that the Israelites might not to be subjected to further severe retaliation (see Bar 1:11-12), as Jeremiah himself had recommended at the time (see Jer 29:5-7). Fundamental here is to be aware of the history of sin that involved all generations of biblical Israel, since its liberation from Egypt (see Bar 1:15-22). Its obstinance in not wanting to listen to the voice of the Lord led to the disaster of Israel's exile and to God's silence, or its inability to hear God's voice. At the heart of the reconsideration are not the history and the condition of Israel, but the Lord. And this is true repentance, the true journey of conversion.

What happened in history should not be seen as the result of the Lord's absence; though it may also be due to the arrogance, cruelty, and ruthlessness of international politics, it must be understood fundamentally as an expression of his "justice" (Bar 1:15) and his desire to call Israel back to the center of its vocation. The discovery of this righteousness of God is a gift of the Lord himself, because it cannot be confused with the sense of guilt or with the resignation to which one abandons oneself in order to come to terms with life; it is also the opposite of rebellion and of definitive desertion of the Lord. The prayer starts from the present and reaches to the origins of biblical Israel (see Bar 1:15-16); the catastrophe and the trauma of exile involve its entire history, explained above all in the light of sin against the

Lord and against his word (see Bar 1: 17-18). To “sin in the Lord’s sight” is to fail in one’s relationship with him. It is a structural tragedy, which happens concretely, consciously, but also carelessly, in “disobeying” the Lord daily, in “not heeding his voice,” which is heard also in his “precepts.” Biblical Israel cannot invent for itself a way by which to pretend to have a relationship with God. The words of Baruch suggest that the disaster experienced in the history of sin and exile has compromised, in the eyes of the pagans, even the credibility of the kings, rulers, and prophets of the Israelites (see Bar 1:16). This history of sin and punishment is not the last word; the teaching of Moses had foreseen that, by welcoming the call to conversion, biblical Israel would be gathered by the Lord (see Dt 30:1-4).

The story of biblical Israel becoming again the Israel of God is also the story of the Church that, through faith in Christ, becomes part of the Israel of God. Just as the harsh admonition of Jesus to the Galilean cities is not a definitive sentence of abandonment, so also the exile of biblical Israel does not mark the conclusion of the story. The journey of conversion, which should be characterized by the recognition of personal and structural sin, is certainly always a gift from the Lord, but risks being dissipated in a hasty self-assertion, or in a merely formal and fundamentalist recovery of gestures, rites, formulas, and phrases that will never have the strength of an evangelizing mission.

October  
2019

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OCTOBER 5, 2019

Saturday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Bar 4:5-12,27-29

Ps 69:33-37

Lk 10:17-24

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In the Gospel for today, the seventy (or seventy-two) disciples return from the mission with joy, to give account to their master Jesus of their pastoral success: “even the demons are subject to us because of your name” (Lk 10:17). And Jesus shares in the joy of his disciples: “I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky” (Lk 10:18). As disciples of Christ, we have received the power to walk over serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing can harm us (see Lk 10:19). This is the same promise that Jesus brings to all his disciples in Mk 16:18: “They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Jesus thus warns us that the mission will be arduous and difficult, but with his Spirit and his grace we will always be victorious over the forces of evil in the world. “Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). It is legitimate for the disciple of Christ to be proud and happy with the successes of his own work of evangelization, but the main reason for this joy should be eschatological. We must have the joy of salvation, the joy of hope: “Good and faithful servant... Come, share your master’s joy” (Mt 25:21.23). It is the joy of the useless servant (see Lk 17:10) who did what he had to do.

What really matters for the disciples is that their names are “written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). In the Hebrew idiom of the time, this means that the

seventy (seventy-two) returned from the mission are recognized by God as citizens of heaven. This is their true home, the kingdom to which Jesus asks them to invite others to whom they are sent. Then, suddenly, in the middle of his conversation with the missionary disciples, Jesus addresses another interlocutor, his Father in heaven. As newly confirmed citizens of the kingdom of God, the seventy – and we, observing them – are privy to a divine conversation. We are witnesses to a moment of profound prayer between Jesus and his Father. Jesus gives thanks to the Father for his merciful will: great mysteries have been revealed “to the childlike” rather than to “the wise and the learned,” from whom they remain hidden.

In the historical context of Jesus, the disciples sent on mission are “children” not only because they are carrying out their first missionary experience, but also because they probably had not received formal education in the things of God equal to that of the learned rabbis, scribes, and other Jewish leaders of the time. This does not mean denying the value of theological formation, but recognizing that the encounter with God is always a gift of God, that faith in him is the foundation of every mission.

Jesus then reflects aloud, so to speak, on the nature of the relationship between himself and the Father. Here, in a passage similar to another in Matthew (see Mt 11:25-30) and to many others in John (see Jn 3:35, 13:3, 14:9-11), Jesus reveals the complete mutual knowledge between Father and Son and the absolute openness to one another that they share. It is a source of joy and communion, the cause of fruitfulness and mission.

It is by virtue of this relationship that Jesus has the power to invite others into relationship with God, to enter into his divine communion. In this intimacy, we come to know the Son as the one who is known and loved by the Father, and the Father as the one who is known and loved by the Son. The seventy, called to alleviate suffering and oppression in the name of Jesus, find the meaning of their mission in the Father and the Son and in their communion of love. Hearing this Gospel message today, we continue to be invited more deeply to enter this same relationship. It is, of course,

only on the basis of an encounter with the Father, as Jesus revealed it to us, that we have the gift of God's love that we can offer in mission to others.

The word of God today calls us not only to consider the different aspects of the mission, but also to actively discover what these realities reveal to us of God. When we recognize with faith the ways in which God comes and works in us, we can allow his Spirit to carry out his mission to others through us. The profound communion of missionary disciples with Jesus, in his loving, divine unity with the Father, gives joy, passion, and zeal for the missionary effort. Rather than rejoicing in their own success, missionary disciples rejoice in love, in communion with their Master and Lord, and in the vocation of being sons and daughters of God whose names are written in heaven.

This is the sense in which Pope Francis writes, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in section 21:

The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy. The seventy-two disciples felt it as they returned from their mission (cf. Lk 10:17). Jesus felt it when he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and praised the Father for revealing himself to the poor and the little ones (cf. Lk 10:21). It was felt by the first converts who marveled to hear the apostles preaching “in the native language of each” (Acts 2:6) on the day of Pentecost. This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present. The Lord says: “Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mk 1:38). Once the seed has been sown in one place, Jesus does not stay behind to explain things or to perform more signs; the Spirit moves him to go forth to other towns.

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**OCTOBER 6, 2019**

Sunday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

Hab 1:2-3; 2,2-4

Ps 95:1-2,6-9

2 Tm 1:6-8,13-14

Lk 17:5-10

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Today's Gospel offers a significant account of faith and a brief parable of our role as servants of God. These two different teachings follow in Luke's Gospel a demanding precept from Jesus on sin and forgiveness, and they lead to the story of Jesus' healing of ten lepers. There is no clear, logical connection between the teachings of Jesus in Luke 17, nor between the teachings and the healing story that follows. However, in contemplating the Christian call to mission, we become companions with the disciples (here called apostles) while they implore Jesus: "Increase our faith" (Lk 17:5).

To the request for greater faith (apparently, a holy request for spiritual growth), Jesus responds by making a comparison between two extremes, combining the image of a proverbially small seed, that of mustard, with that of a large tree, the mulberry. Using an original image, he urges us to go beyond ordinary logic, suggesting that faith does not operate according to normal human criteria but rather appears to the incomprehensible human gaze like a mulberry tree in the middle of the sea. Faith, at its base, is profound trust in God and in the ways God works. Perhaps every missionary with some experience has seen the fruits produced by the action of God in circumstances that seemed completely hostile to any result. Today's Gospel challenges us to believe in God beyond the limits of human logic and the

sense of the possible, thus becoming one with the mind, the imagination, the logic, and the heart of God.

“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith’” (Lk 17:5-6). Here Saint Luke calls the twelve who Jesus chose at the beginning of his ministry (see Lk 6:12-16) “apostles.” The word means “sent.” While the other Gospels use this term only once to designate this particular group of disciples of Jesus, Luke uses it six times in his Gospel and twenty-eight times in the Acts of the Apostles. The early Church was aware of the non-transferable privilege of those Twelve; the authenticity of their mandate and their mission was based on the personal choice of Jesus himself. He chose and sent them. Those apostles are therefore the official witnesses to the Good News of the Risen Lord! And in this sense, they will have to have sufficient faith in him. They are the privileged witnesses of the teachings and miracles of Jesus (see Lk 18:31), and at the same time they are fragile people like all of us, gripped by doubt and lacking in faith (see Lk 24:11,25,38-39). This is the motivation for their prayer addressed to Jesus in today’s Gospel: “Increase our faith,” in the certainty that he is God.

What does this mean for all of us who are “sent” today? We must humbly recognize that we lack much faith in our mission of evangelization of the world. Perhaps the Lord does not tell us, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to [this] mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you” (Lk 17:6). It is therefore not possible to have faith to move mountains if we lack that essential faith in Jesus the Lord, Jesus risen and living in us his Church. What is the use of wanting to possess a faith that works miracles before the crowds, or powers of healing, or exceptional powers to mystify pagans and Christians of today? Jesus himself worked many, many miracles in the presence of his contemporaries and his apostles, and this did not increase their faith. The essential thing is to have the humility of the apostles to ask the Lord unceasingly to come to their aid. “I do believe, help my unbelief!” This is what the father of the demoniac epileptic of the Gospel cried out (Mk 9:24, see Lk 9:37-43).



At each Eucharist, an encounter with the Risen Lord, let us ask him for the faith necessary to meet him in our lives and in our world. Only incessant prayer, the soul of the mission, makes faith possible.

Immediately afterwards (see Lk 17:5-10), the Gospel account of Luke confronts us with a scenario taken from daily domestic life to offer a teaching on the apostolate: however marvelous the results of our work may be, we are simply fulfilling the task assigned to us by God. In everyday life in the time of Jesus, the expectations of master and servant regarding their respective roles are well established. The master commands and the servant carries it out. The servant is expected to move from farm work to household tasks without even taking a break. From the servant there can be no objections like tiredness, hunger, or thirst. Certainly, Jesus' words should not be interpreted as a justification for the economic institution of ancient slavery; he is simply using an ancient social reality as a metaphor, to suggest a similarity between this reality and our service to God.

When he asks the rhetorical question, "Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded?", Jesus addresses an audience, including us, from whom an answer – obviously "no" – is expected. Jesus goes on to say that when we have done for God all that has been asked of us, we should say, "We are useless servants; we did what we had to do." The exaggeration of this image is intended to pedagogically convert the missionary disciple to the logic of faith – not the efficacy and utility of service, but the fruitfulness of faith as communion with Jesus.

Through our own words and through the experience of daily life, Jesus confronts us with the fact that the expectation of reward is disproportionate to reality. What is proportionate, however, is the understanding of who God is and what we owe him. Jesus wants us to recognize that God expects from us a serious and sincere commitment to the work to which God calls us, the mission of making Christ known in the world.

The other two readings of today reflect on these themes of faith and service to God, but from different perspectives. The prophet Habakkuk,

writing shortly before the Jewish people were exiled from their native land in the sixth century BC, invokes God's help in the midst of destruction and violence. In response, the Lord declares that some people feel proud, even though they do not have "integrity," while "the just one, because of his faith, shall live" (Hab 2:4). Habakkuk insists that, in contrast to those who use violence and cause conflicts, some people trust in God. This is faith, pure and simple; this is what makes them right with God.

When Paul met Jesus, the Risen Lord, the understanding of faith of which Habakkuk speaks was transformed. He came to know the extraordinary ways in which God loved us, the distances God has traveled to bring us back to a right relationship with Him. Paul saw that trust in God's creative power also works on us, in Christ. It is freedom and faith in our relationship with God that Paul has discovered, and which drive him and every believer after him to go out into the world to make known the good news of God's regenerating love, to announce the redemptive Easter of Jesus.

Faith's new way of seeing things is centered on Christ. Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us. This is clearly seen in Saint Paul's exegesis of a text from Deuteronomy, an exegesis consonant with the heart of the Old Testament message. Moses tells the people that God's command is neither too high nor too far away. There is no need to say: "Who will go up for us to heaven and bring it to us?" or "Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us?" (Dt 30:11-14). Paul interprets this nearness of God's word in terms of Christ's presence in the Christian. "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)" (Rom 10:6-7). Christ came down to earth and rose from the dead; by his incarnation and resurrection, the Son of God embraced the whole of human life and history, and now dwells in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Faith knows

that God has drawn close to us, that Christ has been given to us as a great gift which inwardly transforms us, dwells within us and thus bestows on us the light that illumines the origin and the end of life.

We come to see the difference, then, which faith makes for us. Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith. By their openness to this offer of primordial love, their lives are enlarged and expanded. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). “May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17). The self-awareness of the believer now expands because of the presence of another; it now lives in this other and thus, in love, life takes on a whole new breadth. Here we see the Holy Spirit at work. The Christian can see with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind, his filial disposition, because he or she shares in his love, which is the Spirit. In the love of Jesus, we receive in a certain way his vision. Without being conformed to him in love, without the presence of the Spirit, it is impossible to confess him as Lord (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). (Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 20-21).

October  
2019

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OCTOBER 7, 2019

Monday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

*Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary*

Jon 1:1-2:2,11

Jon 2:3-5,8

Lk 10:25-37

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Luke presents this parable within the context of a larger episode, in which Jesus encounters a lawyer who believes he can put him to the test. Jesus has already been tested at the beginning of his public ministry, when he was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert and tempted by the devil. Three times in the course of this temptation (see Lk 4:2,12,13), the devil pushed Jesus to prove that he really was the Son of God and to see whether he would remain faithful to the will of God. In the third “test,” Jesus turned away the devil, uttering the last words of his battle with Satan: “You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test” (Lk 4:12).

Now the Gospel passage from Luke states, “There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus” (Lk 10:25). So the attentive reader who has seen Jesus prove himself to be truly the Son of God knows that the scholar of the law is trying to do something that even the devil failed to do and that Jesus has explicitly forbidden; it is much more likely that it is the scholar who will find himself tested.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is famous and easy to imagine, but today’s Gospel begins with the announcement that a scholar of the law is approaching to put Jesus to the test. There are many experts in the science of happiness in our world who try to test today’s apostles of the Gospel. What must we do to have eternal life? How can we achieve happiness? Our answer must be nothing other than the teaching of the Master. To achieve

happiness, we must love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, with all our spirit, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Love God and neighbor. Love God through others. Love the neighbor as God wants! But how to do it, concretely?

Jesus gives us an example through the story of the good Samaritan. Luke is the only evangelist to pass on this extraordinary story from the teaching of Jesus. “A man ... went down from Jerusalem to Jericho”: that is, he left the sphere of the temple, of the sacred, of the holy city, and headed for the periphery, towards the “bottom” of the earth. Jericho, not far from the Dead Sea, was in fact one of the humblest cities in the world. The man leaves the mountain of Zion to descend into the abyss, a place of worldly insecurity and chaos. And predictably, he falls into the hands of robbers. It is exactly the situation of the contemporary person who no longer believes, who deserts the sacred to sink day after day into the depths of uncertainty and finitude. And there are thieves along the way who rob him of everything, leaving him stunned, alone, and abandoned. Unfortunately, a priest coming down the path passes by the dying man and continues on. Then a Levite comes by, sees the man, and goes on. The text does not tell us his place of origin; like the priest, he lacks a heart for the dying man. “But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn, and cared for him” (Lk 10:33-34). The Samaritan delays his journey to take care of a stranger, his own brother in humanity. Jesus did the same, in a sublime way, through his redemptive death. He washed us in the blood and water that flowed from his open side on the Cross. The next day, the Samaritan provided the innkeeper two silver coins, asking him to take care of the patient. Jesus paid on the cross the price of our healing, our redemption. He is ready to repay all the debts we incur by our daily sins. Of the three, the neighbor of the one who fell into the hands of the robbers is the Samaritan who had compassion on him.

What does this have to teach us who are called to mission? Only love evangelizes effectively. It is not a matter of developing a religion of worship, of morality, of legalistic prescriptions; it is a matter of making neighbors of Christ the wounded women and men that we meet on our roads to Jericho. It is a question of making sure that our meticulously planned programs give priority to caring for the wounded we encounter on our roads. It is about giving first aid with what we have: the oil of mercy and the wine of love. It is about bringing humanity ever closer to God's saving goodness through faith in Christ. It is faith in him who died and rose again that familiarizes us more and more with God's ways of working, with its criteria of salvation. The Samaritan is good not by himself; he is good because he thinks and acts as Jesus would have done in that situation. He is good thanks to the goodness of God whom we can receive and communicate through faith.

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

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**OCTOBER 8, 2019**

Tuesday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Jon 3:1-10

Ps 130:1b-2,3-4ab,7-8

Lk 10:38-42

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“Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you” (Jon 3:2). After some digressions, Jonah finds himself having to face the insistent call of God. The Lord has not forgotten him and renews his missionary call: this time Jonah can not escape it. How often we are like Jonah, ready to find excuses to avoid our missionary duty. The world in which we live and to which we are sent on a mission is so often pagan that Nineveh is found at every door, every city, every crossroad we encounter. Jonah stood up and, according to the word of the Lord, left for Nineveh, an extraordinarily large city: it took three days to cross it. The world to be evangelized also seems enormous to us and we are faced with seemingly impenetrable unbelief. The modern lifestyle, the consumerist society, the mad rush to money and a fictitious happiness are a great Nineveh.

“Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed” (Jon 3:3). We understand the reticence of the prophet, since he is talking to those “bad pagans” whom he would like to see punished by God. But God is God, full of mercy for his children and, although the prophet did not trust in the possibility of their conversion, the Ninevites radically turned to God. “The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth” (Jon 3:5). The preaching of the prophets over many centuries had not been enough to convert the people of Israel, but here the preaching of a single day is enough to change the hearts

of the despised Ninevites. This is the wonder of God: he always surprises us in our pastoral expectations. Jesus himself refers to it in the Gospel: “At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here” (Mt 12:41). And God showed them mercy; in simple words, this means that God does not desire the death of the sinner, but conversion (see Ez 33:11). Even when God seems to threaten a punishment, it is love and only love that prevails and that saves in faith. The world needs to hear this proclaimed again today.

Jonah is sent to enter the city of Nineveh, to encounter the Ninevites with his prophetic presence and his preaching of conversion. Jesus is sent by the Father to enter the heart of the city, the home of Martha and Mary. The joy of the unexpected conversion of the Ninevites arouses resistance in the heart of Jonah. The joy of service and listening in the presence of the Master make Martha and Mary true sisters in Jesus’ missionary discipleship.

Crossing the threshold of a house means entering the heart of relationships and discovering, together with joy and affection, the wounds and the fragility of living as a family. We are made of flesh, and this reveals to us every profound relationship interwoven with those whose needs we seek to address; Jesus, both human and Lord of our history, has the traits of one who can be extremely close to our hearts. Close enough to enter our home. Jesus – on his way to Jerusalem, on his way to the Mystery of his death and resurrection – by entering Martha and Mary’s home crosses the threshold of their hearts.

That house in Bethany, a home of friendship and love, reveals to us the humanity of Christ, refusing to remain a stranger to human suffering and difficulties: he cries, listens, consoles, preaches, wipes tears, and offers himself as food and drink (eucharist). This is what “entering a home” means. Jesus enters the house of Bethany intimately. He does so as a friend, bringing into play his heart and his relationships with the living and the dead (see Jn 11). In the mission entrusted to him by his Father, Jesus lets



himself be totally involved. Jesus calls us to overturn the way we think and act: through the key figure of the woman who is all wrapped up and agitated with service, new rules are proposed about the hospitality to be reserved for Christ by missionary disciples, about the salvation that we live and communicate.

The vocations of Martha and Mary are two different and complementary ones, driven by the same intention: to recognize the uniqueness of the One who knocked on the door (see Rev 3:20). These two women, then, do not represent an antithesis, as has too often been suggested. Serving and listening are shown to be reciprocal rather than opposing actions in the mission that Jesus entrusts to the Church for the salvation of the world. The presence of Jesus calls us to take up the journey to enter the heart of every person by listening to the Word and by fraternal service, by proclaiming Easter resurrection and by the Eucharistic banquet of reconciliation that creates communion and unity. All this happens in the house of Bethany, where the death of Jesus' friend Lazarus is an opportunity for us to purify and to strengthen our own listening, our own service, our own faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Friend and Lord.

October  
2019

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**OCTOBER 9, 2019**

Wednesday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of Saint Dionysius, Bishop, and Companions, Martyrs*

*Optional Memorial of Saint John Leonardi*

Jon 4:1-11

Ps 86:3-6,9-10

Lk 11:1-4

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The Our Father is more than a prayer; it is, as Tertullian said, “the compendium of the whole Gospel,” because in it we find the fundamental principles, the deepest hopes, and the most decisive needs of the disciples of Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke presents, first of all, the gift of calling the God of Jesus Christ “Father.” To consider God a Father is not something absent from the Old Testament (see Dt 32: 6, Mal 2:10, Jer 3:19, 31:9, and Ps 103:13). But to address God, as Jesus does, with the particular tenderness and intimacy of a child who exclaims “Father!” is new. The Lord rightly calls God “Abba,” for he is the Son of the eternal Father. In faith, Jesus, while teaching his disciples how to pray, invites them to turn to God as an eternally merciful and infinitely loving Father. He opens to them his filial communion. In the third Gospel, the Our Father is the point of arrival from the question that a scholar of the law asks Jesus about what one must do to inherit eternal life (see Lk 10:25ff): openness to listening is decisive, as is treating all people, without exception, mercifully. The mission of Jesus in faith and prayer opens us to the fatherhood of God as the foundation of a relationship with one another as siblings.

One of the most profound hopes highlighted by the Our Father is the sanctification of God’s name. It is true that the name of God is holy in itself (see Lv 11:44, 19:2, Ps 33:21). Still, the hope of the sanctification of

the name of God indicates the commitment to live as people who belong to him: “Be careful to observe my commandments.... Do not profane my holy name, that in the midst of the Israelites I may be hallowed” (Lv 22:31-32). According to the Old Testament tradition in which the Our Father is rooted, the best way for the name of God to be sanctified is precisely that those who claim to be God’s people live according to his will.

The second element of hope that the Our Father offers is the coming of the kingdom. Jesus is clear that the kingdom of his Father is present and active in history. He proclaims that God is entering the history of humanity to open a new era, in which no one will feel alone and in which we can build a more just world, a peaceful and fraternal society where the dignity of each person is respected. When we say “your kingdom come,” we express the hope that God’s will is realized among us, as grace and at the same time as the permanent task of human freedom and responsibility.

The first petition in Luke’s version of the Our Father is expressed in these words: “Give us each day our daily bread” (Lk 11:3). This request can have two connotations. On one hand, in light of the danger of forgetting our awe and gratitude, the Our Father reminds us of the need to ask God for food every day. On the other hand, we are not instructed to say “my bread” but “our bread,” probably to emphasize the need to share it in charity with others: true life is the fruit of communion and sharing.

The second petition is for forgiveness. Luke presupposes that to ask forgiveness, it is necessary to recognize honestly that everyone, without exception, makes mistakes and that we are all in need of divine mercy (see Lk 5:8, 6:39-42). Starting from this assumption, the third evangelist introduces an awareness that the efficacy of God’s forgiveness leads us to forgive others in turn (see Mt 6:14-15). God’s forgiveness is always given to us, offered for free. Its effectiveness in each of us depends on our willingness to let it act in our lives, our relationships, and our affections.

And finally the Our Father introduces a third petition: “and do not subject us to the final test” (Lk 11:4, see Jn 17:15). First we recognized

our sinfulness, and now our Father helps us to grow in the awareness of our fragility, our weakness. We do not ask God to avoid temptations, but to help us overcome them.

Prayer is always an experience of relationship with God, an encounter with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Our Father, as a summary of the Gospel, offers us the fundamental criteria for this encounter and the mission that flows from it. The grace to turn to God as Father enables us to live as sisters and brothers. The duty to sanctify the name of God involves us, with his grace, in the construction of his kingdom. The blessing of forgiveness offered us by the God of Jesus Christ makes us aware of the enormous need to initiate and encourage authentic processes of reconciliation, which lead not only to the experience of forgiveness, but also, gradually, to the eradication of sins.

The fatherhood of God, fully revealed in Jesus Christ (see Jn 12:45, 14:9), makes the community of missionary disciples a true family, to whose table of Word and Eucharist everyone is invited. In his movement of being sent from the Father and returning to the Father, Jesus makes his own mission ours. It is the mission of his Church for the salvation of the world (see Jn 8). If all fatherhood has its origins in God (see Eph 3:14-21), in the Church of his Son the Spirit of the Risen Lord regenerates all as sons and daughters of the same Father through baptism. The kingdom of God, accomplished by Jesus in his Passover, finds its beginning and seed here on earth in his pilgrim Church, a universal sacrament of salvation offered by God the Father to all.

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**OCTOBER 10, 2019**

Thursday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Mal 3:13-20b

Ps 1:1-4,6

Lk 11:5-13

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In today's Gospel (Lk 11:5-13), the theme of friendship is prominent. The Gospels are rich in examples of Jesus approaching others in friendship. St. Luke shows a compassionate Jesus who approaches the lepers, paralytics, sinners, tax collectors, centurions, widows, those possessed by demons, epileptics – the list is long. Jesus himself is the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) and the compassionate father (Lk 15:11-32). He extends his merciful hand of friendship generously and spontaneously.

The Gospel of John also provides profound insights on Jesus and friendship. The friendship-love of Jesus for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus is described in the eleventh chapter: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (Jn 11:5). When Jesus is informed of the death of Lazarus, he says, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep" (Jn 11:11), and later Jesus weeps at the death of his friend; "the Jews said, 'See how he loved him'" (Jn 11:36).

At the Last Supper, offering us the commandment to love one another, Jesus says: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (Jn 15:13-16). Thus, Jesus manifests the depth of his friendship-love by dying on the cross for us. As St. Paul notes, "God

proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

Everyone is called to experience that Jesus is the friend, indeed the personal friend, of every human being. Friendship with Christ means growing in intimacy with the Master, as well as an existence in Christ. Such a profound dimension of friendship revitalizes the Holy Spirit within us. Friendship with Christ, even in sickness and frailty, offers us a strength that prevails over bitterness, the fatigue of life, and all despair. Friendship is a “matter of heart,” in which one reveals to the other what is in the depths of one’s heart, with trust and reciprocity. Growth in friendship happens through mutual self-revelation. In this process, we find ourselves involved in a deeper relationship with God and our neighbor. People will be encouraged to follow Christ when they see how his friendship has personally transformed the missionary disciple who proclaims and witnesses.

The friendship described to us by today’s Gospel seems insufficient to obtain what we seek. Our need must be supported by the insistence of the request, by the certainty of the faith of the one who asks, and in the ability to give by the one who is asked, even at inopportune moments. The insistence on praying always, without ever tiring (see Lk 18:1), tests and reinforces faith as a relationship of friends, or even of parent and child. The loaves and the Holy Spirit clearly mentioned in the prayer offer clear eucharistic and baptismal connotations of friendship with Jesus and of the relationship with his Father. “The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will” (Rom 8:26-27).

The insistence of the request for three loaves to share with a guest underlines the communion that nourishes and takes care of one’s neighbor. Prayer, if authentic, opens the relationship of friendship with God towards the neighbor and pushes us to mission. We ask for our own needs as well

as for those of others, through the Church that we become through the Spirit of the Father and the Eucharistic bread that we share. We never ask for ourselves alone; that would not be prayer. We ask because it increases our communion with others and expands the boundaries of the community of Jesus.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis emphasizes, “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (n. 1). Francis continues, “Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.... Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization” (n. 8). We are “those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself” (n. 27). Pope Francis believes that “we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters” (n. 265). Our missionary faith “has to be sustained by our own constantly renewed experience of savoring Christ’s friendship and his message” (n. 266).

Pope Francis often uses a simple and useful description of the mission: “Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people” (EG 268). This means that every missionary who experiences a profound encounter with Jesus through personal friendship will want to share with others the fruits of this encounter. Starting from a personal encounter with God, we then desire to be friends with others in sharing their friendship with the Lord Jesus.

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**OCTOBER 11, 2019**

Friday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of St. John XXIII*

Jl 1:13-15; 2:1-2

Ps 9:2-3,6,16,8-9

Lk 11:15-26

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Today's Gospel sheds light on the theme of our relationship with God and introduces a double conviction: first, that neutrality is impossible, and second, that there are no definitive states in the life of a disciple, except fidelity to God.

One's relationship with God is manifested in the rejection of and victory over evil. The Gospel links the previous theme of prayer (see Lk 11:1-13) with the activity of Jesus as exorcist. In the previous passage, he taught us to pray for the coming of the kingdom of God; now Jesus says that kingdom is already coming and that a key sign of this is the casting out of demons. The most interesting thing is that following the previous verses' emphasis on Jesus' relationship with the Father, now his adversaries misrepresent what he said earlier and accuse Jesus of acting in collusion with Beelzebul (see Lk 11:15). However, the Gospel continues to affirm that Jesus, because of his profound communion with God, is able to curtail and eradicate the evil that exists in people and among them.

Neutrality is not possible. Faced with the hope of a real diminishment and vanquishing of evil, no one can be neutral, because, as Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Lk 11:23). In our commitment to make the kingdom of God present, therefore, we must make the decision to be on the side of Jesus, to gather with him; because not to do good in the way of Jesus means that one



is already allowing, in a certain sense, evil. There are no definitive states in the fight against evil except in the paschal victory of Jesus over death. For disciples, the fundamental condition for being able to join in the building of the kingdom is the conviction that in the pilgrimage of earthly life there are no definitive states. To explain this concept, Luke introduces the story we find in verses 24 through 26. Here it becomes clear, for example, that the transformation of reality takes place not simply by doing something good, but by doing good consistently; conforming oneself is a way to allow evil to grow. Indeed, when the unclean spirit returns, that person becomes worse than before, because he believed he was freed forever.

The missionary disciple must, like Jesus, be involved in the struggle against evil. This should be one of our main concerns, because it genuinely demonstrates our filial relationship with God and our communion with Jesus. Curiously, however, being witnesses demands that disciples confront their own humanity. On the one hand, they must be aware of being able, by virtue of grace and effort, to participate in the Lord's mission (see Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-16). But along with these great possibilities, disciples must also be aware of their limitations: they are represented in the person of Peter, as sinners (see Lk 5:8), or even as people who are vulnerable to the blasphemous criticism of the religious leaders. It is being with Jesus, belonging to him, that determines and supports our struggle against every form of evil.

We can say, then, that Luke is not afraid of reality. In his depiction of the disciples, he emphasizes their virtue and commitment, but also their weaknesses and failures. The evangelist, but above all the Lord Jesus, know that our greatness lies in our recognition of this limitation, because every disciple must understand that he will always be growing; he will never achieve, at least in the present life, definitive victories. The missionary disciple will always live in the gerund: converting, engaging, learning. It is precisely when we try to live in the participle – converted, committed, educated – that we begin to be full of ourselves, eager to save ourselves.

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OCTOBER 12, 2019

Saturday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Jl 4:12-21

Ps 97:1-2,5-6,11-12

Lk 11:27-28

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In today's brief Gospel reading, we hear the word "blessed." It refers to a state of spiritual well-being, in which true joy is experienced in the soul, but it can also be used to mean "respected" or "revered." So who are the people who deserve to be called "blessed"? Jesus' response is clear and direct: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it" (Lk 11:28). These words open the way for a profound reflection on our Christian missionary vocation. The deeper meaning of listening to the word of God is revealed to us through an extraordinary image offered by some Old Testament prophets. Ezekiel is ordered: "Eat what you find here: eat this scroll.... So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat" (Ez 3:1-2). Jeremiah says: "When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart" (Jer 15:16).

Authentic listening to the word of God means "eating it," meditating upon it, dwelling in it, taking it to heart. This allows it to take root in our heart, to grow in our consciousness, to challenge our values and attitudes. Our life and the love of God intertwine. This requires constant abandonment to God, which is neither simple nor automatic. The prophetic eating of the word of God refers to the eating of the Eucharistic banquet.

The second part of Jesus' warning focuses on living the word of God. This requires a firm commitment to put it into practice, to observe its commands, to put God's love into action concretely, to translate the message

of God into everyday life. Although this task has a personal dimension, it also involves a strong social commitment. How do we show that we really listened to the word of God and responded with faith? We can take inspiration from St. James who says, “I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works” (Jas 2:18), and we can add: and I will show that I have listened to the word of God.

In recent times, the Popes have underlined the importance of integrating “hearing” the word of God and “putting it into practice”; we must be “hearers” and “doers” at the same time. Evangelization requires both contemplation and concrete action. We should recall the challenge presented by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (EN 41).

A careful examination of the New Testament reveals that the first person to receive the honor of being called “blessed” is none other than Mary herself. Luke, describing the scene of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth (1:41-45), notes that “Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, ‘Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.... Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.’” Mary is blessed precisely because she believes. She believes in the word of God spoken through the angel. She believes and offers her unconditional *fiat* to the Lord.

It is clear that the words of Jesus refer to the Virgin Mary. Verses 27 and 28 are a clear allusion to his Mother, as an indisputable example of this attitude that a disciple must have of welcoming the Word (see Lk 2:16-21), since just a few verses earlier, the Gospel of Luke says that Mary “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). “Keeping” here means preserving, protecting, guarding in memory, and always involves attention and responsibility. But the Virgin Mary, besides “keeping” these things, meditates on them in her heart; that is, she tries to grasp the true meaning of what is happening.

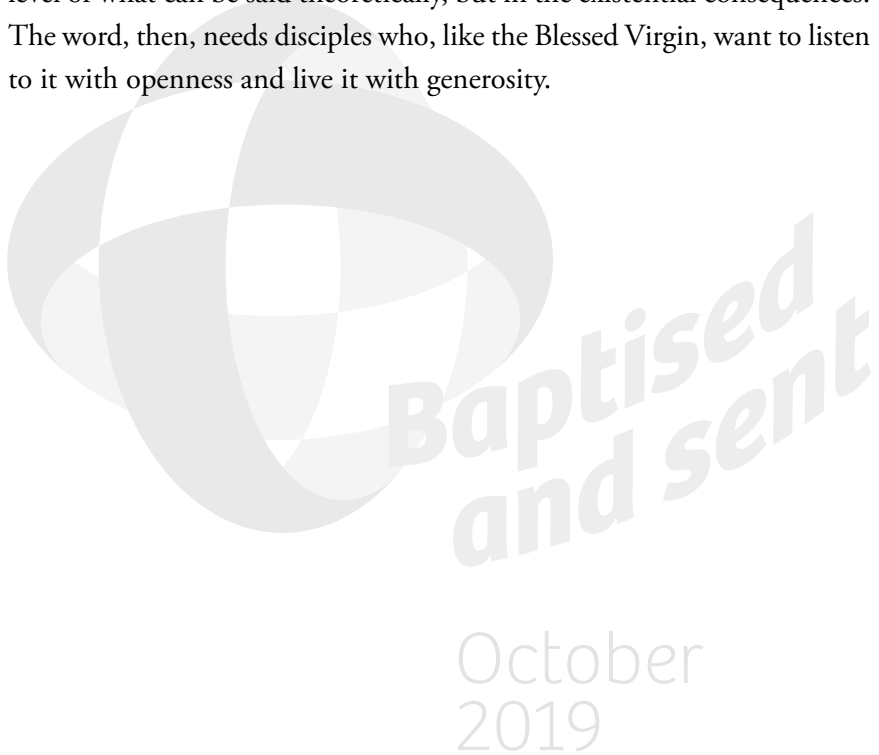
Today's Gospel should not be interpreted as a repudiation of the mother of Jesus; rather, it stresses that attention to the word of God, by reason of faith, is more important than a biological relationship with Jesus. This same affirmation is found in other Gospel passages (see Mt 12:48, Mk 3:33, and Lk 8:21) in which Jesus asks, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Jesus is clearly indicating the importance of receiving and obeying the word of God.

A passage from the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* observes, "In the course of her Son's preaching she received the words whereby in extolling a kingdom beyond the calculations and bonds of flesh and blood, He declared blessed those who heard and kept the word of God, as she was faithfully doing. After this manner the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan" (LG, 58).

The image of Mary as a faithful disciple who lives a pilgrimage of faith engages the sensibility of modern people and the understanding of the Church in its call to discipleship. Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, twice quoting John Paul II's Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*: "Mary is the woman of faith, who lives and advances in faith, and 'her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church.' Mary let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness. Today we look to her and ask her to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn.... 'This is the way that Mary, for many years, lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son, and went forward in her pilgrimage of faith'" (EG 287).

We know that a necessary and even indispensable part of sharing the word as Good News is to provide information. But it is not the first thing, or even the most important thing. Sharing the word primarily consists not in speaking, but in giving witness. Luke presents this conviction in a very coherent way in the story in which John the Baptist sends two of his

disciples to ask Jesus if he is the Messiah (see Lk 7:18ff.). Jesus, instead of giving an answer, offers irrefutable proof, pointing to the consequences of the coming of the kingdom of God. The Gospel says, following the question: “At that time he cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind” (Lk 7:21). The deepest goodness of the Good News that Jesus Christ brought is not at the level of what can be said theoretically, but in the existential consequences. The word, then, needs disciples who, like the Blessed Virgin, want to listen to it with openness and live it with generosity.



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**OCTOBER 13, 2019**

Sunday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

2 Kgs 5:14-17

Ps 98:1,2-4

2 Tm 2:8-13

Lk 17:11-19

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“Gratitude is the memory of the heart.” It is shocking to read that only one of the ten lepers healed by Jesus came back to say “thank you.” Being grateful is not just a social duty that we share, but an expression of our interiority that also becomes a spiritual act.

The Gospel story of the healing of the ten lepers may have been modeled on the Old Testament story of the cure of Naaman. The commander of the Syrian army, Naaman, is a great man, a trusted advisor of the king and a brave warrior, but he is afflicted by leprosy, the most feared disease in the ancient world. It takes a little girl, an Israeli prisoner of war, to help this “great man” discover how to heal. He will be cured, the unnamed girl tells Naaman’s wife, if he goes to “the prophet in Samaria” (2 Kgs 5:3). Naaman must first ask permission from the king of Aram, who tells him to present himself to the king of Israel with his letter. Taking with him some gifts, Naaman travels to Israel with the letter, which the king of Israel misunderstands. Thinking that the king of Aram intended to provoke him, the king of Israel tears his clothes in anger. The prophet Elisha, hearing of this, invites the king to send him the sick man: “Let him come to me and find out that there is a prophet in Israel” (2 Kgs 5:8). Personal encounter and recognition are essential for the commander’s recovery. Naaman arrives at the home of Elisha, with an impressive retinue. And in keeping with his

status as army commander, he expects a more elaborate healing ritual than Elisha calls for. But the prophet, without going out to meet him, sends him a messenger to indicate what to do: wash seven times in the river Jordan (a prophetic sign of our baptism). It is too simple for Naaman to believe. Should he not meet the prophet personally? Do not they have better rivers in Damascus? The narrative suggests that one part is being cured while another is being healed. The cure is physical; the healing is internal. Naaman, though indignant, obeys. When he realizes he is healed, he comes back to Elisha to thank him, offering gifts as a sign of gratitude. This is where he finally meets the prophet in person. Total healing, true conversion, is the result of his obedience to the word of the prophet, of his personal encounter with him, and of the sacramental mediation of the water of the river Jordan. It is an encounter that leads him to recognize the God of Israel.

In the Gospel reading, Luke allows us to encounter again the figure of the stranger, as we follow Jesus on his journey. This journey has as its geographical goal Jerusalem, but its existential end is the offering of his life on the cross, the sign of the limitless availability of the Son for the Father and his work of universal salvation. Jesus is headed for Jerusalem, the “holy city,” but to get there he passes through territories that the Jews considered too close to foreigners (the so-called “Galilee of the Gentiles”) or even impure because they were inhabited by heretics (the population of Samaria).

It is precisely along this risky route that Jesus meets a group of people who were among the most marginalized of the time: lepers (such as Naaman the Syrian). Leprosy was a skin disease that was considered a punishment for sinners (see King Uzziah in 2 Chr 26:20). It was believed to make its victims unfit for worship or for living among the community, so they were forced to live apart from the rest of society (see Lv 13:46). Lepers were excluded, forced to wander in solitude, accompanied only by other lepers, always calling out ahead of them when they approached inhabited areas. They were also humiliated by the fact that they had to wear ragged clothes with their heads uncovered.

A group of ten lepers goes to meet Jesus. They ask for help, approaching as they would have been expected to: from a distance. All they had were their voices, and they used them to call out to Jesus: “Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!” (Lk 17:13). In calling Jesus “Master,” they address him as disciples would. Jesus sees them and gives them his attention, asking them to carry out a specific action: “Go show yourselves to the priests” (Lk 17:14). In Israel, it was the priests were responsible for diagnosing both the appearance and the disappearance of the disease (see Lv 13:9-10; 14:2).

Approaching Jesus, the ten lepers kept their distance. This was because of the quarantine based on the purity laws (see Lv 13:45-46). It can also be to show us that these sick people – who, like the Gentiles, were considered “far off” (Acts 2:39) – despite the traumatic shame of their condition, are about to receive the call of God. It is a detail aimed at teaching us that God is the one who takes initiative and bridges distances. The lepers turn to Jesus as “Master” rather than with the title “Lord,” and this can reveal that their faith in Jesus is at this point only preliminary. They beg him for mercy and they obey his command, but they fail to perceive the true meaning of their healing.

Luke emphasizes the fact that Jesus “saw” the ten lepers as he responded to their plea. Luke, elsewhere in his Gospel, also links “seeing” to “saving” (see, for example, Luke 13:12). In this initial encounter, healing does not take place immediately, as in the case of Naaman. Faithful to the Torah, Jesus orders the lepers to present themselves to the priests (see Lk 17:14). Healing, therefore, would imply listening to the word of Jesus and, as in the case of Naaman, also being grateful to the healer. Nine of the lepers, although they had the good intention of obeying Jesus’ instruction and the privilege of meeting him in person, are unable to take the greatest risk: to return to Jesus. Only one of them does, a Samaritan who is therefore an “enemy.” But “realizing” (or as some translations put it, “seeing”) that he is healed, he returns to Jesus (see Lk 17:15). For Luke, his “seeing” means that the eyes of the Samaritan’s faith have been opened. Now it is a matter



of making a personal decision towards that faith, and this happens when he decides to “return” to Jesus. The impassioned glorification of God by the stranger, who throws himself at the feet of the Master to thank him, indicates that in this second personal encounter with Jesus the Samaritan is not simply paying a debt of gratitude, but experiences a total healing and an inner transformation. Gratitude is normally expressed to God; this is the only instance in the New Testament where such gratitude is addressed to Jesus. In the end, the stranger, whose faith in Jesus transformed him, is ready to be sent on a mission: “Stand up and go” (Lk 17:19, see also Lk 10:3).

The healing of Naaman and that of the ten lepers are both stories anchored to the theme of inner conversion that happens through a personal encounter with God. This encounter takes place starting from a personal crisis, as a serious illness can be, and it is a divine initiative. It is up to the person to take the next step of recognizing and welcoming the meaning of this meeting that will lead to conversion.

Healing is possible only for those in whom physical cure and gratitude intertwine; healing of the body and conversion of the heart intersect. The water of the Jordan River and the reference to the priests highlight the importance of sacramental action in the work of salvation. This is not a simple cure, individual and abstract in nature. From being separated and excluded, we are reconciled integrally with ourselves, in our bodies, and with the community, because we are reconciled in the depths of our hearts with God, by God in Jesus Christ through the action of the Church. As with Naaman and the leprous Samaritan, only those who undergo this experience of purifying and reconciling communion can be reintegrated into the community and sent on mission.

The mission of the Church brings and communicates the saving grace of God because it recreates men and women from the destruction of sin, from the separation of death. Welcoming the Gospel means entering into the Paschal Mystery of Christ, accepting his re-creating death and contem-

plating his fidelity in the resurrection. Reborn in the baptismal font, the Church's new Jordan River, and grateful for the undeserved salvation, we are made missionaries in the ordinary experiences of life: get up, go your way, return to your home. Others will be chosen to be missionary disciples in foreign, and perhaps hostile and pagan, lands: the Galilee of the Gentiles, the Samaria of the heretics, and the Syria of the pagans.



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OCTOBER 14, 2019

Monday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of St. Callistus I*

Rom 1:1-7

Ps 98:1-4

Lk 11:29-32

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The Liturgy of the Word today focuses on the power of the proclamation of the Gospel. The proclaimed word of God is pregnant with salvation; we must be willing to welcome it and to listen to it. Listening is the Gospel, which recalls the invitational Psalm: “Oh, that today you would hear his voice: / Do not harden your hearts” (Ps 95:8).

In the first reading, Paul presents himself and his apostolate to the believers of Rome, a community he didn't establish, but which he deeply cherishes and wishes to ask for help in carrying out his project of evangelizing Spain. To make himself better known there and establish a good spiritual understanding with this community that he has not yet met in person, the Apostle stops to talk about his ministry and his call. His service to Christ and his apostolate with the Gentiles are rooted in the extraordinary mystery of the election in virtue of which Christ Jesus designated him to proclaim the Gospel of God. Paul's service is based on the word of Christ, nourished by the word of Christ, and communicates the word of Christ. His life is Christocentric. The opening lines of the letter depict the dynamism of God's salvation, which turns from particularism to universality: in Christ salvation no longer has privileged recipients, but is addressed to everyone, even to those who are far away.

The Gospel reading speaks to us of strangers and their relationship with God. The Master is surrounded by the crowds who crowd in upon him, and

he denounces a deforming attitude that degrades the experience of faith: the spasmodic search for signs. The generation Jesus addresses is “evil” (Lk 11:29) because it continually asks for external demonstrations, as if to shut God and his saving will within the narrow parameters of an automatic, magical, cause-and-effect relationship that is regulated and controlled by human power.

Jesus does not want to give a sign, except that of Jonah. The book of Jonah is found in the Old Testament between the prophetic and the sapiential books. It is the account of a prophet who is sent to preach outside Israel, in Nineveh, capital of the Assyrians, who were bitter enemies of the covenant: truly foreigners in every sense and those are “far off” *par excellence*. This unexpected mission teaches Jonah about God’s ardent desire to call those who are distant, to announce his forgiveness to the unbelievers, to save them through penance and conversion. Rebellious and reluctant before the divine Word, Jonah becomes a sign of saving action for the Ninevites.

The Son of Man, too, becomes a sign for his generation, the only credible sign. Already in the synagogue of Nazareth (see Lk 4:25-27), Jesus had recalled that God sent his prophets Elijah and Elisha to bring healing not only to non-Jews, but even to pagans. Now he shows that his coming is intended to bring salvation not only to Israel, but to everyone. Through his Son made flesh, God opens up the exclusive election of Israel to all the world. With the eloquent sign of his own humanity, Jesus, in whom God became one with every person, calls us to a true conversion of mentality, a new heart willing to hear and accept the divine logic that wants all people to be saved. Jesus shows to his generation, to his own people, that the Queen of Sheba, though pagan, recognized in the wisdom of King Solomon the traces of the love of the Lord, and that the Ninevites, those strangers and hardened sinners, faced with an oracle of misfortune pronounced by the prophet Jonah, seized the invitation to conversion.

The people of God, on the other hand, resists the coming of its Lord, and this will be judged by those who are far off, by that “non-People” rep-

resented by the Queen of the South and the Ninevites. One sees here the tragedy of Israel's failure to listen, its refusal to recognize the presence of God, the favorable time of salvation, the visit of the Lord (see Lk 19:44, Rom 9-11). The special election of Israel and God's promises to his people do not create exclusive superiority and privileges. The logic of divine election consists in the historical concreteness of salvation and in its vicarious representativeness of all those who, in their own humanity, share the same origin and the same creational destiny.

Jonah, whose experience of burial in the belly of the whale is a clear reference to the Passover of Jesus, represents the effective opening of the mission to salvation for all, which is found in the Church, in its universality, and in its sacramentality. Thanks to the death and resurrection of Jesus, the chosen people and the pagans become one redeemed people (see Eph 2:11-19) which in baptism is united with the Passover of the Lord (see Rom 6). Their presence in the world participating in the mission of Jesus is a visible and effective sign of salvation taking place today in the hearts of people, without discrimination or refusal on the part of God. His Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, in a permanent state of mission, is sent to everyone, calling together everyone to Christ. In persecution it relives the redemptive passion of its Lord; in being received it experiences the effectiveness of his Easter; and in the baptismal growth of its children it sees the generous fruitfulness of the mercy and forgiveness of its Lord, Master, and Spouse, Jesus Christ.

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OCTOBER 15, 2019

Tuesday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

*Memorial of Saint Teresa of Jesus*

Rom 1:16-25

Ps 19:2-5

Lk 11:37-41

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In the first reading, the loss to which humanity has condemned itself against the will of God is re-read by St. Paul through a sort of history of sin that he offers to the believers of Rome. Created by God for truth and justice, the human person turned to impiety and injustice. While contemplating the world and having the ability to grasp through the work of creation the invisible perfections of the Creator, humanity became lost in its own reasonings and ended up in the blind alleys of impurity, subjecting the body to all sorts of pleasures until the body itself became an object, and of idolatry, worshiping and serving creatures instead of the Creator. It seems that this loss has been permitted by God so that humanity learns to trust not in itself but in the One who alone makes right. Paul re-reads this story of sin to show that, although humanity was worthy only of God's wrath because of our prideful foolishness, God chose to love humanity anyway and therefore to justify us, to save us. The righteous will live by faith; the human creature has no trial to undergo before God, but an undeserved love to receive, a love that initiates an extraordinary transformation because it makes the sinner righteous and the perverse redeemed. This Gospel, heard and received, is a true *dynamis*, a power that expands the heart, opens it to faith, and communicates salvation. It propagates itself in an irresistible way. It is contagious to the ends of the world, like the witness that the heavens

give to the earth and to the whole cosmos, to reach every space and every time, as the responsorial psalm recalls. Even the heavens, full of this redemption, sing the glory of God.

The Gospel reading, taken from Luke, invites us to contemplate, further, an obstacle to the spread of the living and energetic word of the Master: the excessive attachment of the Pharisees to traditions, an attitude that prevents them from grasping the universal salvific reach of the presence and actions of Jesus.

While Jesus teaches the crowds, a Pharisee invites him to lunch. Being invited to someone else's table is a gesture of acceptance, as well as esteem and approval. Between two who share a meal together, there can be no barriers, only familiarity and intimacy. Jesus accepts the invitation of the Pharisee, as he had that of publicans, and sits at the table, but he scandalizes his host by neglecting the practice of ablutions that the Pharisees performed before lunch. In fact, the relationship of Jesus with the Pharisees was always very difficult. In Lk 7:36-50, a Pharisee is offended because Jesus lets himself be touched by a sinful woman, whom he praises her for her love. In Luke 14:1-6, he rebukes the formalistic observance of the Pharisees who, while respecting the Law, ignored the demands of love, which is the synthesis and compendium of the Law (see Mt 22:37). In Lk 20:45-47, Jesus warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who flaunt their justice by carrying out sterile and meaningless gestures.

Traditions, practices, and customs, when they are imposed and observed in an inflexible way, move away from their secondary and instrumental finality to educate our weak and impressionable hearts to do good and to love. But they can become real barriers of separation and opposition. Only the recovery of conversion to loving dialogue with Christ, who is not afraid of overcoming barriers, sterile precepts, and empty traditions, can generate life and new relationships of communion, within which even the law and its precepts can help us live well and in a manner ordered to the newness of salvation. From the exteriority of

preservation, one passes to the interiority of the heart in love with God, united with Christ, who is not afraid of risking anything, even life, to remain in communion with him and to invite anyone to this banquet of life and joy.





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OCTOBER 16, 2019

Wednesday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of St. Hedwig*

*Optional Memorial of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*

Rom 2:1-11

Ps 62:2-3,6-7,9

Lk 11:42-46

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In the first reading, Paul, addressing the believers of Rome, insists that the Jews, like the pagans, commit evil. Indeed, he points to how easily the Jews accuse the pagans of immorality, basking in the conviction of being better than others because of their total observance of the Law. To show his fellow Jews how they have lost their way, the Apostle tries to demolish some of their false certainties, which he himself had shared before he came to know the Risen Lord. After previously trusting in the flesh and in his membership in the people who had received the Law, Paul was converted to Christ through faith, which justifies and works through love, not through the ritual observance of precepts. It is not enough to believe with the mouth, with the exterior practice of the Law; one must live in faith. We will be judged, in fact, on love, the fruit of our adhesion in faith to Christ, who died and rose again. Faith is participation in the divine nature and in the divine love of Jesus.

Paul denounces the sin of hardness of heart and of the obstinacy of a people who believe they are the only ones to deserve salvation. The time of privileges is over; the time has come for each person to make a decision about who Christ is. It is a time when each person must surrender to the mercy of God, discovering that he wants to pour out his goodness even upon those who have been far from him. God is the only judge of people;

we are all subject to his judgment, without exception. The certainty of being right and the arrogance of thinking oneself to be the sole defender of truth and morality (the Law) can lead to contempt for God, considering his mercy as weakness, and to the false exclusion of others from salvation.

Today's Gospel passage, a prophetic denunciation of the Pharisees and the scholars of the law, is a warning to Christian communities of yesterday and today of the temptations of legalism, formalism, and ritualism, which nourish that great enemy of the saving work of Christ, a prideful and impenetrable self-referentiality. The perversion of the Law into an external formalism and the reduction of the call of the chosen people to an exclusivist privilege that the pagans can never have undermine the universality of salvation and the mission of the disciples of Jesus.

Jesus begins by denouncing the abuses of the Pharisees regarding offerings. They are capable of observing minimal and marginal norms, such as the tithe on mint, rue, and herbs. Jesus does not want to eliminate these practices (the annual offering of tithing at the temple was called for by Deut 14:22), but to place them in the right context within a true relationship of faith in God and love of neighbor. Making an offering without a personal involvement in a journey of conversion can become the excuse to neglect fundamental precepts, such as justice and the love of God, realities that demand a decisive and continuous transformation of one's heart and the world.

Jesus' other accusation regards the tendency to seek honors, to pursue gratifications, and to take care of appearances of power, taking seats of honor. The insistent concern over appearance is the result of an inner corruption that makes a person like a sepulcher, perhaps sumptuous outside, but full of rot inside. While the interior remains invisible to the eyes of others, the exterior is carefully tended for selfish ends.

The words of Jesus resound with force and they anger not only the Pharisees but also the scholars of the Law, who are deeply offended by him. Jesus continues then by offering a harsh rebuke for them as well, against

their practice of imposing on others the heavy burden of observances in which they are not personally involved, revealing the profound inconsistency between their teaching and their own lives. The law is given to serve life, to preserve it and promote it. Faith never dehumanizes a person; on the contrary, it encourages every person toward his or her fullest growth.

We find here a truly apostolic point of view: faced with the universality of God's salvation and the mission of Jesus and his disciples, the Pharisees and scholars of the Law must reconsider their way of thinking about a relationship with God and salvation. The occasion for Jesus' critical reaction is his taking a seat at the table without having carried out the traditional ablutions before a meal.

The first severe criticism of the scene (Lk 11:39-44), just prior to where our reading begins, is directed toward the Pharisees' offering a false conception of life and of the relationship with God. The Pharisee is amazed (Lk 11:38) by Jesus' behavior, and he receives an immediate and hard answer from Jesus (Lk 11:39). The importance that Luke attributes to the discussion, the tone of Jesus' criticism, his reference to the prophets and to the apostles in the context of the wisdom of God (Lk 11:49) all demonstrate his seriousness. What is at stake in the problematic attitude of Jesus' interlocutors is the restriction of salvation to the outward observance of the Law, which endangers the universal mission founded on the saving will of the God of the Covenant.

The question arises first of all on the level of distinguishing between pure and impure, in terms of internal and external, of rules imposed on others and not practiced by those who impose them. This recalls Peter's vision before his meeting with the centurion Cornelius, who insisted puritanically that "nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth" (Acts 11:8). In the gospel passage from Luke, Jesus' response is clear: God has made the inside and the outside, everything is the work of his hands, so that everything is pure (see Acts 10:15, Mk 7:15). No one can be declared profane or impure, Peter understood (see Acts 10:28). The apostolate and

mission are the manifestation of the goodness of the Father, God the creator of all, who ignores all barriers of ritual or formal separation. The missionary is called to be close to all people (see Acts 10:46-47), because God has no favorites (see Acts 10:34).

Luke uses a formula full of meaning to express the universal openness of salvation offered by God in Jesus and the mission of his Church: “You fools! Did not the maker of the outside also make the inside? But as to what is within, give alms, and behold, everything will be clean for you” (Lk 11:40-41). To be pure, practice mercy and live charity. In the kingdom of God, what determines relationships between people, overcoming barriers of discrimination and separation, is the mystery of the goodness of God who, in Jesus, unites himself to every person and offers mercy to all. Missionary disciples of Jesus are called to give what they possess within. Not only to give material goods in alms, but to offer themselves first of all: their own lives and their own hearts. No simple external acts are required, nor the execution of ritual precepts; the missionary disciple is asked to give all of himself or herself to Jesus, offering soul and body, inside and outside, heart and emotions, relationships and norms, for the cause of the salvation of all in the mission.

October  
2019

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**OCTOBER 17, 2019**

Thursday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

*Memorial of St. Ignatius of Antioch*

Rom 3:21-30

Ps 130:1b-6ab

Lk 11:47-54

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Paul brings his presentation in Rom 1:18-3:20 to a close with a dramatic statement: “Jews and Greeks alike ... are all under the domination of sin” (Rom 3:9). If this is so, it seems that there is no possibility of salvation for anyone, relying only on human capacities. But Paul believes that the intervention of the God of Jesus Christ has overcome this desperate situation of humanity: “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested” (Rom 3:21). Thus Paul contrasts the saving power of God with the slavery of sin. The Father’s powerful liberating work takes place in the present time, for his free initiative has taken historical form in Christ who died and rose again (see Rom 3:24-25, 4:25). When a person adheres to it in faith (see Rom 3:22-28:30), her existence changes completely: she is freed from subordination to the power of sin and death (see Rom 3:24) and lives as a faithful companion of God and neighbor, according to the logic of solidarity proper to the covenant, that is, as “righteous” (Rom 3:26).

Here Paul presents a theology totally opposed to that of the mentality of his time. Late Judaism had reduced the divine Law to absolute domination, disconnecting it from its constitutive and original relationship with history and the divine covenant, assuming it to be valid in itself. The result was that it substituted obedience to Yahweh with the meticulous and scrupulous observance of prescriptions and prohibitions. This way of thinking led to a bloated self-sufficiency of humanity before the destiny of one’s

life. Redemption on the basis of “works of the Law,” typical of rabbinic Judaism, in fact made humanity a sort of religious autocrat, oblivious of divine and self-referential grace. The resulting sectarian and exclusivist attitude drew a clear line of distinction between Jews, who understood and observed the Law, and pagans, who were destined for perdition because they lacked the Law.

The Apostle presents us with a theological understanding of justification as an alternative to this Jewish teaching of his day. He appeals to God’s salvific justice and points to faith as the only possibility of redemption from the dominion of sin and from the destiny of eternal death. In practice, Paul rejects the severe image of a God without mercy, revealing instead God’s true face, that of a Father who acts and intervenes out of love on behalf of sinful humanity. Before this extraordinary initiative of God, Jews and pagans stand on level ground; both need salvation as a gift and are constantly called to faith because both are under the law of sin. In this universalizing process of conversion, Israel is saved and regains its rightful place in the divine election (see Rom 9-11). It will be saved together with all the peoples of the earth. The election of Israel becomes an effective sign of the historical beginning of salvation for Israelites and pagans together.

Pope Francis writes:

On the basis of this sharing in Jesus’ way of seeing things, Saint Paul has left us a description of the life of faith. In accepting the gift of faith, believers become a new creation; they receive a new being; as God’s children, they are now “sons in the Son.” The phrase “Abba, Father,” so characteristic of Jesus’ own experience, now becomes the core of the Christian experience (cf. Rom 8:15). The life of faith, as a filial existence, is the acknowledgment of a primordial and radical gift which upholds our lives. We see this clearly in Saint Paul’s question to the Corinthians: “What have you that you did not receive?” (1 Cor 4:7). This was at the very heart of Paul’s debate with the Pharisees: the issue of whether salvation is attained by faith or by the works of the law. Paul rejects the attitude

of those who would consider themselves justified before God on the basis of their own works. Such people, even when they obey the commandments and do good works, are centered on themselves; they fail to realize that goodness comes from God. Those who live this way, who want to be the source of their own righteousness, find that the latter is soon depleted and that they are unable even to keep the law. They become closed in on themselves and isolated from the Lord and from others; their lives become futile and their works barren, like a tree far from water. Saint Augustine tells us in his usual concise and striking way: “*Ab eo qui fecit te, noli deficere nec ad te*,” “Do not turn away from the one who made you, even to turn towards yourself.” Once I think that by turning away from God I will find myself, my life begins to fall apart (cf. Lk 15:11-24). The beginning of salvation is openness to something prior to ourselves, to a primordial gift that affirms life and sustains it in being. Only by being open to and acknowledging this gift can we be transformed, experience salvation and bear good fruit. Salvation by faith means recognizing the primacy of God’s gift. As Saint Paul puts it: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

*(Lumen Fidei, 19)*

Paul proposes to the Romans the universal horizons of the grace of God, which are at the base of the mission entrusted to him and communicated to the Church, born of the Passover of Jesus and sent to the world by the Spirit of the Risen Lord.

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OCTOBER 18, 2019

Friday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

*Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist*

2 Tm 4:10-17b

Ps 145:10-13,17-18

Lk 10:1-9

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On this Feast of St. Luke, we listen to Paul's letter to his trusted emissary Timothy, in which he complains that he has no one to travel with, except for Luke. In Luke's account of Paul's travels in the Acts of the Apostles, we find at several points a sudden change in the narrative: the so-called "we passages" in the Acts of the Apostles (see Acts 16: 10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28). Up to Acts 10:16, Luke remained out of the picture, writing in the third person. In verses 1 to 9, he reports Paul's trips to Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Bithynia, and Troas. But starting at verse 10, Luke writes in the first-person plural: "We sought passage to Macedonia at once, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them." Luke embarks with Paul and, through his skillful narrative, invites his readers along on the missionary journey.

Luke reveals a detail about himself at the beginning of his Gospel. He writes that he is presenting the events "that have been fulfilled among us" just as he had received them from "those who were eyewitnesses," those who were with Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry (see Lk 1:1-2). In this introductory section, Luke reveals to his audience that even he is not a direct witness to the account he offers. The evangelist is part of the emerging Christian community thanks to the personal witness of those who had personally heard the preaching of Jesus and witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection.



Matthew (10:1), Mark (6:7), and Luke (9:1) each describe Jesus' calling of "the Twelve" and, after a series of instructions, his sending them on a mission to announce the Good News. But only Luke reports that Jesus later commissioned the larger group of seventy-two disciples, whom we hear about in today's Gospel. According to Luke, many more missionaries than the Twelve were involved in the first evangelization. Just before choosing and sending them, Jesus had begun his journey to Jerusalem (see Lk 9:51). He sent the seventy-two ahead of him, to prepare for his arrival in various cities. This prefigures Luke's personal experience traveling with Paul.

This sending of the seventy-two (or seventy, according to some manuscripts) both anticipates and provides a model for Christian missionary activity to all peoples. In the Jewish tradition, the nations of the earth that heard the promulgation of the Sinai law numbered seventy (see Gen 10, Dt 32:8); Jesus' disciples, then, are sent to all peoples.

The passage proclaimed in today's liturgy presents the apostolate as revelation of the kingdom and of the judgment already present in the world. For Luke, it is not a matter of announcing to Israel the greatness of the kingdom, but of proclaiming to the nations that the kingdom is near. The evangelist writes at a time when there are already, "in all nations," witnesses of the resurrected one. This is the decisive moment in history, in which everyone is offered the opportunity to become part of the kingdom of God.

The method, character, and perspectives of the missionary work carried out by the seventy-two disciples are similar to those of the Twelve. Jesus' instructions open with a description of the situation; abundant harvests and few workers stand side by side in significant contrast. Hence the categorical recommendation: "so ask the master of the harvest." "Prayer is the soul of mission," Pope Francis wrote in his October 22, 2017, letter to Cardinal Filoni. God, who is the master of the harvest, takes the initiative; he calls and sends. It is an invitation to join the prayer of Jesus and his exodus to the Father, which is expressed in his delivering himself into the hands of people: "I am sending you like lambs among wolves." Missionaries can

never rely on force, power, or violence. They are rich only in the faith and prayer that keeps them rooted in the personal relationship of love with Jesus, the master who sends them.

Poverty of beginnings becomes the foundation and sign of their freedom and of full dedication to the one task that frees them from any impediment or delay. All this is precisely defined in a series of norms: free from any obstacle, those who are sent aim directly at the goal, without stopping, not even for the greeting that, according to Eastern custom, would have required a lot of time (see 2 Kgs 4:29). The true greeting, on the contrary, is reserved for those to whom the mission is directed. This greeting is not a simple prophecy or proclamation, but an effective word that gives joy and happiness. In short, it is messianic “peace,” which comes with salvation (see Lk 10:5-6). Those who are sent, like the Lord, establish with those who receive them relationships in which living the peace of the kingdom has begun. Their behavior leads them to depend on those who welcome them, to whom they entrust themselves and their very lives. Missionaries are therefore fully exposed, even as regards their livelihoods, to the risks of the mission: welcome or rejection, success or failure. “House” and “city” symbolize private life and public life. Those who are sent depend on the hospitality of those who accept the message, but nothing can stop or hinder them from carrying out their mission; they are missionaries who bring the last and urgent appeal of the possibility of salvation, which must reach the ears of all, the hearts of all, whatever the cost.

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**OCTOBER 19, 2019**

Saturday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of Saints John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, Priests,  
and Companions, Martyrs*

*Optional Memorial of St. Paul of the Cross*

Rom 4:13,16-18

Ps 105:6-9,42-43

Lk 12:8-12

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In today's Gospel, Jesus foresees the various contexts in which his apostles will be witnesses to him, including the possibility that they will encounter hostile reactions. Appearing in the synagogues and before the civil authorities, they will bear their witness of faith both in religious and secular circles. His words are fulfilled in the Acts of the Apostles when Paul preaches in the synagogue of Salamis (see Acts 13:4-17) and when he witnesses to Jesus before the Roman authorities (see Acts 21:33-22,29). Jesus assures his followers that their earthly testimony will reach the heavens; just as they recognize the Son of Man in earthly settings, civil or religious, so the Son of Man will recognize them before the angels of God.

Immediately before this, Jesus had encouraged his disciples to have courage and confidence in times of persecution. As can be deduced from the rest of the missionary discourse, he doesn't promise them serenity or immunity from violence and rejection, but he indicates to them the true root of freedom: the victory over fear whose source is found in Jesus' victory over death. Easter will be, for Jesus and his disciples, the experience of this victory.

The moments in history, when the disciples are called upon to publicly acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Messiah, harken forward to the final judg-

ment before God, when Jesus himself, as Son of Man, will act as advocate and defender. In the image of the juridical process (see Isa 50:8-9; Rom 8:33), one thinks of the Risen Lord, who lives with God, but who is present in his Church in an effective way, through his Spirit, in the public clash with the leaders and the powerful of this world that the disciples continue to face (see Lk 11:11-12).

Jesus' statement that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven is rather surprising, in light of the parable of the prodigal son (that comes just three chapters later in Luke), which emphasizes the forgiveness of sins. But this teaching should be interpreted in the context of the particular understanding of Luke's notion of Christian mission. The followers of the Son of Man will reject him, as we see even Peter, the first among the apostles, did on the night Jesus was arrested. Peter failed to acknowledge and remain faithful to Jesus because he had not yet witnessed his passion and resurrection and he had not yet received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But Peter is forgiven in the greeting from the Risen Lord, "Peace be with you" (Lk 24:36), and in love (see Jn 21:15-9). After receiving the Holy Spirit, the experience of the Gospel is complete and Peter, renewed, is now filled with the power of the Risen Christ, certain of the gift of faith. His own Christological profession was the fruit of the Spirit in him (see Mt 16:18).

Of course, Luke is well aware of the experiences of the primitive Church of Acts – the courageous testimony of the apostles (see Acts 4:5ff; 5:32), but also the commitment of Christian communities exposed to the risk of apostasy or lack of faith in the face of threats and repression from outside. He then recalls a saying of Jesus that ought to cause Christians to reflect, making them more aware and strengthening them: a word against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not seem to allow forgiveness. He who has rejected the Son of Man during his earthly ministry will be forgiven and will have a new opportunity through the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost; therefore, he will receive a possibility of conver-

sion and forgiveness. That was the case for Paul and for many converted Jews. But how can anyone who rejects the Spirit – who is the very source and agent of the forgiveness, repentance, and renewal of the disciples – be forgiven? Luke sees this confirmed in the experience of the hardening and blindness of those who have rejected the witness of the apostles (see Acts 28:25-28). It is a total, free, and conscious closure to the action of the Spirit and to the Spirit's movement of reconciliation and forgiveness, to such an extent that no one can be forced, against his explicit will and action, to be saved. The welcoming or the rejection of the Spirit of God is a mysterious relationship of our conscience and our freedom with God; our hearts are fully scrutable only by God and in God. Only God, who knows our hearts, grants forgiveness of sins and salvation.

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

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**OCTOBER 20, 2019**

Sunday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

*World Mission Day 2019*

Ex 17:8-13

Ps 121:1-8

2 Tm 3:14-4:2

Lk 18:1-8

*Message of His Holiness Pope Francis  
for World Mission Day 2019*

**BAPTIZED AND SENT:**

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD**

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By falling on the Sunday dedicated by the Church to its evangelizing mission in the world, today's first reading, which narrates the battle between Amalek and Israel, might cause some embarrassment to those who want to talk about the importance of this Christian call. The text can be misinterpreted as a spur to holy war or a fanatic proselytism. On the contrary, mission aims at the proclamation of the Passover of Jesus and of the divine reconciliation he offers. Its purpose is to witness to Jesus Christ, to communicate his Gospel, to build up his Church, in a climate of sincere fraternity and authentic and respectful religious freedom in the common search for greater communion and justice in the world. Not to mention the fact that the Gospel also teaches us, through to the example of Jesus, to love enemies and pray for persecutors. The baptized and sent Christian does not have a product to sell to or impose upon the world. As the Church of Christ in mission, the believer receives divine life to

proclaim, witness, and communicate for his own salvation and that of everyone else.

The biblical text of Exodus 17:8-13 offers the memory of an episode in which Israel, a fugitive people in search of a land to settle in, is threatened with annihilation and engaged in a struggle for its own survival. Certain to achieve victory, as well as liberation from Egypt, thanks only to God's help, the people of Israel keep the memory of this battle, and of the others that will follow, as a testimony of its faith in the true God, the Lord of heaven and earth, the God of hosts, who comforts the weak and frees the oppressed. This is the praise that the psalmist, with trust and gratitude, raises to the Lord, the guardian of Israel:

I raise my eyes toward the mountains.  
From whence shall come my help?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
the maker of heaven and earth. (Ps 121:1-2)

The elements of aggression, hatred, and revenge that historically accompanied this Old Testament mode of interpreting the faith had to be gradually purified over the centuries by holy people, such as the prophets and the sages, and ultimately, by the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace and Justice, who was foreseen by their prophecy and awaited for centuries. What was meant by the force and violence of the extermination of idols and pagans, in Jesus becomes a burning passion and fiery love for the salvation of all.

The Cross of Jesus is the place where evil is defeated by the love of the One who dies for us, who dies in our place, making the experience of our death his own. He also dies for the salvation of his persecutors and enemies. All vengefulness is annihilated by the God of Jesus Christ in whom hatred and death provoke, in the Trinitarian communion, ever greater love and ever more efficacious mercy. God has destroyed our sin, injustice, and death by making them his own, and has annihilated them through his boundless

love. “Christ’s death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. In the Paschal Mystery, our deliverance from evil and death has taken place” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 9). The New Testament and all the Holy Scriptures introduce us to and educate us in this saving action of God in the world.

In this perspective, the second reading shows us how Paul teaches Timothy the importance of the Scriptures: “From infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tm 3:15). Timothy, in fact, has studied them since childhood, like every Jewish boy; since then, Christian children, too, learn them, with the help of their parents and the community. Timothy is a young man who, together with his family, embraced the faith during the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul and who later becomes a member of his missionary group. The son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, Timothy received from his childhood a deep and firm religious education from his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice, who introduced him to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. This is necessary because the Scriptures are inspired by God and, if they are explained well (rather than manipulated and distorted, as the Second Letter of Peter reminds us; see 2 Pt 1:19-21), they encourage us to practice good works and build us up in righteousness and holiness. Genuine missionary zeal is not violent proselytism; it is the desire for a fraternal heart full of Christ and driven by the Holy Spirit to cooperate for the salvation and happiness of all people, of all ethnic groups, sharing ethical and cultural values, hopes and joys, in search of a full life and true peace, which is Jesus Christ who died and rose again. For this reason, Paul exhorts Timothy vigorously so that, while waiting for the Parousia of the Lord, he dedicates himself body and soul to the teaching of the Word.

The Apostle often mentions in his letters the service rendered by Timothy to the work of evangelization. Always available and attentive, he accompa-



nies the ecclesial communities with generosity and affection. Paul reminds the Philippians of his testimony and fidelity: “I hope, in the Lord Jesus, to send Timothy to you soon.... You know his worth, how as a child with a father he served along with me in the cause of the gospel” (Phil 2:19,22). Writing to the Thessalonians he highlights his courage and missionary charisma: “We ... sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one be disturbed in these afflictions” (1 Th 3:2-3). Timothy, then, travels with readiness and diligence to put himself at the service of the newly founded churches, whenever they need clarification of their doubts or support in their struggles. The word of God is his strength and his companion.

The Alleluia verse offers us, with splendid lyricism and refined language, a sublime hymn dedicated to the word of God, which it describes as “living and effective,” because it penetrates our conscience just like a double-edged sword. The Lord, as the psalmist says, probes our hearts and minds and sees all our paths. Also in the Letter to the Ephesians we find the metaphor of the sword; attributed to the Spirit, it represents the intense and penetrating power of the word of God (see Eph 6:17). And so a cruel instrument of war bends to symbolize another struggle, that spiritual conflict that produces repentance and conversion, joy and new life, goodness and faithfulness. These are the fruits of the divine, spiritual, living, and personal Word, the fruits of Wisdom that sees everything and knows everything, that pervades everything and judges everything, that is present in the deepest part of the conscience and shines in such a way that no one can hide from its light. The Gospel of Jesus, Divine Wisdom, is spirit and life. It makes the dead rise again, restores dignity to the excluded, gives joy to the afflicted, renews every creature, transforms, sanctifies, and offers eternal life. When the Word illuminates, however, at the same time it judges, because it strips the soul of its masks, revealing the truth that is exposed in the conscience. In the heart where the Spirit of the Risen One was poured, the judgment of the penetrating Word is always for forgiveness and purification.

The parable of Jesus in the Gospel this Sunday portrays a woman who has been denied the right to express herself by a corrupt judge, an experience that many people all over the world suffer today. The parable is set “in a certain town” (Lk 18:2), a city without a name since what is told seems to take place everywhere – for the judge’s enemies, the law must be applied; for his friends, it need only be interpreted.

The widow in the parable is not a friend of the judge, so she does not receive an audience. This widow lost her husband’s support, and in the first-century Palestinian world, she could not inherit his property. Widows were economically vulnerable and could be exploited, as Jesus reminds us sharply when he accuses the religious leaders of devouring the houses of widows (see Lk 20:46-47). Not being able to afford a lawyer, the widow presents herself to offer her case against her opponent. Jesus exposes the inner reasoning of the corrupt judge, who is uninterested in her complaints and indifferent to who she is. He doesn’t fear God and doesn’t care for the good of people. The widow is determined not to remain invisible or unheard, even before a dishonest judge, until the case is definitively resolved in her favor.

Jesus uses the parable to teach about the necessity of urgent and continual prayer. If prayer is the heart of the Church’s mission, it is because within this personal and ecclesial relationship with God (liturgy), persons and communities are renewed through the salvation offered to us by Jesus. His question about faith when he will return seems to indicate a preoccupation by Jesus about the efficacy of the mission that will be carried out and the authenticity of the witness of the missionary disciples. These disciples, incorporated into the Paschal Mystery through baptism, are sent into the world as the Church of Christ, the community of the redeemed, to be the seed and beginning of the kingdom so that all history and all humanity may be transfigured and redeemed. The efficacy of continuous prayer, of constant supplication, of the insistent search for love for truth and justice, forges the disciple’s capacity for mission. Only those who insistently pray

put Christ at the center of their lives and of the mission entrusted to them, growing in faith. Only those who insistently pray become attentive and able to listen, to realize and discover the needs and requests for material and spiritual redemption so present in the heart of today's humanity.



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OCTOBER 21, 2019

Monday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Rom 4:20-25

Lk 1:69-75

Lk 12:13-21

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The common thread in the Scripture readings for today is the great theme of life. To Abraham – at the sunset of his earthly journey, according to the story of Genesis, without hope of seeing the promise of a descendant realized – God confirms that biological barriers will not get in the way of his divine plan. Abraham and Sarah, a couple of “biological retirees” afflicted by the torment of infertility, receive Isaac, whose name literally means *laughter*, the joy of life. Believers who persevere in faith “against all hope” are assured of the same gift of life and joy granted to Abraham.

The apostle Paul, intending to support the doctrine of justification by faith with biblical arguments, points to the story of God’s covenant with Abraham, in which God takes the initiative and commits himself faithfully. God promises him descendants as numerous as stars of the sky, and Abraham, despite his wife being sterile, believes in the word of the Lord. And this, Paul comments, was credited to him as righteousness. The circumcision, the covenant, the Law – all this comes later, observes Paul. Ultimately, faith in God and in his word has primacy and obtains for us, freely, the promised gift, through pure and free divine goodness.

Abraham’s experience is important, since it clearly shows the gratuitousness of the spontaneous initiative of God in manifesting his mercy, without any credit previously earned by those who receive divine grace. In fact, Abraham’s story simply begins with the words: “The LORD said

to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you" (Gen 12:1-2). It mentions no good action by Abraham to suggest that he earned anything. The people of Israel did not lack the warnings of the prophets to learn to accept with faith the universal generosity of God, not as a due reward, but as the free gift of his goodness. We all must recognize that the good that happens in our life is totally and purely a gift from God; it must encourage us to reciprocate with the same generosity and love, making our actions like God's. As for the evils, the story of Abraham shows us they have other causes: human error, lies, greed, war, or natural calamities. God, however, always intervenes to transform these evils into their opposite and to do good for his beloved creatures.

The same theme of life is central in the Gospel reading. The context is a conflict between brothers for the division of an inheritance – a situation as old as humanity, which is confirmed in Genesis's account of the first murder, a fratricide provoked by the fact that for Cain, it is not enough to be the firstborn and to have inherited the father's trade; he is jealous of God's care for Abel. The family dynamics of conflict that develop between brothers are masterfully illustrated, in their crudeness, in the parable of the merciful father in Lk 15:11-32. In both of these stories, the woodworm that eats away at fraternal relations is greed, the desire to have everything for oneself. Here Jesus offers a bit of fundamental advice, useful guidance for anyone's life: "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions" (Lk 12:15). Visceral attachment to money is the root of all evil (see 1 Tm 6:10). The foolishness rebuked by Jesus in today's Gospel consists precisely in this: to forget that life, in all its dimensions, is a gift. It is a grace to be shared, not squeezed for all the advantage it can yield. The fruits of the earth are a blessing from God (see Dt 28:1-14), but they can be transformed into the opposite, when one decides to seize them and control them.

The compulsive accumulation of wealth blinds a person, which is why Jesus refers to the man in his parable as a “fool.” It makes us forget that just over the horizon, death is looming. Yet the Scriptures warn us:

Every man is but a breath.

Man goes about as a mere phantom;

they hurry about, although in vain;

he heaps up stores without knowing for whom. (Ps 39:6-7)

The rich man is a fool because he goes about life forgetting completely that it is a gift that can be lost at any time (see Wis 15:8). One cannot go through life fearing death, but it is equally true that those who decide to lock themselves in the cage of their own selfishness are walking dead.

“What must I do?” is a recurring question in Luke’s writings (see Lk 3:10,12,14; 16:3-4; Acts 2:37; 16:30). The choice between life and death is the crossroads that each person faces. For Israel, and before Israel even for Adam, the gift of life (of the highest value) is strictly bound to obedience to God. When humanity chooses to enjoy material things, to the exclusion of God, we condemn ourselves to flight, to exile, and finally to misery and death. “You have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!” (Lk 12:19). In themselves, material goods, starting from creation itself, are an abundant table prepared by God for the benefit of people. The problem arises when the people, who should be wise administrators of these gifts, make presume the right to be exclusive and excluding masters of these gifts. We live in an age that is crippled by anxiety. The problem is that anxiety over what will happen does not prevent tomorrow’s pain, but only robs us of today’s happiness. The concerns of this world are listed in detail in the Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5-7). “I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?... But seek first the kingdom [of

God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil” (Mt 6:25,33-34). Only faith as eternal life provides the proper measure to everything, to our time, to our relationships.



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OCTOBER 22, 2019

Tuesday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of St. John Paul II*

Rom 5:12,15b,17-19,20b-21

Ps 40:7-10,17

Lk 12:35-38

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The passage from Paul offered in today's liturgy is at the very heart of his Letter to the Romans. Behind the statement that the human person needs to be redeemed, there is the conviction that guilt taints our relationship with God. After having demonstrated, with the help of experience and the Scriptures, that the redemption of humanity comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ and not from circumcision, the Apostle begins to deal with "our" Christian experience.

If someone damages a friendship, hurting their friend, a disorder is created in his own heart, which will be overcome only when the friend welcomes him and embraces him again, accepting his apology. Redemption, says Paul, is the reason and condition of our living in peace with God. But for friends to return to friendship, it can be necessary for someone to mediate between the two, telling the guilty one that the other no longer bears a grudge and waiting with an open heart. And when everything is over, the bond will be stronger and the joy will be greater than before. Now, Paul continues, knowing that the mediator, Jesus, had to undergo many humiliations and sufferings to find and convince me to trust in the goodness of the Father, for whose love I had contempt, my heart is deeply grateful and ready to collaborate joyfully with him in the work of reconciliation, participating in his sacrifices to bring the message to others.

How can we doubt this love, asks the Apostle to the nations, after the



extraordinary demonstration that God has given us? The historical event of Jesus' death has a theological meaning of substitutionary suffering: he died for us, in our place and the place of all, for us who had turned away from God. In other words, he who received the mission of mediation is revealed to be our great friend, taking upon himself the weight of all the evils of which we were guilty when we were alone and lost. This incomparable demonstration of divine love for us will shine in history forever, illuminating the path of peoples.

Paul goes far and wide through the world, without rest and with great joy, giving his very self to spread this good news. Jesus did not sacrifice himself because we were Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, educated or ignorant, rich or poor, men or women, but simply because we were sinners in need of forgiveness. And his gift was dispensed without our having any merit. What most pleases God is not to inflict punishment, but to give without measure his sublime mercy.

After God has accomplished this ineffable mystery of love, absolutely gratuitous and universal, it is impossible, adds the Apostle, that God will not complete the work of our salvation! The fullness of salvation, therefore, concerns future goods, eschatological goods: glory and eternal life. In this way, the peace and reconciliation that we receive "now," and which our hearts savor, point toward a future fulfillment, since they are the pledge of the gifts we will receive later.

To demonstrate the triple nature of this liberation – that is, from sin, from the Law, and from death – Paul describes the situation of the human being before and after Christ, showing the consequences of the disobedience of Adam – a "figure" of the one who was to come – and those of the obedience of Christ, the new Adam. Reflecting on the story of the fall of humanity (Adam) offered by Genesis, Paul uses the theological truth it presents, that the cause of humanity's tragic condition of slavery is sin. The etiological character of the Genesis account points to sin as the cause of the general misery of humanity (pain, affliction, discord, violence, and

death). Adam's disobedience – both individually and collectively (see Gen 1:27) – has introduced an active and disastrous force into the world.

But Jesus Christ is the liberator. Through him came redemption and eternal life for all. Jesus is the “second” Adam, antithetical to the first. The first human being had no faith in his Creator; he disobeyed and broke his friendship with him. But Jesus is the new Adam, absolutely faithful and perfectly obedient, who gives his life to restore our friendship with God. The antithesis underlines the immeasurable superiority of the benefit brought by Jesus as opposed to the damage inflicted by Adam. “For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will all who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:15). The contrast between “one” and “all” highlights the universal scope of the new bond of friendship brought by the Lord Jesus.

The central theme of the Gospel reading is the second coming of the Lord in glory, to judge the living and the dead, as we profess in the Creed: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” The period that separates believers from this inevitable appointment is a time of active expectation. The most important idea of the Gospel passage is the absence of the master who, after having entrusted a patrimony to be cultivated and put to good use, steps away, without abandoning his own to whatever may come. In suggesting this as God's way of working, Jesus also includes the mystery of the freedom given to humanity; we can choose how to manage the gift of life without physical pressure, without feeling a manipulative presence.

In the Sacred Scriptures the request to “gird your loins” is found for the first time in Exodus 12:11. The context is the preparation for the Passover meal before the coming of the angel of death and the escape from the land of slavery. Following this, the phrase became a common formula to indicate a call to service, exemplified by Jesus: “Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father...

[H]e rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet" (Jn 13:1,4-5). In this gesture, service in the name of God has been elevated to the rank of the sacrament of love, within the Eucharist which allows the recipient to participate in the life of Jesus (see Jn 6:30-58). It is not by chance that the fourth Gospel makes the Last Supper the context for the washing of the feet. To Peter who tries to shield himself from that encounter, "unworthy" of the Master, Jesus says, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me" (Jn 13:8). Washing the feet of others is a gesture that the Master entrusts to his disciples as an emblem of the lifestyle to be brought to all nations. After the resurrection of Jesus, in fact, the disciples are dissuaded from continuing to look to heaven; rather, they are encouraged to go on mission to fulfill all that Jesus had said and did, with the promise that the Master would return to his own in the same way he had left (see Acts 1:11). We wait in hope for the return of the Master, with our loins girded, that is, serving our neighbors in the faith, proclaiming and helping them to participate in the salvation offered to us as a pledge in the Eucharist.

The metaphor of the lamps to kept burning (as in Ex 27:20 and Lev 24:2) qualifies the waiting as a time of careful attentiveness. The apparent absence of the master can lead to the temptation to replace him, pretending to become the absolute arbitrators of life – one's own and that of others – and by doing away with the assets entrusted to one's care. From God's perspective, waiting responds to the law of love. For us who live, the long period of waiting only increases our desire to meet God face to face. We must be strong to bear the burden of holding to a promise with no deadline. It is important to be aware that all the seasons of a life well lived, seeking and doing God's will, are a *kairos*, a time favorable to being called home. Our being ready for this moment will make our lives successes.

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OCTOBER 23, 2019

Wednesday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of St. John of Capistrano*

Rom 6:12-18

Ps 124:1b-8

Lk 12:39-48

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Throughout his Letter to the Romans, Paul maintains that it is useless to rely on the Law of Moses, since it does not free humanity, but rather enslaves and condemns humanity. In fact, before the coming of the Law of Moses, sin and death were already in the world, because of Adam. But since the Law had not yet been revealed and there were still no precepts, it was not possible to impute to sinners their failings, in their formal aspect of transgressions, nor could the sanctions provided for by the Law be applied to them. However, according to the natural law written on the hearts of all, personal responsibility for sin remained the same for everyone. Therefore, after receiving the Law, the Jews only saw their responsibility increase and, with it, their faults.

The Jewish expectation was that in the last days, when the Messiah arrived, he would bring a new law or a reinterpretation of the Law. This third period, which Paul calls “the fullness of time,” was inaugurated by the birth and the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the Anointed One of God. Paul teaches that with his coming, then, we were freed from the Law, because the grace of the Lord Jesus began to reign.

Paul leaves aside the account of Noah and what it could mean with regard to the covenant, sin, and the law, and he passes directly from Adam to Moses. He intends to face the problem exclusively in terms of the Mosaic Law, because it was with this argument that some of the Jews, or Jewish-Chris-

tians, the false brothers, were disturbing the Christian communities he had founded, trying to impose circumcision as something necessary for one to be redeemed and saved by God.

Now, when Paul states that the Law was involuntarily the cause of the proliferation of sin and that, even if indirectly, this caused the overflow of God's grace overpowered by sinful humanity, he opens himself to many questions and criticisms. Anticipating the objections that he would have received, Paul affirms that the Christian, once joined to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, who died and rose again, wants nothing more to do with sin and its terrible consequences. The fact that the justification of Christ brings redemption, life, and freedom to all does not mean that the sinner can continue to sin in the same way as before or even more, abusing his freedom in Christ or provoking God to manifest even more his grace. The authentic Christian considers himself dead to sin and lives exclusively for God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, being no longer subject to the Law, but under the protection of grace, the Christian is exhorted to offer his body and all his being to practice only good, mutual love, and justice; he is called to consecrate himself entirely to the service of God for the benefit of others. This is the great evangelizing mission of the Church. Indeed, redemption makes us born again through a bond of filial adoption and implies the beginning of a new life in the light of the Holy Spirit.

This teaching of Paul in relation to the Law is perfectly in tune with that of Jesus. The administrator who has made a mistake, disobeying an explicit order of his master, will be punished more severely than the servant who committed the same mistake, but without being aware of the law in force. This is very simply the teaching that the Apostle explains in his letter. The Law has increased the responsibility and, therefore, the guilt for the transgression. All those who have received authority and means of a religious, social, political, economic, juridical, or military nature will receive a serious punishment if they use their power to abuse, exploit, or oppress the people of God or destroy their home, God's creation.

Peter's question, "Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?" (Lk 12:41), opens the horizon to the community dimension of vigilance. The parable of Jesus is addressed to all the members of the ecclesial community, each of whom is invited to carry out her task with fidelity, daily, without postponing anything until tomorrow. Those who are called to watch, the holders of leadership roles within the community, have a greater responsibility. The great challenge of serving Jesus Christ and his Gospel, rather than using it, concerns primarily the leaders of communities. Those sitting at the head of the table must make sure that others have had their share before serving themselves. Jesus praises the honest and wise administrator, the one who is not ensnared by the fascination of power and who manages resources with proper detachment. "Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property" (Lk 12:43-44). The management of the earth's goods in fairness, justice, and transparency are issues of great relevance in the contemporary world, a world scourged by predatory greed on a global scale and in which human beings are often worth less than products and things. "But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful" (Lk 12:45-46).

It is important to pay attention in these words to the attitude of the unfaithful servant, who in his heart is convinced that the Lord's arrival is far away, and to the final reference to "the unfaithful." In the Psalms, foolishness and atheism appear as a pair: "The fool says in his heart, / 'There is no God'" (Ps 14:1; see also Ps 53:2). Those who decide to exclude God from their hearts will not find it easy to welcome their neighbors and to recognize the divine plan for them. The Gospel declares that the Lord will come again as a judge and all people will have to account for their own lives. It is not a threat. It is not part of God's pedagogy to force himself on

us with the specter of punishment. The Christian community is the home of the Father where life and love are celebrated. It is the choices of each of us that will result in reward or exclusion.

In the vision of St. Paul and of the Gospel, the seriously considered evil, in the light of the certainty of Christ's victory over death, represents a serious provocation for the Christian mission. The struggle begun by Christ in the heart of the missionary disciple, thanks to the action of the Spirit in baptism, represents a central dimension of Christian proclamation and witness. The mission of the Church, precisely because it is moved by the certainty of victory and merciful love, does not fear the struggle against evil in all its forms. To believers, to whom much has been given, much is required – offering, proclaiming, and sharing thanks to the explicit and confident announcement that salvation from evil and death comes only from Jesus Christ.

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

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OCTOBER 24, 2019

Thursday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of St. Anthony Mary Claret*

Rom 6:19-23

Ps 1:1-4,6

Lk 12:49-53

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The biblical texts of this liturgy offer a common theme: the freedom granted by God to every human person, the use that we make of it, and the responsibilities that follow from it. The passage from the Letter to the Romans traces a clear line between a life in service of sin and a life under the lordship of Christ. It also points to the endpoint of each path. The final result of sinful works is death, and death represents a separation without possibility of return. Such separation is the self-inflicted fate of those who obstinately choose to exclude God from their lives. The scenario presented by Paul corresponds perfectly to that of the Gospel. Together with the dark possibility of rejection of the Gospel and consequent condemnation, there is also the broad horizon of eternal life founded in Christ Jesus. To Paul, a veteran of living in strict observance of religious precepts as a path to salvation, it is important to stress repeatedly that communion with God through the person of Jesus Christ is an undeserved gift. No one can claim to be owed anything by God. Salvation is grace, and humanity is invited to welcome it and cultivate it.

Even in its brevity, the reading from the Gospel of Luke contains a vibrant message, so strong in tones and images that no listener can leave indifferent. First of all, it conveys a sense of imminence before which one must take a position. The manifestation of God in the person of Jesus Christ has ignited a flame in the history of humanity and of individual



people. In the Bible, fire symbolizes the word of the Lord proclaimed by the prophet (see Jer 5:14, 23:29, Sir 48). It is connected to the image of a hammer that, when it hits a rock (see Jer 23:29), causes a thousand sparks to burst forth. “I have come to set the earth on fire” (Lk 12:49). In the reading, the focus is on the contrasting responses that the person and the message of Jesus arouse: division, not only among strangers but even among the members of the same family. One is reminded here of Simeon’s prophecy that this child would become a sign of contradiction (see Lk 2:34). But the image of fire is also used in Scripture to offer a message of comfort: “When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned” (Is 43:2). John the Baptist baptized with water, but Jesus will baptize with fire (see Lk 3:16). It is under the form of tongues of fire that the Holy Spirit will descend upon the Church gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:2-4). Fire is also used as an image to express the judgment of God. Everything will be subjected to the test of fire that will separate the chaff from the grain. Hence the exhortation of the apostle Paul:

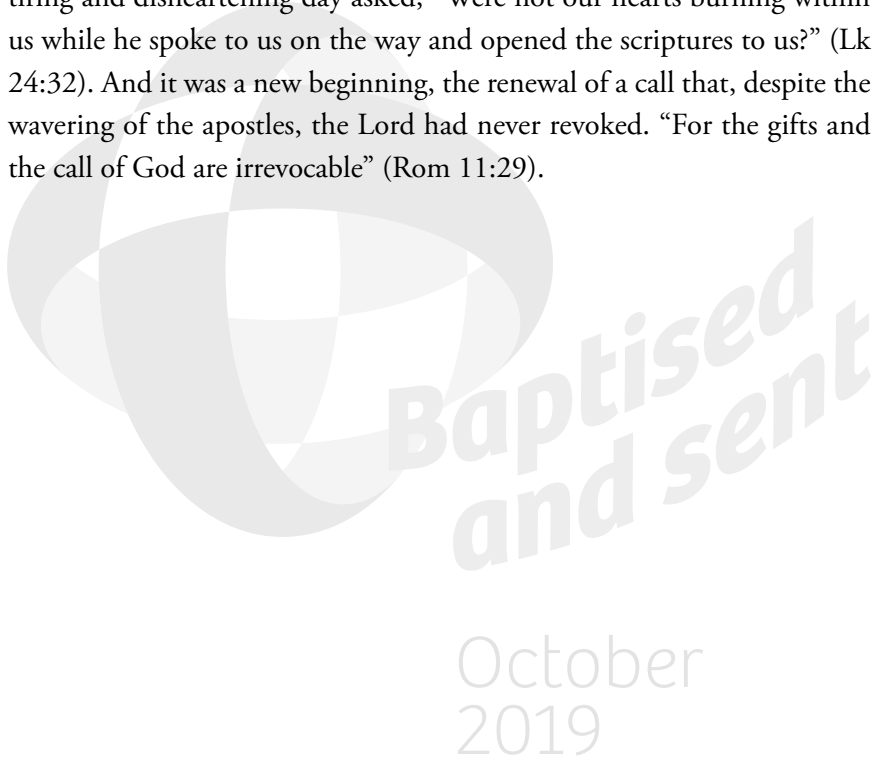
Each one must be careful how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one’s work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone’s work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor 3:10b-15)

The fire that Jesus came to bring to earth is clearly connected with his baptism. When his baptism, or his passion, takes place, then also the fire that he has come to bring, that is, the gift of the Spirit, will be lit. Thus, with two figures of speech, Jesus describes both the paschal mystery and the fruit that it bears for us. John the Baptist, in fact, had announced that the

one who was coming was more powerful than him, someone whose sandal straps he was not worthy to untie. If he baptized with water to prepare the way of the Lord, inviting people to repentance and conversion, the Son of the Most High came to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, so that every creature would see God's salvation and his great wonders. The fulfillment of this promise is described by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, with the story of Pentecost, when the Spirit, a, Easter gift, descended upon the Church in the form of tongues of fire, infusing it with prophetic strength to begin the evangelizing mission.

Luke must have been witness to many family conflicts during his missionary travels all over the world, constantly evangelizing with Paul on some occasions, and also with other companions. Many of these conflicts occurred in the synagogues, as the stories in Acts tell us, due to the acceptance of the Good News by some and its refusal by others. It is obvious that members of the same family took part in the rites in the synagogue. This brings to mind another teaching of Jesus, which requires from his disciples a love greater than the love they have for their relatives. The reason is very simple: he is the source of love. It is he who teaches us to truly love, giving our lives for the people we love. Love motivated only by family ties is very fragile. On the other hand, when I become a follower of Jesus, I not only learn to truly love my own family, but I abandon all greed and hypocrisy, every selfishness and discrimination, opening my heart to universal fraternity, welcoming with sincere love people different from my own religion, ethnicity, culture, skin color, social status – people who were previously foreigners to me. But this can cause enmity on the part of the family and the community that do not like what is different and that refuse to accept news that can undermine their traditions and beliefs. They do not understand this new way of life – which is a real revolution, both spiritual and social – and reject it. As Luke himself says: “The law and the prophets lasted until John; but from then on the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone who enters does so with violence” (Lk 16:16).

Peace is a constant in the discourses of Jesus (see Mt 5:9) and also in his reactions, even in the face of provocation and violence. He is the Prince of Peace; he is “our peace” (Eph 2:14). It is up to those who are called by Jesus to decide where their commitments lie. The fire that Jesus offers warms hearts, especially those who do not know where to go. May he accompany us, as he did in a hidden way the disciples of Emmaus, who at the end of a tiring and disheartening day asked, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32). And it was a new beginning, the renewal of a call that, despite the wavering of the apostles, the Lord had never revoked. “For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29).



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OCTOBER 25, 2019

Friday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Rom 7:18-25a

Ps 119:66,68,76,77,93,94

Lk 12:54-59

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Mention was made above of Paul's assertion that the Law was a reason for the proliferation of sin, and of the criticisms brought against Paul by his adversaries. The Apostle's goal, however, is simply to point out that the Law does not have, in itself, the power to transform and save a person; it only shows what is right and what is wrong, and so ends up highlighting all one's shortcomings. This is why Paul says without a shadow of doubt that the Law is good and holy, but the problem is that through it sin, the transgression of the commandments, manifests itself in all its gravity. The Law places before the people the way of life and the way of death.

Paul knows very well the inner drama that every person lives, especially when we strive to follow the path of perfection. Through reason and will, the human being understands and wishes to do good, according to the commandments, but encounters a tendency, an impulse, to do evil. This shows that we are slaves and need a liberating force that we do not possess. We are not born in personal guilt, but we bear the signs of sin and cosmic disorder, and we suffer its consequences. In fact, says Paul, "I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (Rom 7:19). The human being experiences this dramatic contradiction and asks: who can free me from my own puny, carnal "I," to experience the new, healed "I" that pleases God? Paul knows that Jesus is the only source of grace and redemption. Therefore, he exhorts us to praise and give thanks to God, together with

him, so we can pray with the psalmist, saying: “Let your kindness comfort me / according to your promise to your servants.... / Let your compassion come to me that I may live” (Ps 119:76-77).

Whoever observes the law faithfully must be very careful not to fall into the grave sin of pride, like the Pharisee in the temple who, despising others, considered himself right before God, contradicting what the Scriptures say: “Before you no one can be just” (Ps 143:2). It may also be that he does not have the courage to proceed to the next step, where the Law itself leads. The one who observes the commandments is on the path that leads to eternal life, as shown by the episode of the person who asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 18:18). The Lord confirmed that the young man was on the right path. The point is that this journey had led him to Jesus to continue his search, since Jesus himself was the “way” to life (see Jn 14:6) and the “door” to enter the kingdom (see Jn 14:6). When Paul, through the light of grace, understood this, he did not hesitate to follow the way of Jesus with all his strength, all his heart, and all his mind. But the young man, who was very rich, did not have the same courage.

When Jesus speaks to the crowds, who know how to discern the signs of nature with their experience and intelligence, he reproaches two shortcomings: the inability to discern the present time and the inability to judge what is right. They can interpret chronological and meteorological time, but they cannot perceive the presence of saving time. In his programmatic speech in the synagogue of Nazareth, quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus had declared that he was inaugurating the year of the Lord, the “today” of salvation, in which the promises of the Scriptures reach their fulfillment (see Lk 4). Starting from there, all that Jesus said and did was a tireless mission of evangelization. Many people who listened to him and saw his works were astonished and, giving glory to God, said, “We have seen incredible things today” (Lk 5:26). To the disciples of the Baptist, who asked him if he really was the Messiah or if they needed to wait for another person, Jesus responded by pointing to the fruits of his evangelizing work: “the

blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (Lk 7:22). And if, on one hand, Jesus is troubled by the persecution and opposition from the political and religious authorities, from the powerful and the landowners who know no repentance and refuse any opportunity for conversion, on the other hand he is delighted to see the joy and the simplicity of the humble who welcome the light of his word and become his disciples to enter the kingdom. Therefore, exulting in the Holy Spirit, Jesus bursts forth in praise and thanksgiving to the Father, who has hidden these things from the learned and the wise and has revealed them to the little ones.

Given that the stakes are high, one should be less concerned about interpreting natural phenomena and take greater care to discerning the time of history and the time of God. This latter approach would be less harmful than the one criticized by Jesus. Since it is essentially a matter of the grace of the messianic revelation, it is urgent and decisive to welcome it at the very moment it presents itself, to open oneself as fully as possible to the fruits of the salvation it bears. This can only happen by responding in freedom and obedience to the special appeals for conversion, addressed by the Lord on his way to Jerusalem. It is also necessary to pay due attention to the particular signs of this time that the presence of Christ enriches with an absolute novelty, giving it an incredible historical and providential significance for our salvation.

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**OCTOBER 26, 2019**

Saturday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Rom 8:1-11

Ps 24:1b-4ab,5-6

Lk 13:1-9

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The teaching of Jesus in today's Gospel begins with a story that is reported to him by some people about a group of Galileans massacred by Pilate while offering a sacrifice in the Temple. Not only was the outrage committed within the walls of the Temple, but human blood was mixed with that of the sacrificed animals, which provoked further shame and indignation. It is not clear why these people tell Jesus about the episode. Perhaps it's because Jesus himself was a Galilean and they wanted to warn him, just as they did a bit later regarding the persecution of Herod Antipas, who wanted to kill him. Or maybe they were subtly threatening him, suggesting that if he were reported to the Roman prosecutor, he would suffer the same fate. Or maybe they're just passing along some gossip about the tragedies of others; as the psalm says, people who rejoice in the troubles of others should be ashamed.

But Jesus' answer suggests the presence of something even more serious: a condescending judgment towards the victims, as if they deserved to die so violently while they were at prayer, and as if the brutality of the Romans was a judgment of God on those who were killed. Jesus does not comment on the event, but draws a lesson from the attitude of those who report the sad episode. No one, he says, is authorized to interpret the suffering, illness, accidents, or tragedies of others as a divine punishment for sins committed, but everyone must consider their sins as the worst misfortune and try to

convert with sincere repentance. No one has been given the authority to judge and divide people between “good” and “bad.” Only the Lord knows all the truth of our hearts.

As soon as the news is communicated to him, Jesus immediately rejects the suggestion that there is a causal link between violent death and the gravity of sin. Jesus wants to underline that the incidents do not necessarily reveal the gravity of some hidden sin of the victim. Rather, they are like warnings that remind us that death can always knock, even when we least expect it. This is why we must awaken in everyone the necessity and the urgency of interior conversion, to be accepted and carried out before it is too late. This is why Jesus, rejecting the idea that the Galileans slaughtered by Pilate and the eighteen people crushed by the collapse of the tower of Siloam may be considered more sinful than anyone else, continues his discourse by suggesting that if those who listen to him do not convert their hearts, they might perish in the same way. They should convert not because their repentance would protect them from death, but rather because conversion puts them in a good spiritual and human disposition to meet the Lord of life, in total serenity and peace of heart. The death from which conversion frees us is the eternal one, not the physical one. The image of God at the base of the idea that violent death reveals a serious sin in the victim does not correspond to the Father God revealed by Jesus. This is not a God who takes revenge on sinners, but a patient God who hopes that, given the necessary time, humanity will come to realize how radical is the love with which it is loved, and that this will bear the fruits of fraternal love and solidarity that it should.

In any case, this is the perspective suggested by the parable, the theological point that is dramatized in the story of a landowner, his fig tree, and his gardener. Disappointed by not receiving the fruit that he expected after so many years of care and work, the man decides to cut down his fig tree rather than let it waste the space it was planted in. But, surprisingly, his gardener intervenes, asking to give the fig tree more time, enough to



see whether working the land and adding more fertilizer might help. Jesus doesn't conclude the story, but he seems to suggest that the verdict is suspended, opening the way to hope. If we see ourselves reflected in the image of the fig tree, the good news is that the time of our lives given to us by the Master of the universe gives us an opportunity to let divine grace act and produce its fruits of peace, joy, justice, and love in us. It's a gift, a sort of second chance that leaves little room for error. On the other hand, if we see ourselves in the figure of the gardener, it's a reminder that we must intercede and make efforts toward the conversion of others. As an ecclesial community, it goes without saying that we are called to a two-fold commitment: first, to convert ourselves without ceasing, becoming ever more transparent to the Word of God and docile to the Spirit of love that gives life, and second, to work for the conversion of the world, never obscuring the merciful and patient face of God, Father of Jesus Christ, whose first and only desire is to save and not to condemn. Experience shows that hearts respond more generously when they are shown trust; we do not conquer people for divine love with fear, imprisoning them in their misfortunes. May this pedagogy guide our missionary activity without diminishing its prophetic acuteness or the profound understanding of human nature and the content of salvation.

The image of the fig tree planted in the vineyard suggests, perhaps, that the kingdom of God (the vineyard) is much larger than either Israel or Jerusalem (the fig tree), and that Jesus the Messiah, the divine gardener, came to seek in the Holy City the fruits of mercy, justice, and faithfulness. These are the fruits that God likes, the fruits expected by the "owner of the orchard." But time is running out and the decision to cut down the fig tree is made, because these fruits have not been found. This is also the meaning of the episode of the barren fig tree of Mark (Mk 13:28) and Matthew (Mt 21:18-22; 24:32), which conclude with the curse of the tree.

But surprisingly, in the parable of Luke, it is the gardener who intercedes with the owner, asking him to have a little patience with his fig tree, that

is, to have mercy on Jerusalem. And as if this were not enough, he commits himself to doing everything possible to make this very expensive tree fruitful. Because surely, as the prophet Ezekiel declares in today's Alleluia verse, God takes no pleasure for the death of a wicked person; rather, it is their conversion that he desires, so that they may abandon their wrong path and their life of sin. "Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die, house of Israel?" (Ez 33:11). Unfortunately, the invitation to conversion was not accepted, the warnings were not heard, the signs were not understood, and the time of grace was not embraced. But before the final tragedy of Jerusalem occurred, the Tree of Life itself, Jesus, accepted to be cut down so that, in the end, the root of all evil was torn out and that Tree was planted our hearts, eternally vivifying it with the sap of the Holy Spirit.

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

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**OCTOBER 27, 2019**

Sunday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

Sir 35:15b-17,20-22a

Ps 34:2-3,17-19,23

2 Tm 4:6-8,16-18

Lk 18:9-14

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The teaching of the sage Ben Sirach, heir to the age-old prophetic doctrine of justice and God's preferential love for the poor and the oppressed, leads us to the summits of true biblical spirituality. Deuteronomy warned that God "has no favorites [and] accepts no bribes" (Dt 10:17), as opposed to people, who play favorites based on social, racial, or ideological prejudices at the expense of the lives of the humble. This doctrine was applied broadly by Jesus in his preaching and his work of liberation, as well as by the apostles and evangelists, who featured it in their writings and spread it universally. God, in his infinite mercy, never fails to be present to all those who, aware of their own faults and weaknesses, seek his help and forgiveness. The proud, however, he allows to wander confused in the haughty thoughts of their hearts.

Jesus' parable about the tax collector and the Pharisee demonstrates his way of seeing people, which is God's way of seeing people. He does not judge by appearances, nor according to prejudices, but by what he sees with clarity in the depths of the human heart, discerning the true motivation that generates people's actions and their prayers.

In fact, in the Gospels we first encounter the idea that God has no favorites on the lips of Jesus' adversaries, who, though they were plotting against him, had to publicly acknowledge his perfect moral integrity, saying,

“Teacher, we know that what you say and teach is correct, and you show no partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth” (Lk 20:21; see Mt 22:16). This is the path of God, which Jesus practiced and taught. It is a practice he demonstrated not only in his approach to humble people and those who were excluded and marginalized because they were judged to be sinners, such as prostitutes and publicans, or the impure and accursed, such as lepers, but also in all his work of evangelization, breaking down all barriers of discrimination, whether religious, social, or racial. Jesus, in fact, agreed to listen to the humble request of the Roman centurion and went to his house to heal his servant. Moreover, in his continuous travels as an itinerant Teacher, he visited the Samaritan region and often praised its inhabitants. Going into the pagan territories, he reached the region of Tyre and healed the daughter of a Syro-Phoenician woman. Crossing to the other side of Lake Tiberias, he headed towards the Decapolis and healed people afflicted by various diseases. His repeated crossings of the Sea of Galilee demonstrate Jesus’ lordship over reality, symbolically represented by the sea; he is able to calm its menacing strength and walk over its abyss. The terrifying sea, a negative symbol, no longer functions as a force of separation, but becomes a bridge, and through the ministry of Jesus, it serves as a path toward the reconciliation of the two parts, the Jewish and the pagan.

In the synagogue of Nazareth, where he had presented the program of his ministry, Jesus had challenged his listeners on Israel’s position with regard to the other peoples considered chosen by God. In fact, those present had reacted negatively, condemning his statement about the fulfillment of the prophecies. The examples of Elijah, who was sent to the Phoenician widow, and Elisha, who healed the Syrian leper Naaman, were sufficient to show that God doesn’t play favorites; all creatures are precious in his eyes. As the psalmist says, the Lord is good to all, and his tenderness embraces every creature. He is close to all those who sincerely call upon him. The psalmist does not mention any specific race or nationality, nor status or color of skin. If the love of God permeates all creatures, it is because they are all

his work and, therefore, his is a universal love, full of care for all human beings, without any discrimination.

This does not negate the fact that Israel was chosen by God to enter a special covenant with him. But this election was a function of a specific mission for the good of all peoples, reflecting the presence of the living God in history as the liberator of the oppressed and savior of the human person in all its reality:

You are my witnesses – oracle of the LORD –  
 my servant whom I have chosen  
 To know and believe in me  
 and understand that I am he.  
 Before me no god was formed,  
 and after me there shall be none. (Is 43:10)

God, in fact, has not only chosen his servant but has also formed and instructed him:

I, the LORD, have called you for justice,  
 I have grasped you by the hand;  
 I formed you, and set you  
 as a covenant for the people,  
 a light for the nations,  
 To open the eyes of the blind,  
 to bring out prisoners from confinement,  
 and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness. (Is 42:6-7)

Looking more closely at the teaching of Jesus in his parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee in the Temple, we realize that the difference between the two is precisely what is found in the human heart, laid bare by the presence of God in prayer.

In any case, it is with the intention of praying that the tax collector and the Pharisee go to the Temple, thus finding themselves sharing for a few moments the same sacred place. But the particular way each of them will go about their prayer is what will determine their respective destiny and final spiritual state. The tax collector, having had the humility and sincerity to recognize his unworthiness and sin and to implore God's forgiveness, returns home a better man, transformed inwardly, reconciled. In response to his authentic prayer, divine grace is not withheld. Once again, we learn the truth that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 18:14b).

On the other hand, the Pharisee is a prisoner in his tower of spiritual pride. Too aware of his own meritorious works and of the excellence of his socio-religious class, he believes himself superior and better than all the others, erecting barriers between himself and them, insulting them and despising them. He was perhaps good and pious up to that moment, but the attitude he shows reveals the arrogance in his heart, undermining his alleged virtue from within.

Moreover, we do not approach God in the Temple in order to celebrate and contemplate ourselves in a self-referential pose, looking down at others from above. We stand before God for an encounter of love, and to meet others in him. In this sense, prayer is contemplation of the Lord, a celebration of the wonders that his grace works every day in the bosom of human frailty, and of his indefatigable mercy that lifts up those who have fallen and who want to get up again.

Listening to this parable, the immediate temptation would be to identify ourselves with the tax collector, simply because he occupies the positive place in the story. It's a sign of the subtle human desire to get rid of our conscience. But the parable invites us to look inward to remove all sense of self-sufficiency and contempt for others, in order to find a simple, humble, and fraternal heart that knows how to look upon oneself and upon others with a merciful and hopeful gaze. In this regard, it is often necessary to

question the way we pray. What does it reveal to us about the depth and quality of our hearts? What does it reveal to us about ourselves, about the way we relate to others and the way we perceive them spontaneously in relation to us? What does it reveal to us about our relationship with God and his salvation?

Pope Francis constantly reminds us of the centrality of prayer in relation to the Church and its mission. Prayer is the soul of mission, for the efficacy of one's personal encounter with Christ, the right measures of one's relationship with oneself and with the world in the light of the Holy Spirit, are at the root of the experience of truth that saves. The missionary disciple, thanks to prayer, always includes himself among those in need of the salvation that he is called to announce and, in the sacraments, to communicate. What is certain is that the mission of evangelization entrusted to us as a Church could not be conducted in truth if we adopted a domineering attitude in the ways we relate to others, confident and convinced of our own moral and religious superiority. Mission must be a humble proposal of friendship with Christ, with a profound respect for the religious freedom of the men and women of our age, for their cultures, and for their history. True humility is never the absence of truth. It is rather an effective presence of a truth that judges, forgives, and saves those who proclaim it and those who hear it proclaimed.

October  
2019

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**OCTOBER 28, 2019**

Monday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

*Feast of Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles*

Eph 2:19-22

Ps 19:2-5

Lk 6:12-19

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The liturgy continues the series of feasts of the apostles, reminding us today of two who are almost unknown and whose relics are venerated in the Basilica of St. Peter, near the altar of St. Joseph. Those Twelve, symbol of a whole new people, were called by Jesus not out of consideration for their quality and merit, but, Luke says, from a night of prayer, of intense communion with the Father, as though to draw abundantly from him that Spirit who would be given to those who would be called, making them apostles. Luke, in his Gospel accounts, shows us on numerous occasions how important for Jesus was prayer, that encounter of intimate and loving dialogue with his Heavenly Father.

On some occasions, Luke stops to describe these episodes and even the content of Jesus' prayers, so that each disciple can learn to pray, listening to what the Lord has to say and doing what he commands, rather than merely multiplying useless words to ask God to satisfy all his selfish demands. Authentic Christian prayer is born in God. It motivates our action, transforms our existence, and turns us back to God with feelings of gratitude, filial obedience, self-offering, and solidarity with others. Luke underlines how all the crucial decisions of the life of Jesus were made in a context of prayer, from baptism – or we could even go back to his infancy – up to Gethsemane and the cross.

In today's Gospel reading, we contemplate Jesus spending the whole



night in prayer, because he is about to make a choice that will forever strengthen his bond with his disciples. It is a definitive commitment, because with the Twelve he will establish his messianic community. He will choose the twelve pillars on which he will build, as promised by the prophets, the people of the new covenant, the Church. For this people, and for all humanity, he will shed his blood, consciously and freely, for the forgiveness of sins. The “apostles” – the word that means “sent” – are chosen before Christ’s Passion-Death-Resurrection, but it is only after Easter and Pentecost that their mission will unfold its full potential, fulfilling itself completely. Before this time, though, they are called to be formed and prepared for what awaits them when the Master will be made present in the Spirit. Prayer therefore reveals itself as the soul of mission, that is, the faithful and effective presence of God in the action of his Church for the salvation of the world to which it has been sent.

Pope Benedict XVI had this to say about the faith and vocation of the holy apostles Simon the Cananaean and Jude Thaddaeus in his General Audience of October 11, 2006:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, let us examine two of the Twelve Apostles: Simon the Cananaean and Jude Thaddaeus (not to be confused with Judas Iscariot). Let us look at them together, not only because they are always placed next to each other in the lists of the Twelve (cf. Mt 10:3,4; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13), but also because there is very little information about them, apart from the fact that the New Testament Canon preserves one Letter attributed to Jude Thaddaeus.

Simon is given a nickname that varies in the four lists: while Matthew and Mark describe him as a “Cananaean,” Luke instead describes him as a “Zealot.”

In fact, the two descriptions are equivalent because they mean the same thing: indeed, in Hebrew the verb *qanaʿ* means “to be jealous, ardent” and can be said both of God, since he is jealous with regard to his Chosen People (cf. Ex 20:5),

and of men who burn with zeal in serving the one God with unreserved devotion, such as Elijah (cf. 1 Kgs 19:10).

Thus, it is highly likely that even if this Simon was not exactly a member of the nationalist movement of Zealots, he was at least marked by passionate attachment to his Jewish identity, hence, for God, his People and divine Law.

If this was the case, Simon was worlds apart from Matthew, who, on the contrary, had an activity behind him as a tax collector that was frowned upon as entirely impure. This shows that Jesus called his disciples and collaborators, without exception, from the most varied social and religious backgrounds.

It was people who interested him, not social classes or labels! And the best thing is that in the group of his followers, despite their differences, they all lived side by side, overcoming imaginable difficulties: indeed, what bound them together was Jesus himself, in whom they all found themselves united with one another.

This is clearly a lesson for us who are often inclined to accentuate differences and even contrasts, forgetting that in Jesus Christ we are given the strength to get the better of our continual conflicts.

Let us also bear in mind that the group of the Twelve is the prefiguration of the Church, where there must be room for all charisms, peoples and races, all human qualities that find their composition and unity in communion with Jesus.

Then with regard to Jude Thaddaeus, this is what tradition has called him, combining two different names: in fact, whereas Matthew and Mark call him simply “Thaddaeus” (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18), Luke calls him “Judas, the son of James” (Lk 6:16; Acts 1:13).

The nickname “Thaddaeus” is of uncertain origin and is explained either as coming from the Aramaic, *taddāʾ*, which means “breast” and would therefore suggest “magnanimous,” or as an abbreviation of a Greek name, such as “Teodòro, Teòdoto.”

Very little about him has come down to us. John alone mentions a question he addressed to Jesus at the Last Supper: Thaddaeus says to the Lord: “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world?”

This is a very timely question which we also address to the Lord: why did not the Risen One reveal himself to his enemies in his full glory in order to show that it is God who is victorious? Why did he only manifest himself to his disciples? Jesus' answer is mysterious and profound. The Lord says: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:22-23).

This means that the Risen One must be seen, must be perceived also by the heart, in a way so that God may take up his abode within us. The Lord does not appear as a thing. He desires to enter our lives, and therefore his manifestation is a manifestation that implies and presupposes an open heart. Only in this way do we see the Risen One.

The paternity of one of those New Testament Letters known as "catholic," since they are not addressed to a specific local Church but intended for a far wider circle, has been attributed to Jude Thaddaeus. Actually, it is addressed "to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ" (v. 1).

A major concern of this writing is to put Christians on guard against those who make a pretext of God's grace to excuse their own licentiousness and corrupt their brethren with unacceptable teachings, introducing division within the Church "in their dreamings" (v. 8).

This is how Jude defines their doctrine and particular ideas. He even compares them to fallen angels and, mincing no words, says that "they walk in the way of Cain" (v. 11).

Furthermore, he brands them mercilessly as "waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever" (vv. 12-13). . .

It is easy to see that the author of these lines lived to the full his own faith, to which realities as great as moral integrity and joy, trust and lastly praise belong, since it is all motivated solely by the goodness of our one God and the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, may both Simon the Cananaean and Jude Thaddeus help us to rediscover the beauty of the Christian faith ever anew and to live it without tiring, knowing how to bear a strong and at the same time peaceful witness to it.



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OCTOBER 29, 2019

Tuesday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Rom 8:18-25

Ps 126:1b-6

Lk 13:18-21

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The psalmist, fascinated by the beauty of creation, asked himself:

When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and stars that you set in place –  
What is man that you are mindful of him,  
and a son of man that you care for him? (Ps 8:4-5)

How many times have we been fascinated by the beauty of creation, while contemplating a starry night, sitting along the banks of a river caressed by a light breeze, admiring a sunset or rainbow, or watching children play together happily without regard for race, color, or social class? How many times have we asked ourselves: Why must this marvelous world, which welcomes us and takes care of us only for a short period, suffer such violence at our own hands? Why can't we live in peace and harmony, making our common home a haven of fraternal coexistence, a pleasant place for everyone? How much nonsense in human projects!

In today's passage taken from the Letter to the Romans, Paul seems to indicate a deep and mysterious bond that unites humanity to all other creatures, a bond that makes humanity the spokesperson of the whole divine work of creation, and also its caretaker. The whole universe finds in humanity its consciousness and through humanity makes itself known

and gradually reveals its countless magnificent secrets. The Apostle relies on the long biblical tradition that sees humanity as the interpreter of the praise that all creation raises to its Lord, nature, living beings, and all the elements of the whole world, including time and space.

The biblical writers, women and men who followed each other over the centuries, used many literary forms to talk about the world and its creatures, as they were known, of course, in their time. They expressed themselves poetically, with psalms or hymns, songs and doxologies, personifications and stories, but always with a gaze of faith, with awe and gratitude for the goodness of all that God called into existence through the power of his Word. For this reason, all creation is imprinted with the Word of the Creator and manifests something of divine glory and its infinite beauty, something of its tender and innocent love, something of its wisdom and intelligence, which pervades the whole, uniting harmoniously in one silent symphony of multifaceted life!

But the creative activity of God is not yet finished, for the Creator Father has never ceased to be present in the world and in the history of humanity, giving life and hope, guiding the destiny of nations and preparing for them a marvelous future, a world with new heavens and a new earth. In all the major events in the history of Israel (the promise to the patriarchs, the liberation from Egypt, the kings, the prophetic preaching, the exile, the return, the messianic hope, the study of the word by the sages) we perceive the presence of God and the initiative God has undertaken to make these events happen. We can therefore say that the water of God's grace flows in the river of human history. It is with immense love, paternal pedagogy, and maternal sweetness that he progressively reveals, through facts and words, his plan of salvation that involves the whole creation. Thus Isaiah describes the joy of the universe in the liberation of his people:

Raise a glad cry, you heavens – the LORD has acted!  
Shout, you depths of the earth.

Break forth, mountains, into song,  
 forest, with all your trees.  
 For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,  
 shows his glory through Israel. (Is 44:23)

The liberating intervention of the Lord makes history, despite the stubbornness and rebellion of humanity, a history of salvation, which will surely succeed because it depends on his eternal love, his infinite power, and his proven faithfulness. This is authentic Christian hope.

Though humanity turns away from God and wants to get rid of him, trying to take God's place and to possess the world, sowing war, hatred, and destruction in a continuous attempt to prevail over others, God continues to guide the world, bringing order from chaos, fertility from sterility, communion from solitude, and unity from division. He does this by choosing people, illuminating their hearts, distributing gifts and talents to them, and strengthening their will to do good. Throughout their history, God's people have nurtured their trust in the love of God and in the plan for salvation. It is Isaiah, once again, who revives this hope:

See, I am creating new heavens  
 and a new earth;  
 The former things shall not be remembered  
 nor come to mind.  
 Instead, shout for joy and be glad forever  
 in what I am creating.  
 Indeed, I am creating Jerusalem to be a joy  
 and its people to be a delight. (Is 65:17-18)

Starting from the Paschal Mystery, in which all the light of God's power and faithful love shines, Paul can contemplate in hope the glorious end of history, with the participation of all creation. Sown in our hearts, it is

the dynamism of the kingdom that develops towards its fullness. Mixed with our humanity, it is the leaven of the Word that makes us act like a new creation. The Spirit help us to desire, to be actively engaged, and to await with perseverance the manifestation of the glory promised to the children of God.

Sister Earth, Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'* (n. 2),

now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22).

A serious and proactive Christian critique of modern anthropocentrism, usurper of God's creative role, destroyer of the communion between man and woman and of the peaceful relations between human communities and peoples, is the real concern of the Holy Father's encyclical letter on creation. To reduce it to a generic invitation to protect nature and the planet is to empty it of its critical and constructive force, which comes from faith in Jesus Christ, center of the cosmos and of history. The renewing fulfillment of creation in the Passover of Jesus manifests how much care and love God pours upon his works, which he will never allow to fall into the void of the destruction by our sin.

And if the contemplation of nature is fascinating, it is even more enchanting to contemplate this story of salvation, the story of a divine love that never surrenders, that conquers our sin and makes us proclaim with joy: “The LORD has done great things for us; / Oh, how happy we were!” (Ps 126:3).



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**OCTOBER 30, 2019**

Wednesday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Rom 8:26-30

Ps 13:4-6

Lk 13:22-30

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It is the Holy Spirit who gathers us into the cry of all creation and of all humanity thirsting for salvation. Distracted by the daily concerns of life, we do not know what is really essential to ask. And so the Spirit nourishes in us the question and hope of the true good that God has prepared for us. The Christian opens her heart to the Spirit, who transforms the entire universe's thirst for salvation into urgent invocation and expectation. The Father will not impose himself as a necessary solution, but he will fulfill this powerful desire of our hearts, which is like a long-awaited meeting of love. Created with such a longing, its satisfaction happens through invocation and free adhesion.

Our sin and our death are brought by the Holy Spirit into the divine communion of the Father and the Son. God, in his infinite and superabundant love, burns up within himself every form of evil, brings it back to its creaturely origin of good and truth, opening the door of salvation for all. "For those who stand by Jesus, evil is an incentive to ever greater love," Pope Francis wrote in his Message for World Mission Day 2018. Salvation, the fruit of Christ's victory on the cross thanks to the Easter of resurrection, becomes the content, the motive, the endpoint, and the method of every missionary commitment of his Church sent into the world.

Are there few who are saved (see Lk 13:23)? This was a very controversial question in Jesus' day and, perhaps, even today. And will we, whether

simple or great, be among the blessed? The theme of salvation is central to Luke and is in the foreground in his Gospel. In fact, it is present even in the stories of Jesus' childhood: in the Magnificat, Mary rejoices in the Lord, whom she calls her savior (see Lk 1:47); to the shepherds, the angel announces, "Today in the city of David a savior has been born for you" (Lk 2:11); he is the "horn for our salvation" warmly welcomed by Zechariah in his Canticle, for he came to save his people from their enemies and to bring them the forgiveness of sins (see Lk 1:7-79). Jesus himself is the salvation that Luke announces with joy in his Gospel, the "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (see Lk 2:32), as he likes to call him, citing Isaiah (Is 42:6; 49:6). This title corresponds perfectly to the new dawn of humanity, which begins when "the daybreak from on high" appears (Lk 1:78).

Human life is exposed to many threats: time, sickness, discrimination, oppression, hunger, death. Did Jesus have the power to save humanity? Paradoxically, Jerusalem closed her eyes so as not to see its light and the signs of God's salvation. These signs, in fact, were present in the evangelizing work of Jesus, as Luke emphasizes by using the term "save" even when referring to physical healing, as in the case of the woman who suffered from hemorrhages ("Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace," Lk 8:48), the leper ("Stand up and go; your faith has saved you," Lk 17:19), the blind man of Jericho ("Have sight; your faith has saved you," Lk 18:42), and the daughter of Jairus ("Do not be afraid; just have faith and she will be saved," Lk 8:50).

This characteristic is found in two other episodes: in the case of the forgiven sinner, to whom Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Lk 7:50) and in the conversion of the rich and corrupt Zacchaeus, after which Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham" (Lk 19:9). All these signs, however, require that the sick person, the sinner, and each person open themselves in faith to the ultimate dimension of salvation. Cures reveal the integral salvation brought by Jesus and accomplished in his Paschal Mystery. So the evangelist

speaks of a salvation that requires a change in the heart; repentance and conversion are necessary, accepting the Good News.

Jesus' response to the person who questions him on whether only a few people will be saved is remarkably complete and revealing, while opening a window on the horizon of human history. The Lord uses the metaphor of the narrow door to indicate the challenge facing those who want to enter into the promised salvation and the parable of the banquet of the kingdom to designate the criteria that allow the guests to enter the house of God.

To those who declare, "We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets" (Lk 13:26), the "master of the house" replies, twice, that he does not know where they come from. It is a terrible and unexpected condemnation against those who practice injustice with the claim of being his own and to have the right to salvation. The urgency of conversion in the "today" of our life is made clear in an extremely dramatic way. Many rich people have found Jesus, listened to his preaching, talked with him, and even invited him to dinner at home. But how many of them have accepted his request for conversion and solidarity with the poor, as did Zacchaeus?

The parable warns about the end result of the life choice of the insensitive and corrupt rich. "Woe to you who are rich" (Lk 6:24), Jesus had warned. Alerted, then, to the danger of wealth, which can prevent entry into the kingdom, the listeners ask, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" The evangelist leaves no room for ambiguity. Those who imagine that the mere knowledge of the historical Jesus and his doctrine, or participation in his meals and liturgical practices, are a guarantee of salvation, even if they live in the sins of rejecting God, corruption, exploitation, or any kind of injustice, are very deceived. There is no compatibility between lack of faith, injustice, and salvation. All are called, Jews and pagans, but for all there is the same need to go through the narrow door. The violation of justice and human rights can close to us the door of the kingdom. The doorway is narrow, but it has not been closed yet. The door may yet be narrow

(see Lk 13:24), but since Christ himself is the door of the Father (see Jn 10:7,9), the hope of being able to enter and be saved becomes stronger.

Luke warns us that this also applies to Christians. In fact, the title “Lord” given to Jesus in the parable is used only by those who recognize the saving power of this name. Jesus’ warning is therefore also addressed to the ecclesial community, so that it does not make the mistake of presuming the guarantee of election, rather than following Jesus on the path of faith, hope, love, and justice. The rule remains valid: even those who are far from home, the last ones, the marginalized, the sinners, those of different culture and religion can become, with the practice of love and justice, the guests of honor at the feast of the kingdom.



Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

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**OCTOBER 31, 2019**

Thursday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time

*Weekday*

Rom 8:31b-39

Ps 109:21-22,26-27,30-31

Lk 13:31-35

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As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the word of God accompanies us in the ascent of Jesus to Jerusalem, where the Lord will celebrate his “exodus,” that is, the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. He had already encountered and bravely overcome many obstacles and dangers along the way, from the attempt of his fellow citizens of Nazareth to push him down from the top of the hill to the threat of death by Herod Antipas. Being sought by Herod in Galilee is just another persecution, and it will not be the last. Knowing that something even more terrible is waiting for him further on, in the holy city, confirming the sad tradition of the impiety of Jerusalem, Jesus does not turn away. No threat can prevent him from moving forward to face the appointed day or make his determination falter in carrying out the plan of salvation that the Father entrusted to him.

Many prophets and righteous men had already denounced in Samaria and Jerusalem the sins and crimes of the political and religious authorities of Israel. Almost all those who were sent suffered persecution and death. The murder of John the Baptist was only the latest in a long series of crimes committed.

Jesus does not need revelations or extraordinary visions to know what would happen if he interfered with the powerful of the city of Jerusalem, the city of the Lord God, the great King; the city that belonged to him by right, as the Alleluia verse proclaims: “Blessed is the king who comes

in the name of the Lord” (Lk 19:38). He came in peace, full of maternal tenderness to gather and save his children, like a hen protects its nest under its wings. He came to forgive and save his people, despite the many sin of the past. All that is needed from them, and from all of us, is the fruit of a sincere conversion – the practice of faith in God and justice.

But what if the conversion does not happen? What if he were rejected and persecuted like the prophets? And if his audacity would lead to stoning or death on a cross, would it be worth it? Why should anyone take this risk and put his life in the hands of notoriously corrupt and cruel men? The apostle Paul has only one answer: because of the power of his love for us. Everything, absolutely everything that God could have done to show us his love, he did by sending us his Son. How can we still doubt God’s saving love, after all that his Son has done for us sinners?

The Book of Wisdom already prophesied the final victory of the righteous for the love of God and of his eternal fidelity, saying: “If to others, indeed, they seem punished, yet is their hope full of immortality” (Wis 3:4). What the sage proclaimed is that the righteous who undergo trials are found worthy of God because they trust in his love until the end, until death. Therefore, it is not in earthly prosperity or in being spared from tribulation that divine blessing and reward is manifested, but in the glory of eternal life, which is received by not having doubted his love and his promises, even in the most difficult trials.

Now that this experience has received confirmation and has become a reality in Christ, Paul cannot contain the voice of the Spirit that cries in his heart, raising his song of praise to the unspeakable mystery of God’s love for us. His hymn, full of intense lyricism, which we hear in the first reading, is perhaps the most poetic synthesis of the Gospel of God, the Gospel of his Son, the Gospel of Christ, the Good News announced by the Apostle to all, Jews and pagans, with unswerving determination and untiring dedication, so that everyone can be fruitful in salvation through the obedience of faith. This hymn provides Paul’s answer to Jesus’ question to the disciples, “Who

do you say that I am?" Jesus is the Son of God who gave himself for all of us, the living proof, eternally shining, of the incorruptible love of God the Father for all of us, for all of humanity, and for all of creation.

Pope Francis writes:

This transmission of the faith, the heart of the Church's mission, comes about by the infectiousness of love, where joy and enthusiasm become the expression of a newfound meaning and fulfilment in life. The spread of the faith "by attraction" calls for hearts that are open and expanded by love. It is not possible to place limits on love, for love is strong as death (cf. Song 8:6). And that expansion generates encounter, witness, proclamation; it generates sharing in charity with all those far from the faith, indifferent to it and perhaps even hostile and opposed to it. Human, cultural and religious settings still foreign to the Gospel of Jesus and to the sacramental presence of the Church represent the extreme peripheries, the "ends of the earth", to which, ever since the first Easter, Jesus' missionary disciples have been sent, with the certainty that their Lord is always with them (cf. Mt 28:20; Acts 1:8). This is what we call the *missio ad gentes*. The most desolate periphery of all is where mankind, in need of Christ, remains indifferent to the faith or shows hatred for the fullness of life in God. All material and spiritual poverty, every form of discrimination against our brothers and sisters, is always a consequence of the rejection of God and his love. (Message for World Mission Day 2018)

Christ is the love that dwells forever in us and awakens those who sleep in the sleep of death, the love that is with us from the beginning of our story until the end of time and beyond, that descends into the depths and enters the heavens, that saves us from all fear and slavery and from every enemy and oppressor, that liberates us in the glory of life in communion. He is the love that strengthens us, makes us confident, audacious, invincible, not only towards human and visible enemies, but also before invisible spirits, because God is with us. The accusation against us has been withdrawn; sin

has been forgiven; love has conquered hatred; injustice has been defeated. Affliction and anguish have received their consolation; the abyss has been leveled and the heights have descended towards us; death has given way to life and time has opened its doors to eternity. In his Son Jesus, the love and fidelity of the God of life have been demonstrated. Now, nothing and nobody can ever separate us from this Love. The time has also come for us to raise our voices with joy, saying, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” – he who comes for our salvation.





# HOMILIES AND ANGELUS REFLECTIONS OF POPE FRANCIS<sup>1</sup>

## **October 1, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*

“The humility and strength of the Gospel,” Tuesday, October 1, 2013

## **October 2, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*

“The angel and the child,” Friday, October 2, 2015

## **October 3, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*

“The joy of Christian memory,” Thursday, October 3, 2013

## **October 4, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*

“The grace of penitence,” Friday, October 6, 2017

## **October 5, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*

“The strength of the little ones,” Tuesday, November 29, 2016

## **October 6, 2019**

Apostolic Journey to Georgia and Azerbaijan (September 30 - October 2,

<sup>1</sup> Meditations by Pope Francis on the Lectionary readings of the days of October 2019 can be found in the following preaching and teaching (2013-2018). The texts can all be found on the website [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

2016), Mass in the Church of the Immaculate, Homily of the Holy Father, Sunday, October 2, 2016

**October 7, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Those who pass others by,” Monday, October 9, 2017 [missing from the English version of the Vatican website]

**October 8, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Mercy first and foremost,” Tuesday, October 6, 2015

**October 9, 2019**

General Audience, St. Peter’s Square, Wednesday, October 9, 2013

**October 10, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Courageous prayer,” Thursday, October 10, 2013

**October 11, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Vigilant against worldliness,” Friday, October 13, 2017

**October 12, 2019**

Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV

**October 13, 2019**

Mass, Homily of the Holy Father, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, October 13, 2013

**October 14, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“The Jonah Syndrome,” Monday, October 14, 2013

**October 15, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Love of God and neighbour conquers idolatry and hypocrisy,”  
Tuesday, October 15, 2013

**October 16, 2019**

General Audience, St. Peter's Square, Wednesday, October 16, 2013

**October 17, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Disciples of the Lord and not of ideology,” Thursday, October 17, 2013

**October 18, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“The eve of the Apostle's life,” Friday, October 18, 2013

**October 19, 2019**

General Audience, Paul VI Audience Hall, Wednesday, December 28, 2016

**October 20, 2019**

Mass, Homily of the Holy Father, St. Peter's Square, Sunday, October 16, 2016

**October 21, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“How and how much,” Monday, October 19, 2015

**October 22, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Contemplation, closeness, abundance,” Tuesday, October 22, 2013

**October 23, 2019**

Angelus, St. Peter's Square, Sunday, August 11, 2013

**October 24, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Logic of before and after,” Thursday, October 24, 2013

**October 25, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“The grace of being ashamed,” Friday, October 25, 2013

**October 26, 2019**

Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Introduction, Section III,  
“The new evangelization for the transmission of the faith”

**October 27, 2019**

Mass, Homily of the Holy Father, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, October 27,  
2013

**October 28, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“A special day,” Monday, October 28, 2013

**October 29, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“If pastoral care lacks courage,” Tuesday, October 31, 2017

**October 30, 2019**

Angelus, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, August 25, 2013

**October 31, 2019**

Morning meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*  
“Like a mother hen,” Thursday, October 29, 2015

## PART TWO

### MISSION TESTIMONIES

“Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church.”

(*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 9)

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019



EXTRAORDINARY MISSIONARY MONTH OCTOBER 2019

Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world



## SAINT THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS (1873-1897)

Thérèse Martin was born in Alençon, France, on January 2, 1873, to Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin, who were canonized together in 2015. After the death of her mother on August 28, 1877, Thérèse moved with her family to the city of Lisieux. Some extraordinary graces accompanied Thérèse's human and spiritual maturation and allowed her to grow in her awareness of the infinite Mercy of God that is offered to every person. On the day of Pentecost in 1883, she had the unique grace of being healed from a serious illness; through the intercession of Our Lady of Victories. In 1884, she received her First Communion and at that time experienced the grace of intimate union with Christ.

Thérèse had a great desire to follow her sisters, Pauline and Marie, into the Carmel of Lisieux to live a contemplative life. While on a pilgrimage to Italy, during an audience that Pope Leo XIII granted to the faithful of the Diocese of Lisieux, she boldly implored the Holy Father to obtain permission to enter Carmel at the age of fifteen. Having obtained his permission, Thérèse entered the monastery in 1888 and professed her vows on September 8, 1890.

Her journey of holiness was strengthened by trusting God during moments of great trial, to which she gave witness in her writings, letters, and prayers. Her teaching is also evident in poems and small theatrical performances written for recreation with the sisters. As a collaborator in the formation of novices, she undertook transmitting her spiritual experiences condensed into *The Little Way of Spiritual Childhood*. She also received the task of accompanying two "missionary brothers" through her sacrifice and

prayer, an opportunity to live out the apostolic and missionary vocation that drove her to bring as many people as she could to encounter the Lord who is so thirsty for souls.

On April 3, 1896, during the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, Thérèse experienced a first manifestation of the illness that would eventually lead to her death. During this period, she focused definitively on her vocation to be a beating heart within the Church that is loved, loves, and generates love. As her state of health deteriorated, she was transferred to the infirmary. Earlier, during her dark night of faith she would affirm that “I am not dying, but entering into life” And so on September 30, 1897, at the tender age of 24, she expired saying, “My God...I love you.”

Canonized by Pius XI on May 17, 1925, she was proclaimed the universal patroness of the missions two years later, together with Saint Francis Xavier. On October 19, 1997, St. John Paul II proclaimed her a Doctor of the Church. Her liturgical feast is celebrated on October 1.

In St. Thérèse’s autobiographical writing, *The Story of a Soul: Manuscript C*, she describes the force with which God attracted her into the vortex of union with Himself: “I understand, Lord, that when a soul allows herself to be captivated by the odor of your ointments, she cannot run alone, all the souls whom she loves follow in her train; this is done without constraint, without effort, it is a natural consequence of her attraction for You. Just as a torrent, throwing itself with impetuosity into the ocean, drags after it everything it encounters in its passage, in the same way, O Jesus, the soul who plunges into the shoreless ocean of Your Love, draws with her all the treasures she possesses. Lord, You know it, I have no other treasures than the souls it has pleased You to unite to mine” (*Story of a Soul: Manuscript C*, 334-335).

The ardor of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face was lit and nourished by a life of union with her Lord through incessant prayer, meditation on his Word, the sacramental life, and the community of her



sisters in the monastery. Contemplation was a way to develop a deeper compassion for all realities. Those who make themselves an absolute possession of God also become God's gift to everyone, and their existence, entirely and freely given to the service of divine praise, proclaims and diffuses the primacy of God and the transcendence of the human person created in his image and likeness. The ardor of this great little saint is expressed by her total trust in God and in her desire to share her experience of encounter with God with everyone else, in a universal embrace of communion. She saw that trust in God was a powerful means of conversion; living to respond to Jesus' desire to be loved, she wanted to love him and make him loved, to offer him love for Love. Thérèse's greatest desire, holiness, is inseparable from her desire for the salvation of all people, with particular attention to the poorest. The special apostolate that a contemplative lives within the four walls of her monastery mark out a space reserved exclusively for the Lord and is linked to the heart of the mystical body of Christ, a heart that loves and transmits love, allowing each one to live their specific charism, mission, identity, in service of the Kingdom.

A life offered to God in union with the sacrifice of Calvary obtains the grace to be able to serve Him with fidelity, creativity, and energy spent on behalf of all – this is the fundamental truth in which pastoral care of souls and missionary work are rooted. It is a fusion of active and contemplative life that takes place in the heart of one who responds to the Lord's call and develops in the mystical body of Christ, in which the various members harmonize their specific mission, sustaining and mutually enriching each other. This is how even a place reserved exclusively for praise of the Lord, the cloistered monastery, becomes suitable for missionary work, as a place of intercession and of prayerful and fraternal participation in missionary efforts.

"I would want to preach the Gospel on all the five continents simultaneously and even to the most remote isles. I would be a missionary, not

for a few years only but from the beginning of creation until the consummation of the ages. But above all, O my Beloved Savior, I would shed my blood for You even to the very last drop...Martyrdom was the dream of my youth [...], but I cannot confine myself to desiring one kind of martyrdom. To satisfy me I need all [...] Jesus, if I wanted to write all my desires, I would have to borrow Your Book of Life, for in it are reported all the actions of all the saints, and I would accomplish all of them for You" (*Story of a Soul: Manuscript B*, 251-252).

Thérèse willingly offered her sufferings to support the vocations and works of missionaries, and she gave explanations to her sisters who observed her efforts without understanding the strong motivations that led her to them. Thérèse exhausted herself in life, but her great zeal led her to express the desire not to rest even after death. She desired to continue living her mission to help her brothers and sisters and to bring them to Love, with even more determination once her soul was united to her Lord.

In the exchanging of letters with her spiritual missionary brothers, she underlined how the apostolic weapons given to them by the Lord Jesus would be used with greater ease by virtue of the prayer and love made available to them by her. She insisted on the beauty of the Little Way and had traveled to get to the Heart of the Lord, bringing with her all the missionaries and souls entrusted to them. In a prayer that was particularly rich in scriptural references, Thérèse addressed God:

"O my Jesus! I thank you for having fulfilled one of my greatest desires, that of having a brother, a priest, an apostle [...] You know, Lord, that my only ambition is to make you known and loved. Now my desire will be realized. I can only pray and suffer, but the soul to whom you unite me by the sweet bonds of charity will go and fight in the plain to win hearts for you, while on the mountain of Carmel I will pray that you give him victory.

"Divine Jesus, hear the prayer I offer you for him who wants to be your Missionary. Keep him safe amid the dangers of the world. Make

him feel increasingly the nothingness and vanity of passing things and the happiness of being able to despise them for your love. May he carry out his sublime apostolate with those around him. May he be an apostle worthy of your Sacred Heart” (*Prayer of 1895*).



## SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER (1506-1552)

St. Francis Xavier is known as the greatest missionary saint of the modern age, so much so that Benedict XV, in his Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (1919), compared him to the apostles. Francis Xavier was born on April 7, 1506, in the castle of Xavier in Navarre, Spain, and died on December 3, 1552, on Shangchuan Island, 14 kilometers off of mainland China. He was one of the first companions of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and together with Ignatius, Teresa of Avila, and Philip Neri, he was canonized by Gregory XV in 1622, the same year the Pope created the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*de Propaganda Fide*), known today as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In 1748 Pope Benedict XIV declared him *Patron of the East* and in 1904, Pius X named him *Patron of the Propagation of the Faith*. Finally, in 1927, with St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Pius XI proclaimed him *Patron of the Missions* (*San Francesco Saverio: Le lettere e altri documenti*, edited by A. Caboni, Città Nuova, Rome 1991, 35). He is therefore one of the most significant figures of the Tridentine Church, sometimes defined as “a Church for souls.”

The life and work of Francis Xavier are situated in a time marked by the reform of the Church, the struggle against Protestantism, and the mission *ad gentes* that began in the wake of the great oceanic journeys by Europeans of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These resulted in a new understanding of world geography and a missionary springtime on the threshold of the modern age. In this context, Francis Xavier carried out a gargantuan evangelizing effort that garnered him the title of *Apostle of*

*India and Japan*, which can only be adequately understood and appreciated in the light of the living and travel conditions of that period. In fact, from 1541 to 1552, this great missionary saint traveled over 63,000 kilometers by sea and on land in the countries he evangelized.

The life of Francis Xavier unfolded in two stages. The first was the European stage from 1506 to 1541, which was marked by his encounter in Paris with Ignatius, who would often repeat Jesus' words: "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his life?" (Mt 16:26). Ignatius soon convinced Francis to be among his first companions of the great adventure that became the Society of Jesus. The second stage, from 1541 to 1552, consisted of his Asian missionary journeys characterized by an apostolate that was totally devoted to the mission *ad gentes*. He passed through India (1541-1545), then the Moluccan Islands (1545-1549), and Japan (1549-1552), until his death on the island of Shangchuan, not far from the coast of mainland China, worn out by his relentless and tireless efforts in bearing witness to Christ. Through him the "spectacle of holiness" reached lands and peoples who were not yet known to the Church, where the proclamation of the Gospel would be heard for the first time, and the peoples could welcome the gift of universal salvation that comes from faith in the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Xavier's relationship with Ignatius and the experience of friendship in Christ among the first members of the Society of Jesus are the two first and permanent elements that marked Francis' spiritual continence. In fact, the permanent centrality of the Person of Jesus Christ is foundational for the Society of Jesus, so called because there was no one to direct its members, except the Person of Jesus Christ whom they wanted to serve exclusively. It follows, therefore, that the living presence of the Risen Christ among those who live in friendship with him and with each other – a reality that marked the Society of Jesus in a particular manner – is indissolubly linked to belonging to the Body of Christ in history, which as a whole is the Church guided by the Pope as successor of Peter.

Francis' spirituality and missionary activity were, in fact, based on what St. Paul experienced in his missionary journeys: "For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer" (2 Cor 5: 14-16).

Naturally, all this happened in the concrete context in which Francis lived and carried out his apostolate. From his letters, it is possible to glean important details. For example, in a letter dated October 28, 1542, Francis writes to Ignatius saying: "When I arrived in these places, I baptized all the children not yet baptized, imparting the sacrament to a great multitude of babies too young to know the difference between their right and left. As soon as I arrived in the villages, the children would not let me recite the office, eat, or sleep until I first taught them some prayers. Then I began to understand why the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.... I have seen great talents among them and if someone taught them the Holy Faith, I am sure they would be good Christians" (Caboni, *San Francesco Saverio*, 102-103).

"Here, where I am, many neglect to become Christians because there is practically no one concerned with taking care of godly matters. And so I am often tempted to go to universities in your part of the world, especially to the University of Paris, and cry out like a man that has lost his senses to the members of the Sorbonne, who have so much knowledge but don't seem to want to make it flower: 'How many souls are prevented from entering paradise and are condemned to hell because of your negligence!'" (Caboni, *San Francesco Saverio*, 110-111).

Such texts make clear that the spirituality of this saint is inseparable from his apostolate for the salvation of souls, an apostolate made up of itinerant journeys, kerygmatic preaching, basic catechetical instruction,

and acquiring knowledge of the place and sharing in its conditions of life, even where there was extreme poverty. His apostolate was characterized by an “affable manner, full of understanding and respect for all the people who approached him, [which] was certainly one of its most beautiful and attractive human gifts, but it certainly served to hide, under a veil of reserve and in the best of ways, that intense spiritual life and that intimate union with God that burned in his heart” (Caboni, *San Francesco Saverio*, 38).

One should also add to his missionary experience moments of suffering and trial. In a letter dated April 9, 1552, Francis wrote to Ignatius about his experience in Japan. “As for the experience I have of Japan, for the Fathers who will go there to fructify souls, especially those who go to the University, two things are necessary beforehand: the first is that they have been put to the test and have been persecuted in the world, and that they have a lot of experience and a lot of interior knowledge of themselves, since in Japan they will be persecuted more than they may have ever been in Europe. It is a cold land with there are few garments. They will not sleep in beds because there are none. Food is scarce. They despise foreigners, especially those who go to preach the law of God, until they come to taste God themselves. The priests of the local religion in Japan will persecute them continuously. I also don’t think that those who will go to the University will be able to bring the things necessary to celebrate Mass because of the many thieves present in the places where they will go. Among the many pains and tribulations they will have to face is the lack of consolation from the celebration of the Mass and of the spiritual strength given to those who receive the Lord. In fact the virtue that is required by the Fathers who will go the Universities of Japan is CHARITY!” (Caboni, *San Francesco Saverio*, 422).

Notwithstanding all of these challenges, Xavier lived through the hardships, pain, suffering and trials in peace with trust and joy that came from the grace of God, which he often refers to in his writings. He was also greatly helped by the witness of authentic and faithful friendship he experienced in the letters he received from Ignatius and his friends. The

love of Christ, which was manifested to him in Paris in the encounter with Ignatius, was the experience that accompanied Francis and expressed itself through his person and his life dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel and to the salvation of the men and women that he met in the Far East in the first half of the sixteenth century.





## SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI (1182-1226)

In 1206, Francis Bernardone, the son of a rich merchant from Assisi, Italy, began a journey of profound conversion that radically changed the tenor of his life. From being a carefree and vain young man, he became a sincere and impassioned seeker of God. About two years later, in his beloved little church of Saint Mary of the Angels, listening to the Gospel passage on Jesus' sending of his disciples, Francis was struck hard. When he heard that the apostles should not possess gold, silver, or money, but only preach the kingdom of God and repentance, he exclaimed joyfully, "This I want, this I ask, this I yearn to do with all my heart" (*Vita Prima di Tommaso da Celano*, 22: *Fonti Francescane* [FF], 356). The Gospel showed him the way and drove him to mission.

His conversion matured when, in the church of San Damiano, he heard the crucifix speak to him the divine will that he restore the Lord's house, which lay in ruins. The image of the crucifix became for him the mirror in which the faces of all crucified people were reflected. Francis literally put into practice the words of the Gospel, stripping himself of all material goods, even clothes. In a symbolic gesture, bishop Guido covered him with an episcopal cloak in the square of Assisi, meaning that the bishop would protect him from that moment forward.

As soon as Francis had formed his first group of eight companions, he sent them to four corners of the world to proclaim the word of God. He was well aware that God had entrusted a universal mission to his community, and he sought the recognition of the Supreme Pontiff. This global evangelizing sensibility was also expressed in the meeting between Francis

and Cardinal Ugolino. Contrary to the rapid and chaotic expansion of the Order, Francis said, “Do not think, sir, that the Lord sent brothers only for the good of our regions. I tell you in truth that God has chosen and sent brothers for the spiritual good and the salvation of the souls of the people of the whole world; they will be received not only in the Christian lands, but also in those of the non-believers” (*Leggenda perugina*, 82: FF, 1638).

The proclamation of the Gospel was a natural consequence of the total adhesion of Francis to Jesus Christ. The Christological criterion was decisive for the “Poverello” (Poor Fellow) in moments of doubt and perplexity. The *sequela Christi* implied not only poverty, itinerancy, and fraternity, but also missionary commitment. Francis ardently desired to dedicate himself to apostolic work, even if it meant the sacrifice of himself in the manner of Jesus. The yearning to achieve conformity with the Lord gave rise to the idea of bringing the Good News to non-believers.

After two unsuccessful attempts to reach the Holy Land and Morocco (1212-1215) and after sending Brother Egidio to Tunis and Brother Elias to Palestine, Francis joined the crusading expedition and arrived in Egypt in 1219. In the Christian camp in the city of Damietta, on the Nile delta, he served as a spiritual assistant and took care of wounded soldiers. During a ceasefire, Francis and Brother Illuminato went to the Muslim camp and asked for an audience with the sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. “To the Saracens who had taken him prisoner along the way, he repeated, ‘I am a Christian. Lead me to your lord.’ When Francis was brought before him, observing the appearance of a man of God, the cruel beast was changed into a gentle man, and for several days he listened to Francis with great attention as he preached Christ before him and his people.” (Giacomo da Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis* 14: FF 2227). Al-Malik al-Kamil, whom several contemporary sources agree was a wise and generous man, welcomed the brothers with courtesy and benevolence. Francis did not limit himself to exchange cordialities, but with simplicity, frankness, and strength he professed the Christian faith and announced the *kerygma* of salvation in Christ. Unlike

the words of many Christians and even papal addresses of that time, the “Poverello” did not use offensive language when speaking of the Muslim faith, nor did he attack the religious sensitivity of his interlocutor. The objective of his mission, however, remained well defined, and that was to convert the sultan and then – according to the practice of medieval missionaries – also the people subject to him. Some sources recount that when his fervid preaching did not bring the desired results, Francis resorted to another approach and proposed a trial by fire as the ultimate verification of his words. The sultan, seeing the panic and the anger of his advisors, did not accept the challenge, but he was deeply impressed by the friar’s faith and courage. His presence and his spiritual discourses revealed another face of Christianity and brought to light a lively and sincere experience of God. Francis’ journey to the East was apparently unsuccessful, since he did not convert the sultan and did not obtain the palm of martyrdom. However, the “Poverello” earned a friend and entrusted his Order with the task of continuing the mission and peaceful dialogue with the Islamic world. His lived experience allowed him, after returning home, to develop a missionary project for his Order with particular attention to the Muslim brothers.

Francis’ absence from Italy caused a crisis in the government of the community of brothers. The young order with an international character urgently needed precise and effective juridical regulation. Francis was the first founder of a religious order who had inserted an entire section dedicated to the missions into its legislation. Chapter XVI of the *Regula non bullata*, written in 1221, is a true “treatise on missionary methodology” and together with chapter XII of the *Regula bullata*, approved in 1223 by Pope Honorius III, lays out a program that is valid for all the friars. For the first time, the proclamation of the Gospel was not just a task of individual charismatic personalities, but the whole Franciscan Order was encouraged to follow concrete operational guidelines for carrying out the mission.

The novelty of the missionary plan conceived by Francis manifests itself in the title of chapter XVI of the *Regula non bullata*: “Regarding those who

go among the Saracens and the other non-believers.” While at that time the crusaders were “against” (*contra*) the Muslims, the “Poverello” sent his friars not only “to” (*ad*) them, but even “among” (*inter*) them. The creation of a Western colony was completely foreign to the Franciscan spirit. The prerequisites for effective missionary activities were solidarity and friendship with the local people and knowledge of Islamic culture. Later Francis presented two ways of behaving as missionaries in the Muslim territory: “One way is for them not to engage in quarrels or disputes, but to be made subject to every human creature for the love of God and to profess that they are Christians. The other way is that, when they see it pleases the Lord, missionaries announce the Word of God so that the non-believers come to believe in God Almighty, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, Creator of all things, and in the Son Redeemer and Savior, and are baptized, and become Christians” (*Regula non bullata*, Chapter XVI, 7-10: FF 43). In this passage we see a new and original missionary strategy of Francis. Given top priority is the witness of one’s life animated by love of God. One’s mere presence must be meaningful and eloquent. The example of fraternity is the most effective and credible method of evangelization. The brothers must therefore renounce all claims of superiority and domination, respect the different customs, and insert themselves, as Christians, in the local context. Through the practice of Christian virtues, silent witnesses of the Gospel are required to confess their faith with courage and humility. The second element is the explicit proclamation of the Word of God, which can only take place after a careful assessment of the circumstances and after patiently waiting for the opportune moment. The missionary cannot then take possession of the word and he cannot be the stubborn usurper of the Good News; rather he must immerse himself in listening to God and discerning his will. Francis does not lose sight of the main objective of the mission, that is, the conversion of the non-believers. The decision to believe must be a personal choice and not a hasty one, which will come as the result of the efficacy of the witness and the proclamation of the friars.

The missionary journey of the “Poverello” in the East left traces in his spirituality and prompted him to assimilate some forms of piety and prayer that he found in the Islamic environment, as we read in some of his letters. In the *Letter to the Rulers of Peoples (LRP)*, Francis suggests creating in Christian countries someone whose role would be that of a public announcer and as in the manner of a muezzin, could call people together to prayer: “And you must give the Lord so much honor among the people entrusted to you that every evening an announcer proclaims or with other signs announces the praise and thanks to the Almighty Lord God from all the people” (LRP 9: FF 213). A remote echo of Francis’ proposal was the initiative of Brother Benedetto of Arezzo, former provincial minister in the Holy Land, to whom we owe the use of the bell during the recitation of the Angelus, a practice that was later received and propagated by the Franciscan Order throughout all of Christendom.

The idea of mission is present in the life of Francis from the beginning of his conversion. It comes from his desire to live the Gospel and to follow in the footsteps of the Divine Master. The creation of the nativity scene for Christmas of 1223 in Greccio, as well as the gift of the stigmata, manifest his profound spiritual and bodily identification with Jesus Christ, source and reason of his faith and his mission. Sick and weakened by a life of hardship, Francis died in Assisi on the evening of October 3, 1226.

October  
2019

## BLESSED PAOLO MANNA

(1872-1952)

“In Father Paolo Manna, we see a special reflection of the glory of God. He spent his entire life for the missionary cause. On every page of his writings the person of Jesus emerges as alive, the center of life and the *raison d'être* of mission.”

These words of St. John Paul II, spoken during his homily for the beatification of Father Manna on November 4, 2001, summarize the spiritual portrait of this great apostle of evangelization *ad gentes*, considered by scholars to be a precursor of the Second Vatican Council.

Paolo Antonio Manna was born in Avellino, Italy, on January 16, 1872, the fifth of six children. After elementary and technical studies in Avellino and Naples, he continued his studies in Rome. While studying philosophy at the Gregorian University, he heard the Lord's call to missionary life and entered the seminary of the Institute for Foreign Missions in Milan, where he completed his theological studies. He was ordained a priest in the cathedral of Milan on May 19, 1894.

His superiors sent him to Burma (now Myanmar) and on September 27, 1895, he left, for the Toungoo mission. Although suffering from poor health, he pushed himself with tireless dedication in the evangelization<sup>1</sup> and human development of the Carian peoples (in particular the Ghekhù, about whom he later wrote a well-noted book). Exhaustion from his travels, malarial fever, and the onset of tuberculosis forced him to return home on July 7, 1907.

<sup>1</sup> Father Manna even evangelized the parents of the first beatified native of Burma (now Myanmar), Isidoro Ngei Ko Lat, a catechist who was martyred together with Fr. Mario Vergara, PIME. The two were beatified together on May 24, 2014, in the cathedral of Aversa, Italy.

In Italy, Fr. Paolo threw himself headlong into an intense and diversified schedule of missionary work, putting to good use his skills as an acute observer of the ecclesial landscape on a global level, lecturer, publicist, and learned writer. “The whole Church for the whole world” became his motto. As “a soul of fire,”<sup>2</sup> he infused his books with an ardent vision of faith as it related to the multiple and complex problems of the mission *ad gentes*. He offered bold and penetrating analyses, with intuitions that have at times been judged by scholars to be “prophetic.”

In 1909, he was appointed director of the magazine *Le Missioni Cattoliche*, which acquired new impetus through his expert and dynamic leadership. He published pamphlets and books and wrote articles on missionary themes that were near and dear to his heart. He launched various initiatives of missionary cooperation: adoptions, scholarships, and leaflets of prayers for the missions. He founded new periodicals, such as *Propaganda missionaria* for families, *Italia missionaria* for young people, and, later, *Venga il Tuo Regno*, also for families, especially in southern Italy.

In 1915, Father Manna took the first steps towards the foundation of the Missionary Union of the Clergy (today PUM), which Pope Pius XII called “the gem of his life.” Decisive support for the realization of this project came from Bishop Guido Maria Conforti, the bishop of Parma and founder of the Xaverian Missionaries who was canonized in 2011. The statutes of the Union, presented to the Pope by Conforti himself, were approved on October 31, 1916. In his Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (1919), Benedict XV praised the Missionary Union of the Clergy, expressing the desire that it be “instituted in all the dioceses of the Catholic world.”

The basic idea, fully shared by Bishop Conforti, was that to set the whole people of God in a state of mission, it was necessary to start with the clergy. Father Paolo was convinced that “every priest by nature, by definition, is a missionary,” but he constantly needs to revive the flame of apostolic zeal in

<sup>2</sup> This is what Manna was called by Father Gian Battista Tragella (1885-1968), a famous missiologist, historian of PIME, a great friend and collaborator of Manna, and his first biographer.

his heart. “The missionary is the man of faith *par excellence*: born of faith, living by faith, for this he willingly works, suffers, and dies... Without faith the missionary cannot be explained and does not exist; and, if he exists, he is not a true missionary of Jesus Christ” (Manna, *Virtù Apostoliche – Lettere ai missionari*, EMI, Bologna 1997, 89).

In 1924, Manna was entrusted with the new and particularly demanding responsibility of serving as Superior General of the Institute of Foreign Missions of Milan, which became the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) in 1926 at the behest of Pius XI, who joined it to the similar Missionary Seminary of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome. In the ten years he led the organization, Manna’s missionary passion was revealed above all in “family conversations,” letter-meditations addressed to his confreres and published in a bulletin called *Il Vincolo*, which provided inspiration, information, and communication between PIME members throughout the world. Later collected in a book called *Virtù Apostoliche*, these writings are considered to be a classical expression of missionary spirituality.

Father Paolo was strongly convinced of the central role of prayer in the life of the missionary. “Be men of interior life, men of prayer.... It is worth knowing how to preach, but it is worth much more to know how to pray. The missionary who knows the language well and knows how to preach, but who prays little, will expound the truth of our holy religion excellently, but will leave souls cold. The missionary who has deep intimacy with God in prayer, even if his exposition leaves something to be desired, will always have the gift of transfusing the spirit of Jesus Christ into souls, which is after all what preaching must first obtain. The first will teach about Jesus Christ, the other will reveal him. You make the difference! ‘If he who teaches is not a person of interior life, his tongue will say empty things’ (St. Gregory)” (Manna, *Virtù Apostoliche*, 100).

Manna’s thought was enriched and clarified following a long missionary journey to the East which lasted about two years (1927-1929). His obser-



vation of the diverse realities he encountered – environmental, cultural and ecclesial – and his meetings with numerous people and missionaries in the field would lead to ninety pages of notes, comments and daring innovative proposals that were entitled *Osservazioni sul metodo moderno di evangelizzazione* (Observations on the modern method of evangelization). These writings, sent to *Propaganda Fide*, would remain unpublished until 1977.

In 1934, having finished his service as Superior General of the Institute, he began another great work, the founding of a new women's missionary community, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. This work went forward following the mandate of the PIME General Assembly and was completed by his successor, Bishop Lorenzo Maria Balconi in Milan on December 8, 1936. This new women's institute recognized Father Manna as the one who “inspired” its missionary charism.

From 1937 to 1941, Father Manna was the international secretary of the Missionary Union of the Clergy. He maintained a network of relationships with Apostolic Nuncios, bishops, and priests from all over the world. He continued to write letters, books, and articles. Particularly sensitive to the problems posed by the divisions among Christians, he became a “prophet of ecumenism.” In 1941, he published *I fratelli separati e noi* (The Separated Brethren and Us), which was also published in several other languages. The work was well received among non-Catholic Christians, both in the East and the West, even if their positions remained distant. In 1950, he wrote *Le nostre Chiese e la propagazione del Vangelo* [Our Churches and the propagation of the Gospel], and the ideas contained in this work were taken up by Pope Pius XII in the Encyclical *Fidei Donum*.

Father Paolo Manna died in Naples on September 15, 1952, and his martyred remains rest in the city of Ducenta. He was beatified by John Paul II on November 4, 2001.

## VENERABLE PAULINE MARIE JARICOT (1799-1862)

Pauline Marie Jaricot was born into a faithful, Catholic family immediately after the French Revolution, on July 22, 1799. She was the seventh and last daughter of Antoine and Jeanne Jaricot who were silk merchants in Lyon, France, a city whose Christian roots date back to the second century and which boasts of having the Father of the Church Saint Irenaeus as its second bishop.

Pauline was baptized on the day of her birth. Her parents had asked a priest loyal to the Pope to baptize their last daughter in the family home, because their parish priest of San Nizir had taken the oath required by the revolutionary government, an oath that undermined the authority of the Church in France. Clearly, Pauline lived during a time of civil instability and during a period of profound social change, carrying out a work that became crucial for the activity of evangelization.

From all the accounts of her life, it is clear that she was a happy and lively girl, very determined and even stubborn. In her autobiography – which should be read with caution, as Pauline was very severe with herself – she wrote, “I was born with a fervid imagination, a superficial attitude, and a violent and lazy character. I would have been totally taken up with other things... [but] God gave me a loyal heart, which easily surrendered to devotion.” She was very fond of her brother Phileas, born two years before her, who was determined to become a missionary in China. When Phileas announced his intention, Pauline immediately said she wanted to go with him, to care for the poor and the sick and to arrange the flowers in the church.

During her adolescence and early adulthood, she was inconstant in her devotion. She alternated between moments of intense prayer, which developed in her a desire to spend long periods in church before the Blessed Sacrament, praying through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On other occasions she was very eager to participate in social events where she wore elegant clothes and was admired and courted by young men while she fantasized about the possibility of idyllic marriages. On April 16, 1812, at the age of thirteen, after a careful and reverent preparation, she received her First Communion with great devotion.

Pauline's life, however, changed drastically at the age of fifteen, after she fell from a stool while she was cleaning at home, hitting the floor violently. The fall seriously damaged her nervous system, preventing her from properly moving her limbs and from speaking normally. Though the doctors tried various therapies, they became doubtful about the possibility of recovery. Her mother worried so intensely about her daughter's health that she too became ill. This illness got worse at the unexpected death of her eldest son Narcisse at the age of twenty-one. Antoine Jaricot decided to have his daughter moved to a small village outside Lyon, in the hope that separating mother and daughter could help them both to heal faster. Unfortunately, however, on November 29, 1814, Jeanne Jaricot died. Out of fear of further worsening Pauline's health, her family decided not to inform her of her mother's death.

The local parish priest invited Pauline to resume her religious practice, and she freely decided to ask for the sacrament of reconciliation and to receive the Eucharist. This experience of forgiveness and spiritual nourishment had a profound effect on her. From that moment on, she began to recover the use of her limbs, and when she was finally told of her mother's death, she admitted that she had suspected it. As soon as she managed to walk, she asked to be brought to the Basilica of Notre-Dame of Fourvière in Lyon, so she could pray before the magnificent statue of the Madonna presenting the child Jesus to the world.

From that point, Pauline decided to devote her life exclusively to serving the poor and the sick, visiting hospitals and the terminally ill every day, putting bandages on their wounds and offering words of comfort. Her ministry to the needy was accompanied by a life of intense prayer. She received the Eucharist daily and prayed for the conversion of sinners and for the evangelization of the world. A devotion to the Sacred Heart grew in her, and she became part of the Association of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. This led her to create a new association called *Reparation*, and she invited many women in Lyon, some of whom worked almost as slaves in the silk factories of the city, to join. Her meditations before the tabernacle inspired her to write and publish the book *Infinite Love in the Divine Eucharist*, a source of consolation and spiritual nourishment for many.

At that time, her brother Phileas was studying at the seminary in Paris. He informed Pauline that the Paris Foreign Missions Society wanted to send priests to Asia and asked her to find a way to raise enough funds to ensure the success of the enterprise. It was at that moment Pauline had an idea that would change history: she decided to invite every member of her Reparation Association to find ten new members who would pray and offer a penny a week for the evangelization of the world, or, as was said in Pauline's day, for the propagation of the Faith. Groups of ten members were led by a leader called a *dizeneire*, groups of one hundred members by a *centenaire*, and groups of one thousand members by a *millenaire*.

The idea was simple: to pray and collect funds personally, creating a network of personal relationships. The group leader of the ten would meet its members and collect the pennies every week, the leader of the hundred met and collected the money from the leaders of the ten, and finally the group leader of the thousand from the heads of the hundreds. The substantial funds raised were divided and sent all over the world. The idea spread and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith was founded, which soon moved its work out of France to become a worldwide phenomenon. On May 22, 1922, as a result of a decision made by Pope Pius XI, it became

the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In this way the Holy Father wanted to express his paternal solicitude for the local churches arising from missionary activity.

Pauline's reputation as a devoted and resolute woman in the faith earned her the great respect of the Holy Father, cardinals, bishops, and contemporary saints, some of whom asked her for help and advice. The founder of the Society for Holy Childhood (today known as the Pontifical Society of the Missionary Childhood or Holy Childhood) consulted with her to find the best way to raise funds for children in the missions of various countries. Later, when her health began to worsen, Pauline decided to make a pilgrimage to Rome, but she fell ill there. While she was confined to a bed in a convent near the Church of the Trinità dei Monti, at the top of the staircase known as the Spanish Steps, the Holy Father visited her to encourage and give her his blessing.

In spite of all these enormous spiritual and missionary successes, Pauline's life was full of physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. Pauline had never considered the religious vocation; she was convinced that she had been called by God as a lay woman to dedicate her humble existence to the support of the poor and the missions. Falling into a state of poverty, she was forced to join the list of the poor of Lyon to receive something to eat. Her love for God, for Our Lady, and for the missions never wavered. She died in peace on January 9, 1862, and was later proclaimed Venerable by Pope John XXIII. Her cause of beatification is being examined by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and we pray that she will soon be recognized as a blessed.

It is worthwhile to recall that Pauline had another important missionary prayer initiative. In 1826, encouraged by the success of her personal approach in the organization of the Missionary Society through the creation of small groups, Pauline used the same approach to start a Living Rosary. She began to organize her friends and collaborators in groups of fifteen people, based on the number of the mysteries of the Rosary. She asked each

member to commit to pray a decade of the Rosary daily and meditate on a mystery a day, for a whole month. In this way, the entire Rosary was recited daily and all fifteen mysteries were meditated upon by each group. At the beginning of the month, the person in charge of the group personally redistributed the mysteries amongst the members, making sure that each received a different mystery upon which they would meditate during the prayer of the Rosary during the four following weeks. Every month the whole life of Christ was meditated upon by the group. Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, God's help was sought, making the prayer of the Rosary a "living" reality in support of the mission of the Church, especially for the proclamation of the Gospel to those who had not yet received it.

Pauline's dream of the Living Rosary soon became a widespread phenomenon all over the world. In 1831, she wrote, "The groups of fifteen continue to multiply with incredible speed in Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, England, and in various parts of America. The Rosary has spread its roots to the Indies and especially to Canada." Pauline's hope was that the Living Rosary would unite people, scattered throughout the world, in fervent prayer for the mission of the Church.

The initiative of the Living Rosary was so successful that after Pauline's death in 1862, there were more than 150,000 groups, with 2,250,000 members in France alone! Today the Living Rosary is still practiced in many parts of the world and the groups of fifteen have expanded to become groups of twenty in order to include the new Luminous Mysteries, established by St. Pope John Paul II.

## CHARLES DE FORBIN-JANSON (1785-1844)

Charles de Forbin-Janson was born in Paris in 1785 into a noble, military family. Only four years later, the French Revolution forced his parents into exile in Germany, which led him to experience the life of a refugee, persecution, insecurity, fear, and poverty. This is one of the many significant “details” that serve to orient his life-story around two points of reference: the vulnerability of childhood and mission as a paradigm for the apostolate.

After returning home and receiving First Communion, the adolescent Forbin-Janson showed his charitable sensitivity by joining an organization that helped the most disadvantaged in prisons and hospitals. But it was during meetings held in the seminary chapel of the Paris Foreign Mission Society that he had the opportunity to hear news from the mission in China. The missionary dimension thus made a subtle but early impact on his life. Charles had a promising career ahead of him when Napoleon appointed him to be a supervisor in the Council of State. However, perceiving the call of God, he did not allow himself to be seduced by this opportunity, and in 1808 he entered the Sulpician seminary in Paris. He was ordained a priest in 1811, and after serving in diverse places he returned to Paris where he provided Christian formation for children in a local parish.

His passion for the missionary apostolate, which marked his ministry from its onset, manifested itself in a special way by his dedication to “popular missions” that were developed to revive the faith in post-revolutionary, de-Christianized France. He manifested both a convincing eloquence and a profound love and generosity for the poor, which led him to give away his

own clothes to the needy. This phase of his life ended with his departure for the Holy Land in 1817.

In 1824, De Forbin-Janson was consecrated bishop of Nancy-Toul, a diocese in the North-East of France. At that time, he maintained a very close contact with the missionaries who wrote to him and asked for his help. He was particularly attentive of the situation of the missions in China, having once considered the idea of being a missionary. In fact, when the revolution of 1830 forced him to leave his diocese, he went to the Pope to ask to be sent to the Far East. Alas, his desire could not be fulfilled, even though Pope Pius VIII consented to his request.

Bishop De Forbin-Janson continued to carry out a great ministry of charity and welfare, until another providential event provided an opportunity for him to follow his inclination for evangelization *ad gentes*. He was invited by some missionary bishops in North America to visit that continent, where he would remain from 1839 to 1841. In Canada, surrounded by its natural beauty, he developed a way to proclaim the Gospel to people of the country's first inhabitants. Later, he also visited the United States of America. In all of this, his desire grew to create a foundation for the missions.

Upon his return to France, news about many children – and especially little girls – in China who were harshly abandoned or killed without ever being able to receive baptism continued to move him. He received agonizing requests for help from the priests of the Paris Foreign Missions Society, which he himself had considered joining. The idea of saving the innocence of children in mission lands through the innocence of Christian children in Christian lands made a profound impact on his heart, where the two points of reference of his life definitively came together: childhood and mission.

With these in mind, in the summer of 1842, Bishop De Forbin-Janson went to Lyon to talk with Pauline Jaricot, the young lay woman who, twenty years earlier, had laid the foundations of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith. From this decisive dialogue, he began to



perceive a way to organize help for children in China, which blossomed into inviting the children of the diocese to carry out a “double gesture”: the daily recitation of the Hail Mary with a short prayer for the children of the mission, and to offer a dime every month for children in mission lands.

The bishop diligently dedicated himself to this project of mobilizing Christian children for the benefit of their brothers and sisters in mission lands. And so on May 19, 1843, the “Holy Childhood” (referring to the childhood of Jesus) was founded. Finally there was an answer to the restlessness that he endured for almost forty years!

To extend the initiative, he traveled home and arrived in Belgium, where he received the support of the royal court and the Apostolic Nuncio, Bishop Gioacchino Pecci, who would later be elected Pope Leo XIII. The Society of the Holy Childhood was immediately welcomed in France and gained memberships from all over the world, but not without some resistance. Contrary to the expectations of some skeptics, the new ministry did not weaken, but rather strengthened the work and mission of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. It also addressed vocational issues, thus anticipating the creation of the Society of St. Peter the Apostle founded in 1889.

In contemplation of the Lord’s childhood, De Forbin-Janson discovered an exceptional way of understanding the mystery of the Incarnation and what it means to become one with Christ and share his saving love. In the episodes of the Gospel in which Jesus refers to children, he said, we find “a new language of teachings and example” that manifest “Jesus’ clear desire to restore children the rights of which they had been deprived and to augment their privileges.”

To explain the significance of the Society and to organize its functioning, four months before his death, De Forbin-Janson announced the creation of the *Annals of the Society of the Holy Childhood*, a sort of two-way correspondence between the children of the more established churches and those of the missions. The project would be formally inaugurated in 1846.

Exhausted, Bishop De Forbin-Janson, died near Marseilles in July of 1844, when the Society of the Holy Childhood was barely one and a half years old. Being entirely dedicated to the Society he founded, he would never fulfill his dream of being a missionary in China, nor see the fulfilment of another one of his dreams, the sending of religious sisters to China to provide for the needs of disadvantage children in the missions by their maternal care. His initiative was immediately supported by the popes, which is maintained to this day, and can be summarized in words of encouragement that Pope Gregory XVI addressed to Bishop Forbin-Janson when the Society was created 175 years ago: “Continue to establish the Society. In truth, it is the work of God. It has our blessing.” In 1922, Pope Pius XI, formally recognized it as “Pontifical” in his *Motu proprio*, *Romanorum Pontificum*.

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

## JEANNE BIGARD (1859-1934)

Jeanne Bigard was born on December 2, 1859, in Coutances, a small town in Lower Normandy, France. Her mother Stéphanie Cottin was a woman of character and affectionate love. Between mother and daughter such a symbiosis of feelings and ideals developed that the two became almost inseparable from each other.

Due to her frail health, Jeanne spent her school years in the family's home in Caen, the city where her father, a magistrate, had moved for work. The level of instruction that she received at home was certainly higher than that received by many of her peers, considering the high cultural level of the Bigard family, but it did not grant her the experience of much freedom, carefree playfulness, or friendship.

Jeanne's childhood took place during the era of the full development of the modern network of missionary cooperation, which had its roots in pre-Napoleonic France. The Paris Foreign Missions Society became the focus of the missionary reawakening and the driving force of some missionary associations that, with prayer and spontaneous help, set out to support missionaries sent to the Far East and North America.

With the initiative of several people, especially Pauline Jaricot (1799-1862), the Society for the Propagation of the Faith had been established in Lyon in 1822. During its first three decades the organization's work spread to several European countries, including Italy, stimulating popular interest in the missions, through edifying publications like the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, which told stories of adventurous and helpful experiences of missionaries, but also shed light on the various problems of the indigenous world.

Through reading the *Annals*, Stéphanie and Jeanne Bigard, already in close relationship with the Paris Foreign Missions Society, came to know some missionary priests working in the Far East, of whom they would later become confidants and supporters. At the same time the missionary forces were multiplying, Europe began to perceive an urgent need to establish a local hierarchy in the mission territories, free of any political pressure and autonomous in its pastoral exercise. The Bigards, thanks to their ongoing contacts with the missionaries, sensed the problem and began to think of an adequate response. The Paris Foreign Missions Society, which they visited often, had long since incorporated into its efforts the immediate establishment in the indigenous churches a hierarchy composed of local leaders. But the implementation of this plan was not easy.

At the Vatican, the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* took up the problem of indigenous clergy with resolve, referring to the famous Instruction of 1659,<sup>3</sup> which encouraged missionaries to be attentive to the formation of the local clergy. With the Instruction of 1845,<sup>4</sup> apostolic vicars in the mission lands who were directly connected with *Propaganda Fide* were invited to hand over responsibility for the missions to indigenous priests and not to fear letting European missionaries act subordinately to them. Persecutions, with the probability of a mass expulsion of foreign missionaries, made the creation of an indigenous clergy an even more urgent task. So as to guarantee the growth of the local churches in mission territories, for many years the formation of the indigenous clergy remained the central issue. The two Bigards dedicated themselves to address this concern.

The starting point was a letter addressed to them dated June 1, 1889, by the bishop of Nagasaki, Giulio Alfonso Cousin of the Paris Foreign Missions Society. Concerned that he would, for lack of funds, have to send boys back to their families who could have been excellent seminarians and, later, good

<sup>3</sup> Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, *Istruzione* 1659, *Collectanea* 1 (1622-1866), n. 135, 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, *Collectanea* 1 (1622-1866), n. 1002, 541-545.

priests,<sup>5</sup> he asked the Bigards to become supporters and promoters of his seminary. He suggested the idea of “adopting” a seminarian who would later bring to the holy altar the memory of the “parents” who had supported him, both during their life and after their death.<sup>6</sup> For Jeanne and Stéphanie, the letter sounded like a call. Support of the indigenous clergy was the vocation to which they could offer their lives without reserve. They immediately devoted themselves to raising funds for the seminarians of Nagasaki and at the same time gathered information from the bishops and apostolic vicars of the Paris Foreign Missions Society on the status of indigenous clergy in their countries.

They wanted to solve the central problem of the mission by ensuring the presence of the local clergy. The foundation of the Society of St. Peter the Apostle went through various stages. At first, to meet the requests of Bishop Cousin and of other missionaries, scholarships were awarded to seminarians and sacred furnishings for mission churches were made. Jeanne understood that her work would have to include support of all of the missions throughout the world,<sup>7</sup> because the whole missionary world needed priests.

The Society wanted to invite people throughout the world to contribute what they could to support:

1. Creation of perpetual grants
2. Adopting a seminarian
3. Prayer, sacrifices, and work

But to guarantee a good foundation, two indispensable elements were necessary: the grace of God and the blessing of the Pope. Leo XIII offered to the occasion his encyclical *Ad Extremas Orientis*,<sup>8</sup> with which he supported the urgent need for the formation of indigenous priests.

<sup>5</sup> P. Lesourd and A. Olichon, *Jeanne Bigard. Fondatrice della Pontificia Opera di S. Pietro Apostolo per il Clero Indigeno*, translated and edited by P.F. Casadei (Rome: Ed. PPOO.MM., 1979), 32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Ad Extremas Orientis* (24 June 1893), *Acta Leonis XIII*, 13 (1894), 190-197.

Missionaries who ignored the language and customs of the place were considered foreigners, while indigenous priests would carry out the ministry more easily. Equally troubling were the number of foreign missionaries who could not keep up with the increase in conversions.

The Society of St. Peter the Apostle already had, to its credit, a thousand associates and a long list of scholarships, worth one hundred thousand francs, for Asian and African seminarians. A sign of approval from Rome was highly anticipated. The Pope's blessing came in 1895, when the French episcopate also approved the Society of St. Peter the Apostle for the indigenous clergy of the missions, which thus entered fully into the universal Church. *Propaganda Fide* assured its full support to the Society through its prefects Cardinal Ledochowski and Cardinal Jacobini. The latter, in a letter, anticipated its inclusion in the Pontifical Mission Societies, which took place on May 3, 1922, at the behest of Pius XI.

The solitude and abandonment experienced by many founders and foundresses also affected Jeanne. Alone at the bedside of her dying mother, Stéphanie (January 5, 1903), Jeanne offered to God her suffering and the love of those who had helped and followed her. Afraid of spiritual darkness Jeanne begged Jesus to be her traveling companion "until the day I lose myself in your love."<sup>9</sup> She was worried about the continuation of the Society, which she eventually entrusted to the religious congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.<sup>10</sup>

The long illness that led to her death on April 28, 1934, reveals the mysterious ways God works, often offering an abundance of his gifts in response to people who know how to totally give their lives unto the cross.

The Society of St. Peter the Apostle was now fully part of the life of the

<sup>9</sup> P. Lesourd and A. Olichon, *Jeanne Bigard. Fondatrice della Pontificia Opera di S. Pietro Apostolo per il Clero Indigeno*, translated and edited by P.F. Casadei (Rome: Ed. PP.OO.MM., 1979), 88.

<sup>10</sup> The Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary was founded by Elena de Chappotin de Neuville (1839-1904) who took the religious name Mary of the Passion. Approved on July 17, 1890, the institute, because of its essentially missionary character, obtained the approval of its Constitutions by the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide* on August 7, 1922.

Church. For the first time, it appeared in a document of solemn teaching, Pope Benedict XV's *Maximum Illud*, as the competent authority in the area of seminaries and local hierarchy. On May 3, 1922, Pius XI declared it a "Pontifical Society." He also consecrated the first bishops of China, Japan, and Vietnam. Pius XII followed suit by consecrating the first apostolic vicars of Africa in 1939.



## ANNA DENGEL (1892-1980)

Anna Dengel was born in the Austrian town of Steeg in the state of Tyrol on March 16, 1892. Following the premature death of her mother (which occurred when Anna was only nine years old), she and her brothers were raised by her father who, after having remarried, had four other children. Anna was deeply affected by the loss of her mother and this event influenced her work and, above all, the commitment she put into the care of women and mothers. Hers was a wealthy family, and her father devoted himself to raising his children.

After completing her studies in Hall and Innsbruck, at the age of seventeen, Anna started working as a German teacher in Lyon. At that time, she learned of a school that trained women as nurses. Working there was Dr. Agnes McLaren, one of the very first women physician of the era. Dr. McLaren's main goal was to provide medical care for women in India, especially Muslim women, who could not be treated by male physicians because of Islamic laws. At age 72, when she received the blessing of Pope Pius X, Dr. McLaren departed for India where and in 1910, she founded St. Catherine's Hospital for women and children.

Initially she tried to persuade religious orders to provide medical assistance in India and other the mission territories, but her attempt failed because of a twelfth-century ecclesiastical decree that forbade nuns from studying and practicing medicine. Dr. McLaren then began looking for young European and American women who wanted to become nurses or doctors and were willing to move to India to carry out this mission. The then twenty-year-old Anna Dengel became aware of this urgent need and immediately



considered this to be exactly what she was waiting for. She wrote as much in a letter saying, “This is the answer to my greatest dream and heartfelt desire: to be a missionary with a specific goal, to carry out such an urgent task that only a woman can achieve. This is my dream from childhood.”

The correspondence between Anna and Dr. McLaren immediately proved to be complicated, since the doctor did not speak German and Dengel did not know English. The doctor encouraged the young Tyrolean to study medicine in Cork, Ireland, because it was necessary to obtain an English qualification to work in India, which was still an English colony. Unfortunately, the two women never met because Dr. McLaren died in 1913.

Anna completed her studies in Cork in 1919. In December of that year she arrived in Rawalpindi (present-day Pakistan) and began working in St. Catherine’s Hospital. Her routine, which absorbed all of her energy, included work at the hospital, language study, visits to homes, and the concerns of everyday life. At least 150 patients each day went to the hospital for assistance and treatment. After about three years, Anna was assailed by an inner restlessness. A priest understood that Anna had received a religious calling and advised her to become part of a missionary order. But she found herself facing the same problem that had plagued Dr. McLaren: if she took religious vows, she would have to give up her career as a doctor.

In 1924, Anna entrusted the management of the clinic to an Indian doctor and returned to Innsbruck for a retreat. There she developed the desire to establish a religious order of doctors, an idea supported by the priest who led the retreat. She then went to the United States for six months in search of funds and women who shared her interest in the project. Soon a doctor and two nurses joined her. So on September 30, 1925, the Medical Mission Sisters were born in Washington, D.C. Since the nuns were still forbidden to practice medicine, the community was founded as a pious society without vows.

Anna Dengel worked many years to bring about a change in canon law and remove the prohibition against religious sisters practicing medicine.

In 1936, Pope Pius XI revoked the ban with the decree *Constans ac Sedula*, and in 1941 the community of the Medical Mission Sisters finally became a religious congregation with vows. Then in 1959, they received the decree of the Holy See which made it a Religious Institute of Pontifical Right.

The Institute, which began with four sisters now counts over 500 members working in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Many of the hospitals first established by the sisters are now being administered by the local population, which is what the founding sisters would have wanted. Today, the sisters no longer focus their attention solely on strictly medical or surgical services, but on promoting the overall integral well-being of people in need and their salvation in Christ.

Dr. Anna Dengel's most famous student was undoubtedly Saint Teresa of Calcutta, who received medical training with the Medical Mission Sisters in Patna, India. The two women did not meet in person until near the end of Anna's life and although they had not always followed the same line of thought, they both shared a profound commitment and love for charity towards the poorest of the poor. Both founded religious congregations, and their zeal was able to forever change the Church and the world.

In 1973, Dr. Anna Dengel passed on the direction of the Medical Mission Sisters to the next generation with these words: "The future belongs to you. Take care to understand the difficulties of your time just as I understood the difficulties of mine." In the spring of 1976, she had a stroke that left her partially paralyzed. She was still at the hospital in Rome when Mother Teresa came to visit her. Dr. Dengel recognized her old acquaintance and asked her to hold her hands, as is customary in India, as a symbol of heredity and spiritual blessing. She died in Rome on April 17, 1980, and was buried at Campo Santo Teutonico.

## BLESSED BENEDICT DASWA (1946-1990)

Pope Francis, in his decree of beatification, described Benedict as a “diligent catechist, a thoughtful teacher, a witness of the Gospel to the point of shedding his own blood.” Tshimangadzo Samuel Daswa was born on June 16, 1946, in the village of Mbahe in the province of Limpopo, South Africa, in what is now the Diocese of Tzaneen. He died a martyr for the faith on February 2, 1990, and was beatified on September 13, 2015.

When Benedict became a Catholic, he understood that there were aspects of African culture, such as the widespread practice of witchcraft, magic, and ritual murder, which he could no longer accept. His position against these profound and obscure problems of his culture led him to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom. His brutal death by stoning and beating has made him a hero to all Christians in Africa and to all those throughout the world who struggle to be free from the slavery of sorcery. Benedict Daswa lived his Christian vocation with contentment and enthusiasm, but at the same time with modesty and humility, as shown by his Christian witness in various areas of his life. After his baptism, and especially after getting married in the Church to Shadi Eveline Monyai in 1974, Benedict became a guide for the young and spent many hours and weekends with them to catechize and teach them.

When the first pastoral council was formed in his parish, he was elected its president. He helped teach catechism to children and adults, leading the Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest, visiting the sick and the non-practicing, and helping the poor and needy. In church, he helped start a nursery school. Every once in a while the small Christian community

gathered at his home and during these meetings the Rosary was recited and the Word of God was shared.

In the family, Benedict was a model husband and father, totally devoted to ideal of the family being a “domestic church.” In the classroom, he was not only concerned with providing students with a good level of education, but above all instilling in them fundamental moral values so as to form their personalities. Being a skilled and motivated sportsman, Benedict imparted to young people the value of hard work, discipline, fairness, and team spirit. As principal of the school, he was respected and scrupulous, and he motivated and trained his staff to provide the best possible education to the students, involving the parents as collaborators in the entire educational process.

In the public sphere, Benedict made no secret of his position against witchcraft, magic, and ritual murder, which still have the power to prevent the development and progress of a society. Witchcraft allegations are often driven by jealousy, fear, and suspicion towards those who appear to be more engaged and successful in their undertakings. Benedict realized the need to free individuals from these paralyzing effects, allowing them to take personal responsibility for their lives and become mature adults.

This is why his role in helping people achieve true inner freedom was important not only for the Church, but for the whole of society. Both in the local community as a counselor and advisor to the village chief, and in the ecclesial community as a catechist and prayer guide, Benedict demonstrated a spirit of genuine Christian love, respect, generosity, honesty, and freedom. But above all, and in every situation, Benedict was a man of prayer whose spiritual life was constantly nourished by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and the Word of God. This great mystery of faith and love meant everything to him. It was the center of his life.

He was never ashamed to admit his great faith in God for it was God who gave him strength. People who knew him very well testified that the growth in his relationship with God was clearly visible, as was the fidelity

with which he lived the values he had embraced at his baptism. He wanted Catholics to be proud of their faith and to assume a real responsibility towards the Church he loved so much. This meant working at the local level for priestly vocations and religious life, being active in the Church and supporting her financially.

His position against witchcraft was not very popular, because he was opposed to something rooted in local culture. There were others who, like Benedict, considered the world of witchcraft as the fruit of evil, fear, mistrust, enmity, injustice, and violence, which they thought people should abandon and free themselves from. But most of them, including religious ministers, were silent for fear of reprisals. Benedict was different. He spoke openly and forcefully in public, opposing those who resorted to witchcraft. Benedict Daswa never compromised. He always adhered to his Christian faith.

He defended those who refused to pay to consult the *sangoma* (the shaman), because he did not want people to pay for something that was false. Above all, Benedict did not want any innocent man to be killed or banished from the village as an alleged sorcerer. What normally happened is that through rumors and gossip, a finger was pointed at someone, often an elderly woman or some other vulnerable person. People didn't seek any proof of guilt, but turned to a *sangoma* who usually confirmed their suspicions. The one accused had no opportunity for defense.

Between November 1989 and January 1990, flooding struck the village where Benedict lived with his family. On January 25, 1990, during a storm, the roofs of some huts were struck by lightning and caught fire. It was widely believed that when lightning struck a house, it was caused by a person who was a sorcerer. According to traditional culture, sorcerers had to be captured and killed, as well as anyone who protected them, because they posed a threat to society. This was traditional culture. Benedict was aware of the growing pressure against him.

So the following Sunday, the village leader called a council meeting to address the issue. Benedict had not yet arrived when it was decided that

some members of the community would have to consult a *sangoma* in order to find the sorcerer who had sent the lightning. But first they would have to raise the money needed to pay for it. When Benedict arrived, he immediately tried to change their minds, pointing out that their decision would lead to the death of innocent people. The meeting ended with their firm resolve and Benedict's refusal to collaborate. His enemies gathered a group of young people and adults to kill him. Friday, February 2, 1990, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, became a feast day for Benedict Daswa's entry into paradise.

The most significant aspect of Benedict's witness has to do with his ability to critically embrace what was good in his culture, but to bravely challenge the cultural elements that hindered the realization of life to the fullest. Benedict firmly believed that marriage was a relationship of partners for life, a faithful sharing of life and love. In a rural, patriarchal, and traditional African community in apartheid-era South Africa, Benedict gave a prophetic witness to a respectful attitude towards women's equal dignity. He believed in a faithful and monogamous marriage that finds its full meaning in the Christian sacrament. As testified by his sons, he was never ashamed to help Eveline, his wife, in household chores that were generally reserved to women. He prayed every day with his family and encouraged all parents to pray with their children. He organized regular family reunions and acted as a mediator and counselor for couples in difficulty. And finally, Benedict was a fervent teacher and educator, becoming the principal of the Nweli Primary School where he taught for many years. And perhaps above all, as pointed out by those who knew him, he was a profoundly humble man, who always used the power of confrontation and dialogue that came to him from his faith and friendship with Jesus.

He never renounced his African culture, but embraced its best aspects, purified and matured by faith. His story reflects his sincere commitment to the values of Ubuntu ethics, a commitment to the common good and the service of life. The example he offered through his daily life – as a lay

person, a family man, a diligent catechist, and a thoughtful teacher – is what many South Africans today consider the most significant legacy of his life: not against their culture, but for the good of their culture and that of every culture and nation.



## CATERINA ZECCHINI (1877-1948)

**M**other Caterina Zecchini was born in Venice, Italy on May 24, 1877, and died there on October 17, 1948. We have scant information about her youth: baptized on June 3, 1878, in the church of St. Giacomo dell'Orio, she was confirmed at the church of Saints Geremia and Lucia on May 25, 1885. Known to be very sensitive, yet she possessed an exuberant, lively, and witty character. When she was ten years old, after completing elementary school, Caterina began working at home helping her father, a wine merchant, with his accounting. She developed an ever growing concern for the poor, especially for children of her parish whom she met on the streets and whom she often brought to her home to give them food and clothing.

This charity that grew in her heart was destined, through the grace of God, to grow in time until she could no longer limit herself to helping the occasional poor person. She felt the need to work with all her strength for the spread of the Kingdom of God throughout the world by serving those whom Caterina called the true poor: those who did not yet know God. In 1905, Caterina had an encounter with the Dominican Fr. Giocondo Pio Lorgna, which was a fundamental moment in her spiritual life. For over twenty-five years, until his death, he was her spiritual director, helping her to grow in her love for the cross and the Eucharist.

Caterina experienced the Eucharistic encounter as a meeting with a real person – with God, whom she called “annihilated and hidden”, but whom she knew to be the only one with the power to transform a person’s life. After receiving the Eucharist, she grew in an ever stronger desire for per-



fection and for union with God. While Eucharistic contemplation led her to an authentic knowledge of herself and her own nothingness, it also gave her the strength to spread her wings and cast her gaze farther away, where many sisters and brothers needed her help.

Her communion with Christ generated a call to mission, which manifested itself in the presence of deep sentiments of love, in what she experienced as Christ's thirst for souls. She wrote, "I felt a great thirst for souls.... Give me, Jesus, many of these souls, I want to bring them back to your feet, beautiful and purified" (September 16, 1912). Contemplating Christ in his passion, under the Crucifix and in the Eucharistic presence, sharing the anxiety of love, Caterina longed to satisfy this thirst in the way that Christ himself had chosen: through suffering. Thus, was born the desire to offer herself with Christ and in Christ as a victim for her brothers and sisters. On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Catherine offered herself to the Lord's Merciful Love; an act that was a synthesis of her journey, of her many desires and intuitions that came together into one great ideal: "I feel immense desires in me. I would like to be an apostle of your love, O great God! To die as a martyr of charity, to spend every moment of my life to make that Love known, for the Glory of God and for the good of souls."

In the light of the Eucharist, we can understand the various missionary activities Caterina undertook. One was the publication in 1915 of what she entitled the "Apostolic Page", which called for a monthly day of prayer and of offering one's daily toils for the missions, for missionary vocations, for the spiritual and material needs of missionaries, and the conversion of those who still do not know Christ. Another was an Hour of Adoration, to which she invited people to pray for the missions around the world before the Eucharistic Christ. A third was the St. Catherine of Siena Missionary Union, a group of women, bound by private vows, who met monthly to offer a few hours of work for the missions and adoration for the same purpose, accompanied by a priest who would lead them on a journey of missionary formation.

The double movement of work and adoration also marked another initiative by Caterina, the missionary laboratory, which later became the diocesan missionary laboratory. She would say that “only prayer and work would have had the efficacy of realizing the goal that Zecchini proposed to the faithful for the non-believers.” Finally, she organized the Institution of the Little Apostles of the Holy Childhood and an amateur theater company. The proceeds of the recitals were offered for the missions.

Caterina’s experience of offering herself as a “victim,” along with her ever deepening thirst for prayer and progressive emptying of herself before God were clear signs of a vocation that could no longer be limited to one person. It blossomed into a new religious institute. The intuition for this work came to her, once again, before the Eucharistic Jesus.

The idea of forming a religious community came to her at Castel di Godego in 1912. It would be a community completely devoted to the universal mission of the Church. But it would take many years of reflection and discernment, as well as a journey of faith and a careful search for the will of God with the help of some priests, before the idea would become reality.

In October of 1918, Caterina was forced to take refuge in Novara because of the ravages of war. There, in Santa Maria delle Grazie church she met Fr. Luigi Fizzotti, a Passionist priest, who heard her confession. Even though she did not reveal much about her plans, she was urged by her confessor to begin the work of organizing the new institute without delay because it was the work of God. Fr. Luigi always remained close to Caterina, supporting her in her role as foundress, helping her make her way through letters and recommendations and when it came to giving an institutional face to the work, he was its principle sponsor.

Caterina then asked the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice, Pietro La Fontaine, to bless the work she had begun, which by now included a number of companions that had joined her spiritually. On November 10, 1922, the Cardinal signed a decree establishing a Pious Union, but it was only

on May 30, 1923, that Caterina Zecchini and her first two companions entered the first cenacle of community life. On the very next day, the Feast of Corpus Christi, they formally consecrated themselves to God in the presence of Fr. Lorgna. This first stage of the community lasted from 1923 to 1933 an involved intense engagement of prayer and sacrifice, before the community would be officially recognized by the Church.

On April 10, 1933, after various difficulties, delays, and obstacles of all kinds, the Constitutions and Rules of the *Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament* were approved. "It was given a yes," reads the diary of the Patriarch, who wanted the decree to be dated on Good Friday. This date is certainly appropriate because – the decree reads – "we are now in the nineteen hundredth centenary of the Redemption. It is the day when the Lord shed his blood for the human race. And the new congregation, aside from that which is common to all religious institutes, calls on its daughters to work among the faithful for the non-believers, helping Catholic Missions with spiritual and material works, which relates very well with the purposes of Redemption itself." For Caterina and her companions, it was an early Easter.

She herself had expressed it thus in the first Rule of 1923: "A work that is fully imbued with an apostolic and Eucharistic spirit, which has the mission of gathering into the heart of Christ the souls of the poor non-believers and thus increasing the number of those who worship him." As a cornerstone for her institute, Caterina insisted upon love for the Church, particularly in its maternal and missionary nature. Therefore, this work had to possess a general apostolic character as its primary quality (Rule of 1923): "All missions without exception will have the suffrage of our prayers, sacrifices, offerings."

Universal missionary contemplation lived in this way produced a definite choice in Caterina. "We want to exercise our mission here among the faithful, for the benefit of the non-believers. We seek, therefore, with the help of the Lord, to strive most earnestly for the spiritual and material good

of Catholic missions and to spread the missionary idea in every class of people” (to Patriarch Pietro La Fontaine, July 25, 1922). Caterina’s life and spirituality found strength and meaning in the Eucharist, the very source of the life of the whole Church and her mission.

Caterina knew that the ideal that motivated her was realizable only through suffering. She never refused the cross, even when in the last years of her life it came to visit her in the form of a painful illness and a series of misunderstandings. Still she found strength and courage before the tabernacle, praying at length, even at night, to ask for graces for the institute and for the extension of the kingdom of God throughout the earth. After a life completely dedicated to the Eucharistic-missionary ideal, her death, which occurred on October 17, 1948, fulfilled what she had written many years before in the institute’s Rule: “At the end of our mortal life, the last note of the love that our poor heart will emit will be that of the dying Christ: ‘Consummatum est, – It is accomplished!’”

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

## BLESSED CYPRIAN MICHAEL IWENE TANSI (1903-1964)

**B**lessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi, the first blessed of Nigeria, was born in 1903 in Igboezunu, on the edge of the forest, near the ancient city of Aguleri in southern Nigeria, located in what is now the Diocese of Onitsha. Only a few years before, in 1890, the Alsatian Catholic missionaries had brought the first announcement of the faith to the region; they were soon followed by Irish missionaries who belonged to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

His parents, peasants, were pagans who practiced the traditional religion of the Igbo people. In 1909, at only six years old, little Iwene was sent by his parents to the town of Aguleri. There, in the Christian neighborhood called Nduka, he lived in the house of a maternal aunt whose son, Robert Orekie, a Christian, was a teacher in the mission school. At the age of nine, he was baptized and was given the name of Michael. His peers described him as a studious boy who demanded very much of himself. He had a strong influence on his companions, who were fascinated by his decisive and precocious personality, both on human and religious levels, and by his profound piety.

In 1913, Michael moved to Onitsha, where he enrolled in Holy Trinity Primary School and in 1919, he obtained the diploma that enabled him to teach. In 1924, he assumed the post of principal of St. Joseph School. He felt the call of God to the priestly life, and in 1925, at the age of 22, resolutely overcoming the opposition of family members, entered the newly established St. Paul Seminary in Igbariam, becoming the first indigenous vocation of the area. By 1932, the confidence he had inspired in his

superiors was so great that he was entrusted with the role of treasurer of the Training College. On December 19, 1937, he was ordained a priest by the missionary Bishop Charles Heerey, C.S.Sp. in the Cathedral of Onitsha.

Michael demonstrated his exceptional gifts throughout the first twelve years of his priesthood, which has been confirmed by the many testimonies of those who witnessed his zeal and his complete abandonment to God. Michael's first assignment was in the parish of Nnewi. Elisabeth Isichei, in her precious book *Totally for God: The Life of Michael Iwene Tansi*, summarizes his strongest pastoral characteristics: "personal asceticism, great capacity for commitment and physical resistance, goodness towards the sick and the poor, concern for the sanctity of marriage and the spiritual formation of women, as well as personal charisma."

In 1940, he bravely managed to dispel a superstitious myth about land that had been given to the missionaries, which was known as "the cursed forest." It was expected that anyone who entered would die or otherwise contract some kind of terrible disease. The first thing that Fr. Michael did was travel through the forest, sprinkling it with holy water. When he emerged unscathed, the people took courage and cut down the forest. The next step was to build a church and a school, a rectory and houses of welcome. They were rudimentary buildings, but he helped build them himself, offering a concrete example of being a tireless worker. Seeing a priest working so hard prompted many people to help him, and his example inspired others to undertake similar endeavors throughout the region.

As for women, he cared about their dignity and put forth much effort to protect their virginity. To do so, he organized houses in his parishes which accommodated young women so as to prepare them for marriage and to deter them from living with their future husband before marriage. The Legions of Mary that he established assisted him in every village of the parish by informing him of sick people who wanted to be baptized, promoting the morality of the inhabitants, and preparing the catechumens. He committed himself to the building of schools and to making sure that there

were qualified teachers. He built houses in which to welcome the oldest students, one for boys and one for girls. He attended to a good number of orphans, and he made sure that each of them received a suitable education.

Fr. Michael seemed to have a special gift to encourage priestly vocations; at least seventy priests came from his parishes. He was a good preacher. People were touched by what he said and remembered his teaching. He was critical of some pagan customs and superstitions and, even when he could not completely eradicate them, he still managed to weaken their hold on his parishioners.

Amid the whirlwind of pastoral activities, he perceived the beauty of the contemplative life. During a retreat day with the clergy, Archbishop Charles Heerey expressed the wish that a few of his priests embrace a monastic experience, in order to bring the seed of contemplative life into the diocese. Father Tansi, without hesitating, declared himself ready to put his bishop's proposal into action, along with the assistant priest at his parish, Fr. Clement Ulogu. In July 1949, contacts were made with the Cistercian Abbey of Mount Saint Bernard in Leicester, England, which agreed to welcome the two priests. Michael arrived at Mount Saint Bernard on July 3, 1950, accompanied by Archbishop Heerey.

Under the action of the Spirit, the man who had been an authentic pioneer and "manager" in the young missionary church of the diocese of Onitsha made himself a humble and docile monk in his new way of life. He embraced the austerity and silence of everyday Trappist life, where no one except the novice master, Fr. Gregory Wareing, had any idea of the magnificent work he had done as a priest. One of the memories shared by those who knew him at Mount Saint Bernard is the image of him praying in the chapel of the Madonna, with his head bent to one side, as if he were listening to his Lord speaking to him.

The original idea with which the two Nigerians had entered the community was to receive formation in monastic life, with the aim of then bringing it to Nigeria, but the difficulty of making a foundation with only

two people soon became clear. Eventually they freely asked to be admitted to profession at Mount Saint Bernard and to wait until the community was able to send a group. In 1963, the monastic community decided to establish a foundation in Africa, but in Cameroon rather than Nigeria. This disappointed Fr. Michael, but he accepted it as God's will.

When the group for the foundation in Cameroon was appointed, Fr. Michael was chosen as the novice master, because he seemed to be the right person to form the future African vocations. The first four founders left Mount Saint Bernard on October 28, 1963, to prepare the buildings for the rest of the group's arrival, scheduled for the spring of the following year. But God's plan for Fr. Michael was different, and it was made manifest in a very short time.

In January 1964, he was struck with acute pain in one of his legs, which swelled enormously. The doctor diagnosed thrombosis and proposed hospitalization. Urgently admitted to the Royal Infirmary in Leicester, he was diagnosed with an aortic aneurysm. During the night he got worse, and on the morning of January 20, 1964, in a spirit of total poverty and detachment, Fr. Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi took the last step of his long journey of faith and love in silence.

On January 22, 1986, twenty-two years after his death, with great solemnity before a gathering of faithful from all parts of Nigeria, the process of his canonization was opened in the Cathedral of Onitsha. By that time, a few monastic communities of contemplative life had already begun to flourish in the area. The remains of Fr. Michael were exhumed in 1988 and returned to Onitsha. During the reburial Mass, a miracle occurred when the bishop allowed seventeen-year-old Philomina Emeka, who had been suffering from inoperable tumors, to approach and touch Fr. Michael's coffin, and she was immediately healed. The miracle led to his beatification celebrated by Pope St. John Paul II on March 22, 1998.



## VENERABLE DÉLIA TÉTREULT (1865-1941)

“F or God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). Over a hundred years ago, these words deeply touched the heart of Délia Tétreault. In 1916 she wrote: “God has given us everything, even his Son. What better means of repaying him – as much as a weak creature can do in this world – than by giving him sons, the chosen, who also will sing his mercy forever and ever?”

Awestruck by the unmerited love that God has for us, Délia Tétreault responded with gratitude. A woman with a universal heart, Mother Mary of the Holy Spirit (her religious name) was the founder of the first female missionary institute in Canada and played a decisive and undeniable role for the missionary Church. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in Canada and in particular in Québec, the Church occupied a prominent position in a society marked by Jansenism, in which women were hardly recognized. The means of social communication were still quite undeveloped and the written word played a major role in the transmission of news. In this socio-ecclesial context, Délia Tétreault, inspired by the Holy Spirit, brought a breath of fresh air to her society. Her bold vision and creative action contributed to the opening of her country and her Church to the world.

Délia was born on February 4, 1865, in Sainte-Marie de Monnoir, today Marieville, Québec. Frail in health and orphaned by her mother, she was adopted by her aunt Julie and her godfather Jean Alix at the age of two and lived a happy childhood. From a young age, Délia loved to hide in the barn reading the *Annals of the Holy Childhood* and *of the Propagation of the Faith*,

which she found in an old chest. The missionary narratives fascinated her and the first fruits of her vocation began to take shape. At that time, she had an inspired dream: “I was next to the bed, and suddenly I saw a field of ripe wheat that stretched as far as the eye could see. At a certain moment all those spikes turned into children’s heads, and I immediately understood that they represented souls of ‘pagan’ children.”

The visit of some missionaries from the Canadian Northwest deeply moved her heart. She said, “Although I felt an inexpressible admiration for the apostolic life, I would never have dared to undertake it. Indeed, apostolic life did not seem possible to me, since there was no community of religious missionaries in Canada.” At eighteen, after being refused by the Carmel of Montreal, she entered the Sisters of Charity of St. Hyacinth, but an epidemic sent her home. A decisive event marked her brief time in that community. “One evening,” she recounted, “while I was with the postulants in a small room, it seemed to me that Our Lord told me that I should later found a congregation of women for the foreign missions, and work toward the foundation of a similar society of men, a Seminary for the Foreign Missions modelled on the one in Paris.”

Some years passed when she met Fr. John Forbes, a missionary in Africa. Délia planned to leave for Africa with him, but she fell ill the very night of their planned departure. Jesuit Father Almiré Pichon, helped her found *Bethany*, a project dedicated to social works in Montreal. Troubled by doubts, she worked there for ten years but felt that the Lord was calling her to something else. Later at Bethany, Délia met Fr. Gustave Bourassa and Jesuit Fr. A.M. Daigneault, both missionaries from Africa, who supported her in her missionary desire. Other men and women of God, especially Archbishop Paul Bruchési of Montréal, played a fundamental role in her vocation.

A strong missionary spirit enflamed the Church in the early twentieth century. But Canada was not considered among the great donor countries on a universal level, both for the Pontifical Mission Societies and for missionary vocations. Donations and resources passed through foreign religious

communities operating in Canada. Young people who aspired to missionary life had to be trained abroad. In 1902, after many trials, Délia and two companions founded an apostolic school in Montreal for the formation of young girls for missionary communities.

In November 1904, while Archbishop Bruchési was visiting Rome, Father Gustave Bourassa, a supporter of the young community, died in an accident. He had asked Bruchési to speak to the Pope about this nascent community and, despite his hesitations, the archbishop did so with Pope Pius X. The Pope exclaimed, "Establish it, establish it ... and all the blessings of heaven will descend upon this foundation." On December 7, the Pope conferred on it the name of the Society of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, indicating the whole world as its field of apostolate. On August 8, 1905, Délia made her perpetual profession. "All mission countries are open to you." She could only give thanks. Her missionary dream had become reality.

The founder realized that it was time for the Church in Canada to offer its contribution for service to the universal mission of the Church. She endeavored to awaken and form the missionary conscience in the country, creating fertile ground in which missionary vocations would emerge and where the resources needed to support missions in other countries would be found. The first request came from the bishop of Canton, China. In 1909 Délia sent him six young sisters. She would, in time, open a total of nineteen missions in the Far East. Among the requests she received from bishops, Délia Tétreault favored the works of mercy: kindergartens and orphanages for abandoned children, communities for leprous women, and houses for the elderly or disabled people. In fact, she opened the first school for girls in Canton, a hospital for people with psychic disorders, and promoted formation activities for the catechists and the other religious in the area. The obstacles were numerous as evidenced by her voluminous correspondence, yet undaunted she encouraged her daughters from a distance, insisting on Christian values.

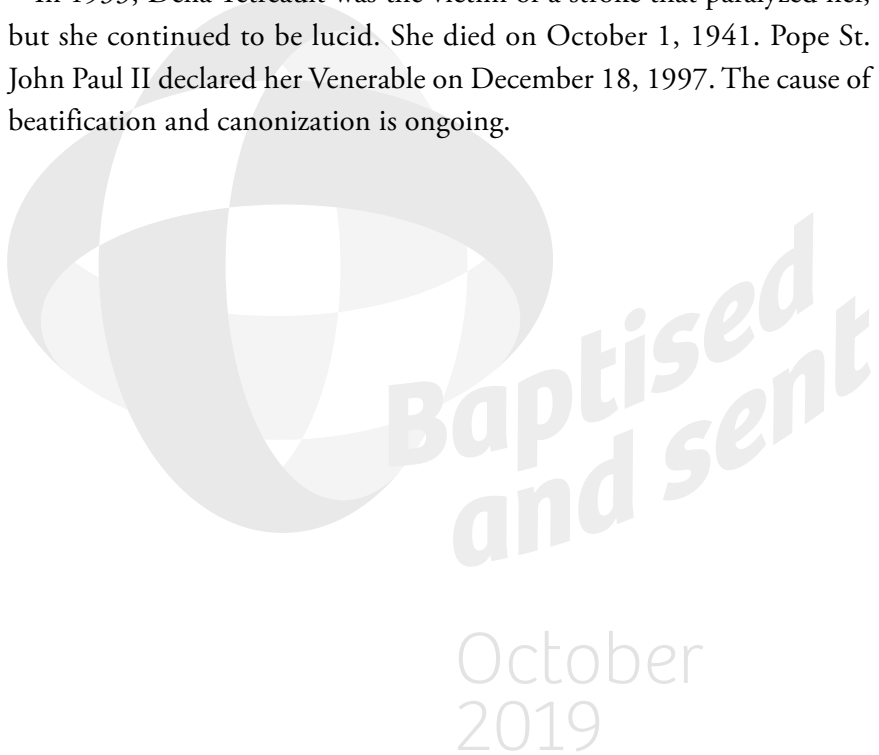
Because her health was fragile, Délia could never leave her homeland. But by God's providence, Canada benefited from her apostolic zeal for the mission. Among the preferred missionary works, she and her institute immediately became committed to promoting the Missionary Societies of the Holy Childhood and of the Propagation of the Faith. Both Societies were already present in Canada but were languishing because of neglect. In 1908, Délia and her daughters introduced the Society of the Holy Childhood to Outremont and Montréal. In 1917, Archbishop Paul Bruchési officially called them to revitalize the Society of the Holy Childhood in his diocese. They did everything in their power to inspire the local children to open their hearts to the needs of the other children in distant countries of the world who did not know Jesus. The sisters would visit all of the parishes and schools of Québec and elsewhere in Canada with boundless zeal.

In 1917, the Society of the Propagation of the Faith was experiencing a steady decline in support, and Délia was determined to address this problem with the same exuberance. During all of these years, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception actively collaborated in the Pontifical Mission Societies at all levels, in Canada, South America, Haiti, and Madagascar. Délia Tétreault even exploited the power of the media to promote missionary formation in Canada and to support the missions abroad. In 1920 she launched the missionary magazine *Le Précurseur*, and an English edition was introduced in 1923. Many missionary vocations were born through exposure to these publications.

Seeking to fulfill the will of God, Délia persevered in trying to accomplish the second part of her dream: to collaborate in the foundation of a seminary for missionary priests and had a concrete plan to support this work. Discreetly, but boldly, she visited the bishops of the various dioceses, insisting that this initiative was not just a Canadian extension of the Paris Foreign Missions Seminary. As a result, on February 2, 1921, the bishops of Québec founded the Society of Foreign Missions of Québec.

From the very beginning, Délia invited the collaboration of the laity in support of the missions. She made them missionaries in their own areas of daily life. She introduced spiritual retreats for women and apostolic schools. She also answered an obvious need: to help the Chinese immigrants in the country. She opened hospitals, schools, and centers and inaugurated catechesis in Chinese. Her very compassion evangelized.

In 1933, Délia Tétreault was the victim of a stroke that paralyzed her, but she continued to be lucid. She died on October 1, 1941. Pope St. John Paul II declared her Venerable on December 18, 1997. The cause of beatification and canonization is ongoing.



## SERVANT OF GOD EZECHIELE RAMIN (1953-1985)

The missionary life and martyrdom of the Servant of God Fr. Ezechiele Ramin can be summarized by a sentence that he himself uttered during his homily at Sunday Mass on February 17, 1985, in Cacoal, Brazil, just twelve months after his arrival in that country: “The father who is speaking to you has received death threats. Dear brothers, if my life is for you, my death too will be for you.”

Ezechiele was born in Padua, Italy, on February 9, 1953 to Mario Ramin and Amirabile Rubin. He was their fourth child of six. The parents, of modest means, succeeded with great sacrifice to realize the dream of educating all their children, but their primary desire was to give them a solid human and Christian formation, which would prepare them to face the trials of life. He spent a peaceful childhood and adolescence, anchored to the values of faith and religious practice, study and work, sacrifice and sobriety, love and mutual help, simplicity and honesty. It was a family shaped above all by the mother’s total dedication. Her day was illuminated by the daily Mass and by the prayer with which she often accompanied her housework.

Ezechiele completed his scholastic career with the belief that study was important for life, beyond being his “work” of those years. An awareness of the poverty in which a great part of humanity – then called the Third World – lived, led him to carry out practical forms of solidarity with the oppressed. He joined the “Open Hands” association in Padua and offered his support to the summer work camps that financed micro-projects in the Third World through the collection of used paper, glass, iron, and rags.

Ezechiele always kept in mind the need to be aware of marginalization and poverty in society.

In a speech he offered on World Mission Sunday in October 1971, when he was just eighteen years old, Ezechiele said, “Christ is now on the road to Emmaus, in the streets. He is the face of the poor brother, the old man devoured by leprosy, the millions of hungry, the 600,000 undernourished children. Our Christianity is a strong commitment that can become, if we want, a witness of life to those around us, because one never arrives before God alone.” The experience of “Open Hands” was so intense and meaningful for him that he continued it in Florence in 1973-74, while he was carrying out a trial period with the Comboni missionaries.

At the end of the summer, when his parents asked him about which university he wanted to attend, he invited them to get in the car and brought them to the Comboni Missionary Institute in Verdara. He surprised them by saying, “Here is my faculty!” They were perplexed, as were all of the others to whom he communicated his plans, because he had never spoken about it before. It was a choice he had considered in silence. It matured in the secret of his conscience as he had walked between home and school, along high mountain paths or while cycling through his beloved Euganean Hills. It had not been an easy choice. He spoke of this during his encounter with a Comboni priest who was visiting his school to give a vocation talk, at the end of which he confessed to the priest, “You spoke of Jonah who was afraid of going to Nineveh. That Jonah who is afraid is really me.” Was it the fear of undertaking such an arduous missionary vocation, the fear of not having what it takes or being faithful to the end? In fact, we do not know the fears that may have weighed upon his heart during this time of discernment because the available correspondence dates back to 1972, after he had already made his decision; one that he would never turn back on. In fact, after his struggle making a decision, he was filled with peace and serenity that came from knowing that one has responded to an insistent call. “To bring Christ is to bring joy,” he wrote. “I follow the path of the

missionary, not on my own initiative, but because God sought me and continually asks me if I want to follow him.”

In September 1972, Ezechiele left Padua, his family and his friends, to begin the journey that would eventually lead him to the priesthood. On May 26, 1976, he asked to consecrate himself to God by taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and becoming part of the Comboni Missionary Congregation. When he had made his vows, Ezechiele was sent to England to learn English in anticipation of being sent to complete theological studies in Uganda. But because of the precarious political situation in that country and the difficulties related to obtaining a residence permit, he was sent to the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where he lived and studied until June 1979. During the summer holidays he was sent to an African American parish in Richmond, Virginia, in the southern United States. It was the America of the excluded, of the lost, of those left behind in the race for material success and of those who needed help, even an open ear to listen to their story. He said to one of his brothers, “Poverty was in every house.... I met people who were forty years old who asked me what they should do. I’ve been with alcoholics, with homeless people, with 13-year-old pregnant girls. They all just asked to be heard, to be understood.” In short, Ezechiele showed that he possessed a particular predisposition and sensitivity in grasping the needs of the poorest of the poor and a capacity to stand by their side.

After his experience in the United States, he went to Lisbon to learn the language of the people he was destined to serve for the rest of his life. He arrived in Brazil on January 20, 1984, and spent a few weeks in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In March he moved to Brasília to take courses in Brazilian culture and pastoral care. As he got to know Brazil, he became aware, not only of the situation of the Church there, but also of the dramatic condition of the poor, especially of the farmers, who had been driven off their lands by the invasion of powerful multinational companies that occupied large pieces of land to raise livestock for meat



export to well to do countries. At the end of June, with his period of preparation completed, Ezechiele reached the Cacoal mission in the state of Rondônia, in Amazônia Legal.

In those days, along with the very difficult social situation of the country, the state of Rondônia was racked by two disruptive forces. On the one hand it was sustaining a constant migratory influx, especially from the northeast. On the other hand, its traditional native lands were being invaded. In fact, more than half of the aboriginal population of Brazil lived in Rondônia. During those months, an area on the outskirts of the Cacoal parish at the border between the states of Rondônia and Mato Grosso had become a hotbed of tension, because a group of landless farming families had settled there to work some of its uncultivated land.

Father Ezechiele knew the area and the conflicts that were present there, since it was part of his pastoral assignment. He travelled to the most afflicted area on July 22 and 23 to minister to the people and to work together with the president of the local trade union. In one of the communities that he visited, the settlers' wives pleaded with him to go and convince their husbands to stop tilling the land that was now claimed by one of the multinational companies. The presence of these itinerate farmers on land claimed by a large corporation could lead to armed confrontation and result in many unnecessary deaths. In fact, they had already been threatened and intimidated by the corporation's armed guards. The women said that Fr. Ezechiele was the only one who had the moral authority and credibility to convince their husbands to withdraw and wait for more opportune times, a credibility that he gained during his months of pastoral care of the people. On the following day, just before dinner, Fr. Ezechiele presented the situation to his confreres, members of his religious community. Some of them agreed to come out to act as support the next morning, given the extreme gravity of the conditions of the farmers. These were critical moments and there was some dissension from the established plan even though Fr. Ezechiele emphasized the

enormous danger that the farmers were in and the heartfelt appeal made by their wives.

A swarm of anguished thoughts and worries must have besieged him that night, because very early the next morning on July 24, while his confreres were still asleep, he decided to leave with the community's jeep together with a friend who was a member of the trade union. At 11:00 a.m., they arrived in the town of Aripuanã (Mato Grosso), a hundred kilometers from Cacoal. They found a dozen of the farmers gathered together and nearby there was a group of men hired by the landowners to act as guards. Fr. Ezechiele and his friend spoke to the farmers, encouraging them to avoid any violence or provocation, given the danger of possible uncontrollable accidents with the armed guards.

The meeting was brief and Fr. Ezechiele was convinced that he had persuaded them to peaceful and nonviolent resolution of the tensions. As they headed out, the armed guards drove ahead of them with an off-road vehicle. After a few kilometers Fr. Ezechiele and his traveling companion found the road blocked by the guards' vehicle. They had time to guess what was about to happen and gunshots rang out. They both jumped out of the jeep but the gunmen focused their fire on Fr. Ezechiele. He shouted, "I am a priest! Men, let's talk!" There was no mercy. He was shot 75 times before he could reach the dense forest. A true execution. It was about noon on July 24, 1985. Fr. Ezechiele's companion slightly wounded by the jeep's windows, after hours of walking in the forest, found the farmers who had left the meeting place. Picked up by a truck bound for Cacoal, at one o'clock in the morning he informed Fr. Ezechiele's confreres. They immediately left to inform the police and the bishop, but the police would not agree to escort them to the site of the shooting until morning.

Fr. Ezechiele's body lay fifty meters from the jeep, riddled with bullets. No doubt they wanted to kill a priest who represented the local diocese that clearly sided with those suffering poverty and injustice, the indigent landless farmers. It is worth noting that Fr. Ezechiele always wore a

cross. It was ripped off during his execution. A larger wooden cross was erected upon the site of his death. It, too, was torn down. But, in the end, the community that now bears his name has replaced the wooden cross with one made of durable concrete.



## SERVANT OF GOD FELICE TANTARDINI (1898-1991)

The Servant of God, Brother Felice Tantardini, a lay missionary of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) in Burma (Myanmar), was born on June 28, 1898 in Introbio, a small village north of Milan, in the Italian province of Lecco. He was the sixth of eight children. As a soldier in World War I, he was taken prisoner by the Austro-Hungarians and later escaped from a prison camp. He entered the PIME in 1921, and in 1922 was sent to Burma where he remained until his death on March 23, 1991. He would return to his native land only once, in April 1956, but returned to Burma in January the very next year. His earthly story does not include any particularly sensational events. What is striking and arouses admiration is “the extraordinary in the ordinary” in this man, rich in humanity and overflowing with faith; someone who made his life a total gift in the service to the Gospel and to his brothers and sisters.

The first virtue that stands out from the overall picture of his life is faith. The criteria that inspired his words, his writings, his actions, and his relationships with people were derived, not from calculation or human logic, but from the Gospel. His gaze was one of faith. We can truly say that he saw and judged things, events, and people with the eyes and the heart of Jesus, whom he loved deeply. In his journey of faith, he let himself be “formed” docilely by an exceptional educator – his “dear Madonna,” whom he invariably invoked with affection and filial tenderness. Brother Felice’s faith was constantly nourished by the Word of God, prayer, and the Sacraments, from which he would draw light and strength to face every challenge and trial, with a smile on his face and peace in his heart,

never complaining about his hardships. We know this from excerpts of testimonies taken during official depositions for his beatification cause:

“He had a pure and simple faith. God and Our Lady were his everything.” “Every morning he had at least an hour of meditation and then he rang the bell. And this he did every morning, without ever getting tired.... He was also faithful to Eucharistic adoration, which he would engage in especially in the evening, after work.” “When he prayed, he was truly attentive.... He seemed to be talking to God as if he saw him.” “His devotion to the Madonna was proverbial: he was always holding the rosary.”

To understand how and with what spirit he worked, the following two testimonies are particularly relevant.

A Burmese nun declares, “He was a man full of virtues, completely dedicated to his work.... And he never wasted time. He was a man who was all about prayer and work, and his work was all for God.... He preferred to do the work in silence and in secret.... It was a way of being attentive and totally dedicated to God and his service.”

A Burmese priest attests, “I remember him as a man who worked a lot, who was enthusiastic about his work and was able to inspire those who worked with him. I remember that he was very careful not to require of someone a more difficult or demanding job than one he could do.... He was always very serene and joking, so he made us all happy and satisfied in our work.” In a word, Brother Felice loved to work joyfully for the Lord. He knew how to teach others about work, which means about life. After all, life is not worth living without a task to accomplish!

“Faith work[s] through love,” says St. Paul (Gal 5:6). It was from his love of God that Brother Felice’s love flowed towards everyone; a love that was manifested concretely in his attentive service to others, especially those most in need: the sick and those suffering from Hansen’s disease and other disabilities, without making distinctions of the creed that one professed.

Self-giving was also expressed in the obedience he practiced in an exemplary way. He happily went everywhere that the bishop or his superiors sent him, and he was particularly happy to have been sent to help the forest dwellers. He said that people in the city enjoyed a certain well-being and had workers at their disposal, while those in the forest were often abandoned and in need of everything. He willingly, but discreetly and hidden from others, stripped himself of everything to help the poor, keeping for himself only the bare necessities. He was well liked by everyone but remained humble and even a bit shy. In fact, humility seemed to be part of his very nature.

The spirit of sacrifice and the ability to face the difficulties, trials, and adversities of life with patience and courage are part of Tantardini's rich human and Christian heritage. We know that he did not grow up in comfort and spent years of military service and imprisonment during the Great War, which tempered young Felice's character. This was followed by his missionary experience in a land and a time marked by misery, hunger, conflict, famine and Japanese and Chinese invasions and bombings during the Second World War; all of which brought unspeakable sorrow and suffering. We also know that he risked his life in the midst of the bombings during the Japanese invasion, which lasted two years. But he always managed to get by with the special protection of the "good God" and the "dear Madonna," as he said. His own ingenuity also certainly played a role in all of this.

But time passes for everyone. His physical health had taken its toll from his work, many an exhausting journey and even some surgical interventions that resulted in postoperative complications. Nevertheless, it was rare for him to complain, always careful not to burden others. Sustaining him through all the tribulations were his rock-like faith and his fidelity to prayer. He could not have been able to cope with so many trials without strong internal motivation and special help from Above, which he sought assiduously with humility and trust.

He died at the age of 93, on a mission that had not yet been completed. It was Saturday, March 23, 1991, Mary's day, just as he had desired. He is, no doubt fulfilling his promise from heaven to be a missionary, but now "no longer beating the anvil, but hammering steadily at the heart of the good God" for the salvation of those poor and humble people he so loved.



## JEAN CASSAIGNE (1895-1973)

**B**ishop Jean Cassaigne was born in Grenade-sur-Adour, in the Landes region of France, on January 30, 1895. He lost his mother prematurely and was sent by his father to Spain to study in a college run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He returned to France around age seventeen to help his father in his work, but he felt attracted to the missions and expressed his desire to become a missionary. Just as he was preparing to enter the Rue du Bac Seminary, he learned of the declaration of war between France and Germany. He then enlisted at the age of nineteen. He spent five years at the front as a liaison officer, participated in the Battle of Verdun, and was decorated with the Military Cross. After demobilization, in 1920 he entered the Seminary of the Foreign Missions of Paris, was ordained a priest on December 19, 1925, and left for Indochina on April 6, 1926. He was first sent to Cai-Mon, an important Christian community in the province of Ben-Tre, Vietnam, to learn Vietnamese.

Arriving at the mission, like others, Jean Cassaigne, dedicated the first months of his missionary life to the study of the local language and customs and was introduced to pastoral care in the Vietnamese context, in the large parish of Cai-Mon. The following year he was sent by his bishop, Isidore Dumortier, to Djiring (Di-linh) on the highlands of the Upper Dong Nai, to establish a new Christian community among the peoples of the mountains of this region, inhabited by the Sré, also called Koho. At the time, the Djiring region was populated almost exclusively by ethnic minorities, because the Vietnamese had not yet settled in the highlands.



From the moment he arrived, Jean carefully studied the local language, which was very different from the Vietnamese language, and soon began to compile a lexicon and a conversation manual. The young missionary quickly began to make contact with the animist populations, but they were wary and probably afraid of the bearded stranger. It is possible that the people of the forest (called Moïs, or “savages”) had never seen a white-skinned European. Little by little, however, with his smile and his amiability, Jean succeeded in approaching them.

He discovered then the misery of those people, forced by various circumstances to move away from their natural environment. Obligated to leave the forest where they usually found their subsistence, undernourished, without clothes, they were easy prey for any kind of disease. And among them, Jean discovered the sickest and unhappiest of all: the lepers, rejected by their families, abandoned in the forest, without shelter or care, waiting only for death to put an end to their suffering. Those poor people, excluded from society, deeply moved his missionary heart. It was then that he made the commitment to devote all his strength to serving them. Slowly, the Moïs accepted his presence and began to seek him out.

At that time, many French plantation owners, who had obtained land concessions from the colonial government to farm the Djiring plateau, asked the mission to create a Christian community. The Paris Foreign Missions Society found the proposal interesting and worthy of being welcomed. Bishop Dumortier, for his part, saw a providential opportunity to begin evangelization in that region. The mission then acquired a house, which at the same time served as a residence for the missionary and as a school for the children of the mountain populations. With the help of some men, Jean Cassaigne built for them the small village of Kala, not far from the village of Djiring. Made up of huts on stilts, as inhabitants of the country often constructed their homes, Jean called it the “City of Joy.” And then, little by little, he gathered the lepers around him. He considered them his own children, provided them with food, and cared

for them every day. In 1929, the village of lepers was enlarged and there were already a hundred patients.

In 1930, Father Cassaigne had baptized his first two catechumens and several families asked to become Christians. At the center of the village there was an infirmary where he distributed medications and other medical care three times a week. He took care of the lepers himself and, with religious instruction, prepared them to die as Christians. In one corner of the village was the lepers' chapel where, on Sundays, prayers were recited in Koho and catechism lessons were held.

In 1935, Jean, with the help of his faithful catechist Joseph Braï and the collaboration of a hundred lepers, founded an autonomous village in Kala, near Djiring, to gather and care for the Moïs lepers of the region. A few months later, he had the joy of baptizing twenty-six catechumens in a completely new chapel. It was the beginning of the first Christian community of mountain populations, which would continue to develop in the future. By 1936 there were two hundred.

In 1937, a visitor of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Clotilde Durand, moved by the dedication of this missionary who personally treated the lepers, promised him the help of the order. Four Daughters of Charity arrived at the village in February 1938 and began to treat lepers.

In 1941, a telegram from Rome pulled Jean Cassaigne away from his lepers. The Pope had appointed him bishop, making him responsible for the Apostolic Vicariate of Saigon. Despite his disinterest in honors, he had to agree to "go down" to Saigon. He received episcopal ordination on the feast of Saint John, June 24<sup>th</sup>. A crowd of three thousand people gathered in the cathedral of Saigon for the ceremony, and among them was an important delegation of the people of the mountains in traditional costume, coming to represent the Christian community of Djiring.

In Saigon, Bishop Cassaigne brought his personal style with him. Though he certainly carried out his responsibilities and respected the expectations of his ministry, in his daily life, Cassaigne remained a simple and welcoming

man. He always left the door open; everyone – poor and rich, without distinction of race or social background – was welcome without appointment. He maintained this burdensome task for fifteen years, through which he faced many difficulties, both during the Japanese occupation and during the Franco-Vietnamese war. During this turbulent period, he put his energies at the service of all, organizing aid and relief for those most in need, without preferences or exceptions. The Japanese themselves paid homage to the love of neighbor and the dedication shown by Bishop Cassaigne.

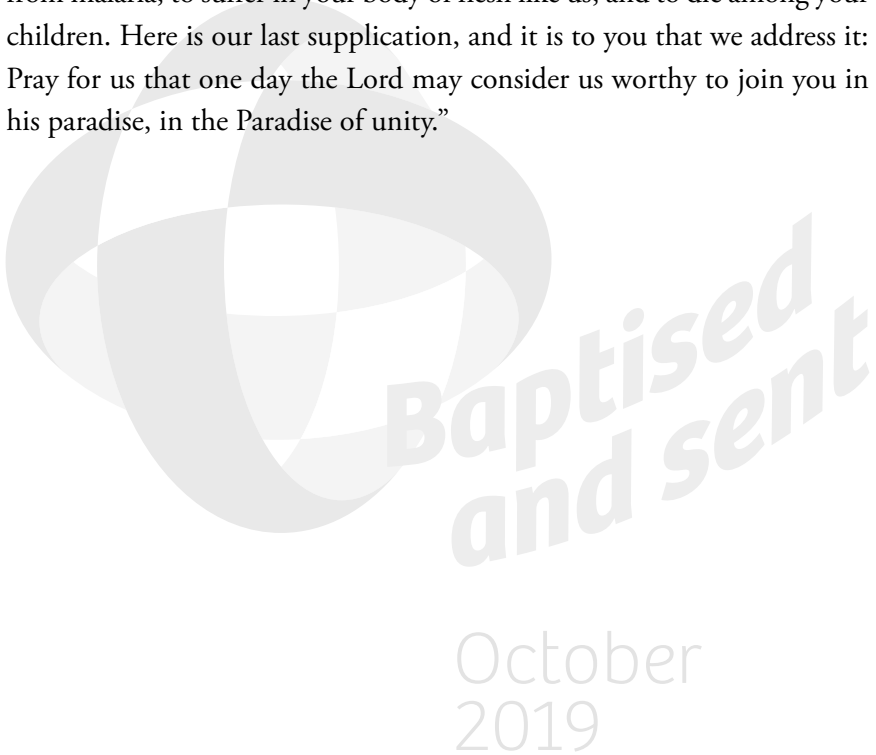
He, however, had one desire in his heart: to return to live with his dear mountain people. When he learned that he had also contracted leprosy, he submitted his resignation as apostolic vicar of Saigon to the Holy See. The Pope accepted it, giving Cassaigne the great joy of returning to live among his lepers in December 1955. From that point, he would never leave them again.

Returning to Djiring, his only concern was to provide adequate material assistance to his people, and above all to offer them the spiritual help that made them happy people. He loved them so much, was so close to them, and mingled with them so intimately that, struck himself by leprosy, he chose to live out this suffering alongside them. And at the end of his life, despite his pains and bedridden by illness, he always maintained joy, a radiant and communicative joy that one day made him say to his friends, “The good Lord loves me, because he chose for me the best prayer, which is suffering, the one he reserves for friends.”

Bishop Cassaigne died on October 31, 1973, and, according to his wishes, was buried in the small cemetery of the leper colony, where he himself had dug the grave for his first convert. The gratitude of the lepers to Bishop Cassaigne was expressed in a moving way on the day of his burial by one of the lepers, who took the floor on behalf of his sick brothers and addressed this message to him:

“O Father, you have shown us the true way to heaven, and this leper colony is your work. Thanks to you, we did not lack anything: food, clothes,

medicines. You sought them for us.... Dearest Father, deprived as we are of everything, we can only thank you and pray to the Lord for you. Today we want to live your teaching, to keep alive the bond of love between us and the way you loved us, to suffer in our flesh of sorrow, as you taught us to suffer during your life among us. Father, when you were alive, you wanted to identify with us, you wanted to contract leprosy like us, to suffer from malaria, to suffer in your body of flesh like us, and to die among your children. Here is our last supplication, and it is to you that we address it: Pray for us that one day the Lord may consider us worthy to join you in his paradise, in the Paradise of unity.”



## BLESSED JUSTUS TAKAYAMA UKON (1552-1615)

**A**mong the many saints in the history of the Church in the Land of the Rising Sun (42 saints and 393 blessed, including European missionaries), all martyred *in odium fidei* during several waves of persecution, the story of Justus Takayama Ukon is special. He was a layman, politician and soldier; in fact, he was a feudal lord and a samurai. Unlike the others, he was not put to death, but renounced a social position of very high rank, nobility and wealth, in order to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

He was born with the name Hikogoro Shigetomo between 1552 and 1553 in Takayama Castle, near Nara, Japan, the son of Takayama Zusho, who later became lord of the castle of Sawa. Takayama was his family name and derived from the territory that was their feudal property. His family was part of the noble class, or *daimyō*, lords of a castle with its properties. They were second only to the shogun (lords of several territories of which the different *daimyō* were faithful allies, providing them with an army and professional fighters, the samurai) who were often at war with each other to broaden their areas of influence.

In 1563, his father was appointed by his shogun to judge a Jesuit missionary, Father Gaspar Videla, who had been proclaiming the Gospel in Kyoto, the future imperial city. The Gospel was brought to Japan by the great missionary, Jesuit Father Francis Xavier in 1549, and spread rapidly. Listening to Father Videla, Justus's father was so impressed that he decided to become a Christian. He was baptized and took the name Darius. Returning home to his castle accompanied by a catechist, he instructed and baptized many of his soldiers, his wife, and his children, including

his oldest son Hikogoro, who at the time was about twelve years old and who received the name Justus. From that moment on his father became a protector of Christians.

For Justus, the son and heir of an important *daimyō*, it would be his natural vocation to become a samurai, a warrior always ready to defend his family, his estate, and his lord, the shogun. Given the frequent conflicts between the *daimyō*, he participated in wars and fights, and distinguished himself by his valor. His forced convalescence, after being wounded in a duel, was providential for him and he became convinced in 1571, at the age of twenty, that even though he would remain a samurai he would have to put his skill in handling weapons at the service of the weakest members of his territory, especially widows and orphans.

In 1573, his family received a new estate, and since by now his father was too old to manage the family's affairs, Justus became the *daimyō*. Two years later he married Giusta, a Christian, and had three sons (two of whom died as infants) and a daughter. He built a church in the imperial city of Kyoto and a seminary in Azuchi, on Lake Biwa, for the formation of Japanese missionaries and catechists. Most seminarians came from the families of his estate.

Justus used a customary Japanese tea ceremony as an opportunity to evangelize. During the ceremony relationships were strengthened and friendships deepened, and Justus would transform the moment by proclaiming the Gospel to all present and by entering into dialogue about the Christian faith with other nobles. In the first period of the shogun, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who rose to power in 1583, increased his influence among the nobles, several of whom chose to become Christians. But Toyotomi, who had become so powerful that he could unify all of Japan under his authority, began to fear Christians and in 1587 issued an edict that prohibited the practice of Christianity in the country and ordered the expulsion of foreign missionaries and exile for native catechists.

All of the great feudal lords accepted the arrangement except for Justus, who preferred to renounce his estate and suffer exile rather than obey.

Toyotomi suddenly died, but his successor proved to be even worse than he was. The persecution of Christians became widespread and intense, with the aim of eradicating what was called “the bad plant” or “the perverse religion.”

On February 14, 1614, Justus Takayama and his family were captured and transferred to Nagasaki, where they awaited execution together with the missionaries who were gathered there. After months of jail, on November 8, 1614, Justus and three hundred of his companions were sentenced to exile and loaded on a Chinese junk to Manila in the Philippines. During his time in prison, he had hoped to share the fate of the martyrs of Nagasaki. He was certain that he would be killed and had waited for the end with great serenity. The expulsion and the slow voyage on the loaded ship into the unknown served to help Justus deepen his faith. Although received with honors by the Spaniards, exhausted by imprisonment and the long voyage, he died in Manila on February 3, 1615, forty days after his arrival in the Philippines.

The example of Justus is important and valuable. He lived an authentic, honest, sincere, and profound Christian life. He was recognized as a martyr, because even though he was not directly killed by his persecutors, he was forced to abandon all his wealth and social status and to endure a voyage and exile that contributed to his death. He was very happy to have received from God the gift of the Christian faith, and he was a contagious witness to all those he met – nobles of his rank, superiors, subjects, and friends.

He was beatified in Osaka on February 7, 2017, during the pontificate of Pope Francis.

## BLESSED LUCIEN BOTOVASOA (1908-1947)

Lucien Botovasoa was born in 1908 in Vohipeno, a small village in the Diocese of Farafangana, on the southeastern coast of Madagascar, more than one thousand kilometers from the nation's capital. His parents were poor farmers, like many others in this region, always struggling with weather-related risks. They followed the traditional religion but were open-minded. When the villagers discovered the Christian faith, many converted and asked for baptism. Among them was Lucien, baptized at the age of 13 on Holy Saturday, April 15, 1922. His parents converted to the Christian faith much later. Lucien was confirmed the following year, April 2, 1923. From his childhood, Lucien was intent on living his faith with commitment and seriousness.

Lucien's ideal of life was to be a good Christian, an apostle of Jesus in the heart of the world. What most characterized his martyrdom was his love for his compatriots and his persecutors. It is no coincidence that he was called Rabefihavanana, the Reconciler.

Following the motto of the Jesuit Fathers, *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, Lucien studied in Ambazontany Fianarantsoa, at Saint Joseph College, for four years. After he obtained a teacher's diploma, he returned to Vohipeno as teacher and assistant director of the parish school. Even then, he still had the desire to read and continue to learn everything. He was a wonderful educator and an exceptional, competent, conscientious, and zealous teacher, explaining all the school subjects to his students with clarity and kindness. But he was also a Christian teacher and always concerned himself with the religious education of children, to whom he taught catechism both



during school hours and after classes. Every evening, after school, he read the stories of the saints to those who wanted to hear them. But what he loved most of all were the lives of the martyrs; he knew how to tell them with a very particular fervor that set fire to the hearts of those who listened.

On October 10, 1930, Lucien married Suzanne Soazana. The couple had eight children, of whom only five survived. Lucien loved his children, educated them, and taught them to pray. But he also spent a great deal of time taking care of the children of others, visiting the sick, teaching in the evening, leading various groups – the Crusaders of the Heart of Jesus, the Honor Guard of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Young Malagasy Catholics – to learn the catechism. Suzanne, at home, had a great challenge: she wanted her husband to leave the role of teacher to become an accountant. Lucien, however, continued his service of forming others in the Christian life with joy and generosity. He spent much time at church, playing the harmonium and conducting the choir, not only during Sunday Mass, but also weekdays at the early morning six o'clock Mass.

Around 1940, looking for a book on the life of a married saint to be taken as a model, Lucien discovered the Franciscan Third Order (since 1978, called the Secular Franciscan Order) and studied the Rule. With Marguerite Kembarakala, who had formed him to the faith, he established a first community of brothers in Vohipeno. The rule was demanding, and Lucien applied it to the letter. Lucien Botovasoa began to excel in piety and poverty. Every night he got up several times to pray kneeling at the foot of the bed, then he went to church at six for an hour of meditation before the tabernacle. On Wednesdays and Fridays, he enlivened the family meal but, following the rule, he fasted himself, provoking Suzanne's discontent.

In October 1945 and then in June 1946, political elections were held in Madagascar. The two political parties wanted Lucien Botovasoa as their candidate. But Lucien categorically refused their invitation, insisting, "Your politics are nourished by lies and can only end in blood."

Sunday, March 30, 1947, Palm Sunday, Lucien's father sent Lucien and

his brother into the forest. The two took refuge there as insurgents attacked the city. The fighting lasted until Wednesday. The massacres carried out by the political party known as the Parti des déshérités de Madagascar resulted in a bloody Holy Week. The result was a total massacre, with eighteen churches and five schools burned. Naturally, on Easter, it was not possible to celebrate the Eucharist in the parish church. On the Second Sunday of Easter, Lucien returned to the city after having taken his family to safety in the forest. Here he succeeded in bringing all the refugees together in a common prayer, in which Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims participated. Lucien commented on the Gospel, urging everyone to revive their faith and to have the courage to face martyrdom in the event that it was necessary. He spoke and led the song with intense joy.

On April 16, 1947, King Tsimihono, the local leader of the Malagasy Democratic Renewal Movement (MDRM), summoned everyone to eliminate all the party's enemies from the city, including Lucien. On Thursday, April 17, the king offered a key position to Lucien Botovasoa, inviting him to become the secretary of the MDRM. Meanwhile Lucien had communicated to his wife that they would condemn him. Suzanne wanted him to hide, but Lucien refused and, taking a picture of St. Francis from the wall, said, "He will guide me."

After a quiet lunch with his family and some prayer, Lucien replied to those who had come to arrest him without the slightest hesitation, "*I am ready.*" He was taken without the least resistance. He knew he would die and when they called him, he came forward. Sitting at the king's right hand, in the place of honor, he said aloud, "I know you are going to kill me, and I cannot fight it. If my life can save others, do not hesitate to kill me. The only thing I ask of you is not to touch my brothers."

If he had accepted the role as MDRM secretary, he would have saved his life. But he said, "You kill, you burn the churches, you forbid prayer, you let the crucifixes be trampled, and you destroy the sacred images, rosaries, and the scapulars. You want to desecrate our church, turning it

into a ballroom. Yours is a dirty work. You know how important religion is to me. I cannot work for you.” About thirty boys from Ambohimanarivo, mostly his old students, accompanied him to the Mattatoio, the place where executions took place, at the south exit of the city, in a place called Ambalafary. Lucien said, “Tell my family not to cry, because I am happy. It is God who takes me. May your hearts never abandon God!” He walked like a free man, a conqueror.

The group of boys arrived at the place of execution. Three men designated by the king were already in place. To reach them, the procession had to cross a canal. Before crossing it, Lucien asked for time to pray and was given it. He prayed, “O my God, forgive my brothers, who now have a difficult task to face. May my blood be shed for the salvation of my country!” Lucien repeated these words several times. He also prayed in Latin, and perhaps intoned the song of Lent that he loved so much: “Save, O Lord, save your people, may your wrath not remain forever upon us!”

Then they wanted to tie his hands, but he refused, saying, “Do not bind me to kill me. I bind myself.” And he crossed his wrists one on top of the other, holding the cross of the rosary in his hand. Once on his knees, he prayed again, repeating the words already spoken before: “O my God, forgive my brothers.” He forgave the executioners first and interceded for them, while they mocked him: “Your prayer is too long! Do you think it will save you?” Some of those who had remained on the other side of the canal were shouting insults. But Lucien answered, “I have not finished! Leave me a moment longer.” He raised his hands to heaven and prostrated himself three times on the ground, like Jesus during the Passion, then turned to them saying, “Hurry up now, because the spirit is ready but the flesh is weak.” While they killed him, the executioners mocked him, saying, “Now go play your harmonium.” Given up for love of Christ and his Church, Lucien’s body was thrown into the Matitanana River. Recognizing his martyrdom and his witness to his faith, the Catholic Church beatified him on April 15, 2018, in Vohipeno, Madagascar.

## MON FILOMENA YAMAMOTO (1930-2014)

**M**on Filomena Yamamoto, a Japanese Xavierian Missionary of Mary, left this earth on April 28, 2014, in Miyazaki. She was 83 years old.

About ten years earlier, she had recounted in a Xavieran publication how she had come to know Christ:

Thinking of the environment in which I grew up and of the events that preceded the grace of baptism, I clearly see the loving hand of God who guided me in a silent and hidden way. I was born to a Buddhist family of the Zen current. In the house there was an altar where the mortuary tablets of our ancestors were venerated. Every morning we offered a cup of tea and a little cup of rice, and we stopped to pray with folded hands. When pilgrims passed by on their way to some temple or when poor people came, we would offer them rice to eat.

We had a profound connection with the temple. As a child I often went to visit it. I listened to the monk's sermons and I wondered why people are born and then die, why there is suffering and why those who do good in the world so often are the ones who suffer while those who do evil succeed and live in comfort. I would often dwell on these thoughts, but I did not dare to ask adults, because I had the impression that they would not be able to answer me.

Through nature, with the marvelous spectacle of changing seasons, I believe the Lord spoke to me. I felt that, above the deities of the ancient religions of Japan, there must be a God who created heaven and earth and that I had to look for the true religion. I prayed to find it, but I did not know where to find it.

When I was 23, I left my town to go to Miyazaki. Invited by a friend, I began to attend the Catholic Church and catechetical lessons. At the beginning,

I felt a certain resistance towards faith in one God, because Japanese culture is imbued with the presence of many deities that are not exclusive of each other. But, continuing the study of Christianity, when I could listen to the passage about the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord and understand the marvelous work of redemption, I felt within me the firm conviction that I had finally found what I had sought for years.

From her early youth, Mon wanted a life entirely dedicated to others, but it was only when she met Christ that she found the way to do it. While still a catechumen, she was fascinated by the idea of giving her whole life to the mercy of God. She said, “When I was still a catechumen, the Xaverian missionary Father Sandro Danieli lent me the autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and I read of the offering to merciful love that she made of herself. It was the first time I came across this idea. Later, entering the Xaverian missionaries, I was surprised to discover that the founder, Father Giacomo Spagnolo, had a deep devotion to the Merciful Omnipotence of God and that all of us, in our perpetual profession, entrusted our life to Merciful Omnipotence of the Lord.”

Love for Mary helped to guide her choice. When Mon entered the Xaverian Missionary Sisters of Mary in 1961, the Xaverians had been in Japan for only two years. One of them, named Maddalena, remembered, “Mon was a sister who was faithful to the choice of her life. She created harmony in any community that her obedience led her to. Her serenity, her humor, her simplicity gave everyone the opportunity to be welcomed. She was a ‘true’ person of the Gospel, one of those people to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs. Accepting everything, and living in the present moment, she offered everything with Jesus and in prayer. She was at peace and spread peace.”

Another Xavierian sister in Japan added, “Open-minded, she was able to face new and unexpected situations beautifully, with a spark of humor. She kept up to date on world and national problems so that she could

take them to prayer and share them with us and with the people she met. She gave special attention to visiting the sick, the elderly, and the lonely.”

A Xavierian father who met her at the beginning of her missionary service remembered, “In the parish there were many sick people, and Mon asked me to go with her to visit them and bring Communion to them. It was the first time I had done this ministry, and Mon helped me in countless ways. From her I learned how to approach the sick, how to pray with them, how to comfort them, and how to bring Jesus into their lives. Mon opened the way for me to be a true missionary. She showed an acute sensitivity to the physical suffering of others, but her gaze penetrated the deepest recesses of their hearts, and she wished to prepare them to welcome the salvific work of the divine Doctor.”

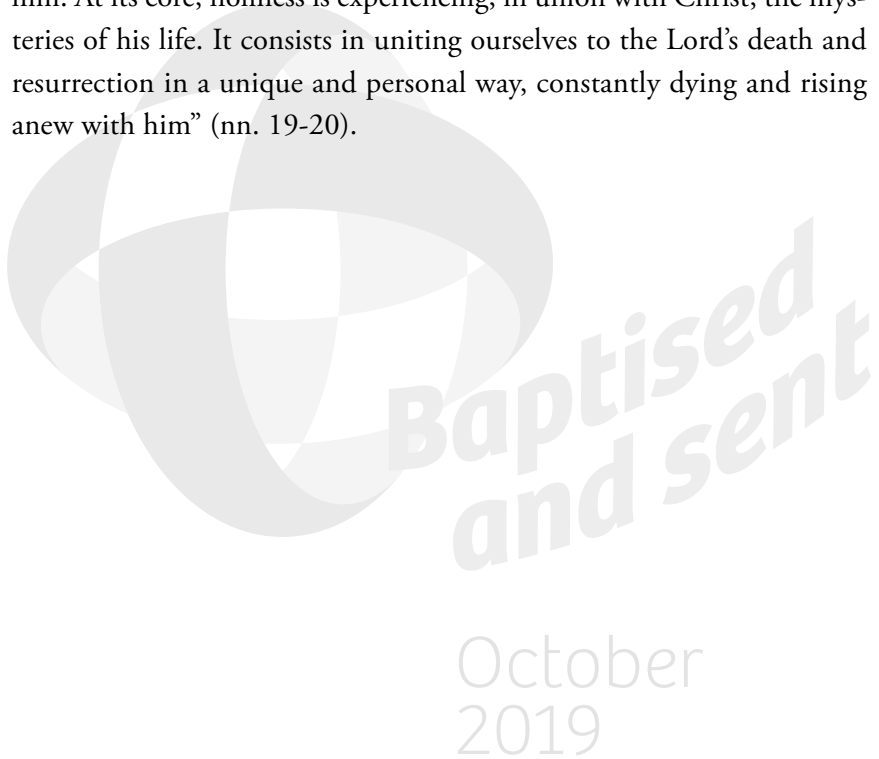
The Director of Shinmeizan Center for Interreligious Dialogue offered this testimony: “I owe much gratitude to Sister Yamamoto Mon, not only because for three years she generously contributed to the life and activities of Shinmeizan, but also and even more for the quality of her presence and for her example of religious life. Always serene and jovial, she was however also very serious and precise in the observance of community life and in other aspects of religious life. Prayer was very important in her life. She was sober and simple and avoided useless chatter, hardworking and very diligent in carrying out the work entrusted to her.”

In 2011, Mon was diagnosed with a malignant tumor. “I went to visit her in the hospital,” wrote a Xavierian missionary friend. “Even then I remember her concern for others. She had made of her room a ‘little church’ where she was in the company of Jesus. While doing chemo she had the opportunity to prepare for death and talked about it with those who went to see her, leaving behind a testimony of faith and serenity from her unconditional trust in Jesus.”

When she saw her smiling, she wondered if she was really ill. She had words of thanks for everyone: “It is thanks to your prayers...” she always said. During her various convalescences, her serenity struck many people:

“People who have faith are different,” they said. In her last days, she prayed continuously, “Lord, come quickly and get me.”

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis wrote “Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel. That mission has its fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him. At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord’s death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him” (nn. 19-20).



## BLESSED PETER TO ROT (1912-1945)

**P**eter To Rot, the first blessed of Papua New Guinea, was an exemplary husband and father and an exceptional catechist. In 1945, he was killed by Japanese soldiers because of his courageous defense of Christian marriage.

The island of New Guinea is surrounded by numerous archipelagos and includes mountainous terrain difficult to traverse and is inhabited by thousands of diverse ethnic groups that speak about eight hundred different dialects. The missionaries brought the Gospel to the region in 1870, and in 1882 the first group of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus arrived at Matupit (now New Britain Island). To everyone's surprise, the head of the village of Rakunai, Angelo To Puia, announced that he wanted to become a Catholic along with most of the villagers. Maria Ia Tumul, Angelo's wife, gave birth to their son Peter in 1912. He was the third of their six children. Angelo To Puia made sure that all of the children were baptized, and he taught them the fundamental truths of the catechism, while Maria taught them to pray.

As a child, attending the missionary school, Peter showed himself to be an exceptional and hard-working student, particularly interested in religion. The boy had a particularly lively personality, but he was also thoughtful and helpful. Even though he was the son of a great chief and could have let others serve him, he was happy to serve others and even to climb palm trees to collect coconuts for the elderly villagers.

In 1930, the parish priest told Peter's father that his young sons might have vocations to the priesthood. To Puia, however, answered wisely, "I



don't think the time is right for one of my sons or another man from this village to become a priest. But if you want to send him to the school for catechists in Taliligap, I'll agree."

The missionary work to be done in Oceania was immense, but there were few missionaries, and for this reason the local youths were encouraged to become catechists and to work with them. Peter dedicated himself to his new life at St. Paul's College, filled with spiritual exercises, lessons, and manual work. The school had a farm that made it largely self-sufficient. Peter offered a fine example to the other students by tending attentively to the work that needed to be done on the farm. He was a "joyful companion" who often ended quarrels among his peers with his calming words. Through frequent confession, daily communion, and the rosary, he and his fellow students succeeded in combating temptation and increasing their faith, thus becoming mature Christians and "apostles."

In 1934, Peter To Rot received his catechist's cross from the bishop and was sent back to his native village to help the parish priest, Father Laufer. He taught catechism to the children of Rakunai, instructed adults in the faith, and led prayer meetings. He encouraged the people to participate in Sunday Mass, and he was a trusted counselor for sinners, helping them prepare for confession. He further committed himself to zealously fighting the practice of witchcraft that was common among many, even among some who called themselves Christians.

In 1936, Peter married Paula Ia Varpit, a young woman from a nearby village. Theirs was an exemplary Christian marriage. Peter showed great respect for his wife and prayed with her every morning and evening. He was also devoted to his children and spent a lot of time with them.

In 1942, during the Second World War, the Japanese invaded New Guinea and immediately confined all the priests and religious in concentration camps. Being a layman, Peter was able to stay in Rakunai. After this, he began to take on many new responsibilities, guiding Sunday prayers and urging the faithful to persevere, witnessing weddings, bap-

tizing newborns, and presiding at funerals. He also led the villagers into the forest, where a missionary had taken refuge after he had managed to escape the Japanese, so that everyone could receive the sacraments in secret.

Although the Japanese initially did not totally forbid Catholic worship, they soon began to loot and destroy churches. So To Rot built a wooden chapel in the bush and created underground hiding places for the sacred vessels. He continued his apostolic work with caution, visiting the Christians at night because of the numerous spies in the area. He often went to Vunapopé, a distant village, where a priest gave him the Blessed Sacrament, and with the special permission of the bishop, To Rot carried communion to the sick and the dying.

By exploiting the divisions within the population of New Guinea, the Japanese reintroduced polygamy to win support from several local leaders. They implemented a plan to counteract the “Western” influence on the native population. Out of lust or perhaps simply out of fear of reprisals, many men took a second wife.

The catechist, Peter To Rot felt that he had to speak out and would say, “I will never stop telling Christians about the dignity and great importance of the sacrament of marriage.” He even stood in opposition to his own brother Joseph, who was publicly advocating a return to the practice of polygamy. Another of his brothers, Tatamai, remarried and denounced Peter to the Japanese authorities. Peter’s wife Paula feared that her husband’s determination would endanger their family, but Peter responded, “If I have to die, that’s fine, because I will die for the kingdom of God among our people.”

Pope St. John Paul II would later teach, “The primary communion is the one that is established and develops between husband and wife. By virtue of the covenant of married life, a man and a woman ‘are no longer two but one flesh’ (Mt. 19:6; cf. Gen 2:24). Such a communion is radically contradicted by polygamy. This, in fact, directly negates the plan

of God which was revealed from the beginning, because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive” (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 19).

One day in 1945, while Peter To Rot was planting beans in a field occupied by the Japanese, he was arrested by police officers who had just searched his house and found several religious items. During the subsequent interrogation, Peter admitted that he had led a prayer meeting the day before, and the chief of police, Meshida, struck him. When he professed against bigamy, he was arrested. As he later told his family, “for Meshida, that was my principle crime.”

Peter was kept in a small, windowless cell from which he was released from time to time just to look after the pigs. His mother and his wife brought him food. Once Paula took their two children with her (she was pregnant with the third) and begged her husband to tell the Japanese that he would stop working as a catechist if they released him. “It is not your concern,” Peter said. Making the sign of the cross, he added, “I must glorify the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and thereby help my people.” He asked his wife to bring him his catechist’s cross, which he kept with him until the end. That same day he confided to his mother that the police had called a Japanese doctor who would come to give him some medicine, adding, “I’m not sick! Go home quickly and pray for me.” The next day a policeman arrived at Rakunai and announced, “Your catechist is dead.”

To Rot’s uncle, Tarua, went to the place with Meshida to identify the body. A red scarf was wrapped around the martyr’s neck, which was swollen and wounded. An injection mark was clearly visible on his right arm. Judging by the smell, the “doctor” had injected a cyanide compound. The poison had worked slowly and the soldiers had strangled and stabbed Peter in the back with a knife. Peter To Rot was buried in the Rakunai cemetery and his tomb became a place of pilgrimage. His brother Tatamai repented

and, after the war, rebuilt the church of Rakunai with his own money as an act of contrition. In the fifty years following the death of To Rot, the village of Rakunai has seen at least a dozen priests and religious come from among them for the Catholic Church.

During his pastoral visit to Oceania in 1995, Pope John Paul II beatified Peter To Rot in Port Moresby. The Pope preached, “Because the Spirit of God dwelt in him, he fearlessly proclaimed the truth about the sanctity of marriage.... Condemned without trial, he suffered his martyrdom calmly. Following in the footsteps of his Master, the ‘Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn.1: 29), he too was ‘led like a lamb to the slaughter’ (Cf. Is. 53: 7). And yet this ‘grain of wheat’ which fell silently into the earth (Cf. Jn. 12: 24) has produced a harvest of blessings for the Church in Papua New Guinea!... Thanks to the Spirit of God that dwelt in him, he boldly proclaimed the truth about the sanctity of marriage.”

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

## BLESSED PIERRE CLAVERIE

(1938-1996)

In January 2018, Pope Francis approved the beatification of Bishop Pierre Claverie and his eighteen companions. The murder of Pierre Claverie, a Dominican and the Bishop of Oran in Algeria, was the latest in a series of tragic killings that cast the Church of Algeria into grief between 1994 and 1996. The other victims were seven Trappist monks, four missionaries of Africa, a Marist friar, and a number of religious belonging to different congregations. Their deaths are inscribed in a dark decade during which between 150,000 and 200,000 people were killed due to religious violence and repression. It was precisely their free choice not to flee this violence for the love of Christ and the Church, which allows us to call these Christians “martyrs.”

Pierre Claverie was born in Algiers in 1938. He was a native son of colonial Algeria. In adulthood he confessed that he had lived all his youth among the Arabs without ever meeting them: “I lived my childhood in Algiers in one neighborhood of this cosmopolitan Mediterranean city. Unlike other Europeans, born in the countryside or in small cities, I never had Arab friends. We were not racist, just indifferent. We ignored the majority of the population of this country. The Arabs were part of the landscape of our outings, the background of our encounters and our lives. They were never companions.... I had to listen to numerous sermons about love of others, because I was a Christian and also a scout, but I never realized that even the Arabs were my neighbor. A war was needed for that bubble to burst,” he explained much later, recognizing that he had lived all his youth in a “colonial bubble.” This awareness, which corresponded to the

outbreak of war in Algeria and its proclamation of independence, constituted for him a real watershed, which led him, in 1958, to religious life in the Dominican order.

Pierre studied in Le Saulchoir, where his teachers were the great Dominican theologians whose work helped frame the ecclesiology proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council: Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and André Liégé. He graduated in 1967 with a solid intellectual and spiritual formation, which served him well later on. In the letters he wrote to his family, his precocious intellectual maturity shines through: “This morning, during prayer, I finally discovered the Triune God, who has always seemed to me to be simply a theological argument. I believe that it is the essence of Christianity – beyond the life of Jesus, his teaching, his Church, he reveals God to us, not only as a Father God, but giving us the image of what we are called to be: those who participate in a current of love that unites the Father to the Son through the Holy Spirit,” he wrote in May 1959.

Ordained a priest, Pierre joyfully joined the small Dominican community in Algiers which, under the guidance of Cardinal Duval, contributed to the existence of a new type of Church, a Church for a country whose population was predominantly Muslim. For this reason, he learned Arabic well enough that he could teach it to others. But above all, “he learned Algeria,” establishing a magnificent network of Algerian friends who meant a great deal to him. As the country began the process of reconstruction after a bloody war (1954-1962), there was a lot to do in the education and training of leaders. Pierre Claverie made his contribution with the priests and religious of Algeria who put themselves at the service of their neighbors, collaborating in the development of the country. It was a very happy period of his life. He offered a beautiful homage to these friends, present in the Cathedral of Algiers on the day of his episcopal ordination: “my Algerian brothers and friends, I owe to you who and what I am today. You welcomed me and supported me through your friendship. I owe to you my discovery of Algeria. Although it is my country, I lived in it as a stranger throughout

my youth. With you, learning Arabic, I learned, above all, to speak and understand the language of the heart, that of fraternal friendship through which peoples and religions communicate. In this regard, perhaps I am weak and fallible but I believe that this friendship withstands time, distance, separation. Because I believe that it comes from God and leads to God.”

His solid formation led him to participate decisively in the theological reflection of a Church that needed to rethink the meaning of its presence in Algeria. It was not there to proselytize among Muslims. On the contrary, through the witness of faith and its gratuitous action in the service of the country and of its humblest people, the Church could offer an active presence of evangelical love and help heal the wounds inherited from the colonial past and the war of liberation. Only the fruitfulness of witness and the work of the Holy Spirit can convert hearts and move them in freedom towards Christ and his Church. In this capacity, Pierre Claverie assumed the direction of the diocesan center of studies in Algiers and collaborated with the bishops on the drafting of theological documents that attempted to articulate the meaning of a Christian presence in a Muslim world.

In 1981, his strong personality and personal charisma earned him the nomination as bishop of Oran, in the west of the country. His diocese had few faithful, but it was international, and Pierre loved his role as a builder of communion, not only among Christians of different origins, but also with Muslim friends of the Church. He made the choice to make the property and buildings of his diocese available for the needs of the country: libraries for students, a reception center for people with disabilities, a training center for women. With his Muslim collaborators, he established relationships of trust and friendship that would prove to be precious during the tragic decade of the 1990s. God alone can bring a heart to conversion. The Christian faithful are few in number, but a true Christian witness can be given to all the Muslims with whom Christians live and work daily.

On the occasion of a conference at the Paris mosque in June 1988, Pierre rejected political hypocrisy and stressed, without hesitation, that “in the

ensemble of relations that have marked the relationship between Christians and Muslims, dialogue has not always been the rule.” Indeed, he said, the opposite had often been the case. “Polemics and controversies.” Continuing his frankness, he pointed out the obstacles. Beyond the vicissitudes of history, he said, the underlying problem is the difficulty of “acknowledging and accepting otherness.”

When dialogue was limited to words, often ambiguous, sometimes misleading, Pierre Claverie preferred encounter, since the latter involved people. He maintained that nothing could be done if it did not start with creating bonds of trust and friendship. This is what allows things to be accomplished together, allows people to face common challenges and even more complex questions. The Christian must be able to explain why their faith in the Trinity is not polytheism; the Muslim, in turn, will be able to underline how the text of the Koran or the personality of Mohammed moved them, things that are so misunderstood by Christians. One of the miracles these meetings can achieve is to help heal the wounds of the past, which make the relationship between Christians and Muslims often hindered by tenacious fears and prejudices. The reciprocal and honest knowledge of a healthy dialogue between religions helps to promote religious freedom, the right to proclaim and to witness, the right to free conversion and religious adherence.

Beginning in 1990, Algeria fell into a decade of violence. The new political openness of a multi-party system after twenty-five years with a single-party regime favored the emergence of radical religious parties. At the time of the local legislative elections, these parties garnered the majority of the votes and were just about to take power when, in 1992, the military regime decided to stop the electoral process in order to prevent the establishment of a religious dictatorship. Frustrated by not being able to obtain power through voting, the fundamentalist fanatics tried to take it with arms. They began by assassinating hundreds of representatives of the state (judges, police officers), then moved on to the symbolic figures of an open



civil society (journalists, writers), and finally, they targeted foreigners. The murder of the first two Christian religious, in May 1994, was a trauma for everyone. The killing of the seven Trappist monks in 1996 scandalized the great majority of Muslims.

Pierre Claverie was the last Christian killed. It must be added that he had not only made the choice to remain in Algeria but also, and above all, to speak courageously, expressing himself publicly in favor of a “plural, non-exclusive humanity.” He said, “We are exactly in our proper place, since it is only in this place that we can glimpse the light of the Resurrection and, with it, the hope of a renewal of our world.” He was assassinated on August 1, 1996, along with a Muslim friend, Mohamed Bouchikhi, who had made the choice to stay with him despite the risks. His death shocked not only Christians but also many Muslim Algerians who, at his funeral, said they had come to weep over a man who was also “their” bishop.

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019

## SIMON MPECKE (1906-1975)

Simon Mpecke was born in 1906 in Log Batombé, in Cameroon. In 1914, at age 8, Mpecke attended the elementary school of the Catholic mission in Édéa. It was a mission opened by the Pallottine order during the period German colonization. At age 11, Mpecke finished elementary school. On August 14, 1918, at the age of 12, he was baptized in Édéa by Father Louis Chevrat, and the day after he made received his first Communion. Later he became a teacher, first in the schools of the savannah and later in the central mission of Édéa. In 1920, he obtained a diploma of indigenous teacher from the Catholic mission of Édéa and in 1923, he became the head teacher of the mission.

On August 8, 1924, Simon entered the small seminary of Yaoundé. In 1917, he transferred to the newly opened major seminary of Myolyé, where he did two years of philosophy and four years of theology, completing his studies in December 1935. On December 8 of that same year he was among the first natives of Cameroon to be ordained a priest. This priestly ordination was an important stage in the history of the Church of Cameroon and inaugurated a new era for the country.

As his first ministry, Simon was appointed to serve in the Ngovayang mission, where he took a firm stand against the practices of traditional religions in the region. In 1947, he was appointed to the parish of the New-Bell district in Douala and the following year he became its pastor. He provided strong leadership and increased participation in several lay organizations. He supported the activities of Catholic Action and the parish school, demonstrating great availability and abundant generosity. Also in 1947, by chance,

Father Simon read an article that described the life of pagan populations in northern Cameroon. From then onwards he began to experience a great fondness for these people. The establishment of the fraternity of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Jesus in his parish brought him closer to the spirituality of Blessed Charles de Foucauld. In 1953, Father Simon Mpecke joined the Secular Institute of the Little Brothers of Jesus and left for a year of novitiate in Algeria. He was one of the international founders of the Priestly Union “Jesus Caritas” and became its first member in Cameroon and for a while he thought of living permanently with the Brothers.

On April 21, 1957, Pope Pius XII published the Encyclical *Fidei Donum*, which inspired Fr. Simon to leave his native land to be a *fidei donum* missionary priest in northern Cameroon. In February 1959, at the request of Bishop Plumey, Father Simon went to Tokombéré to establish a mission to reach the Kirdi, a name that means “the pagans.” By this time the majority of the population in Southern Cameroon were Bantu Christians, the north was populated mainly by Muslims of Sudanese origin.

Dr. Joseph Maggi, a Swiss doctor, had already established a small hospital in the village, in a place where there were only a few leaders of the French colonial administration and technicians who were introducing the cultivation of cotton. The beginnings of the Catholic Mission of Tokombéré were an exceptional missionary experience. The task was not easy because Fr. Simon was not member of a local tribe and was, therefore, perceived as a danger. However, the fact that he was African made things easier. From the beginning, teaching the Kirdi became his daily preoccupation. His legendary goodness soon earned him the nickname “Baba,” which means father, patriarch, sage, and guide at the same time. Everyone – men and women, adults and children, Kirdi and Muslims – began to spontaneously call him Baba. At Tokombéré, Baba Simon lived out God’s promise to Abraham – whose exodus and mission, allowed the birth of a people.

Faith and friendship with Jesus convinced him that only love for the whole person would save him from the spiritual evil of sin and ignorance,

and from the material evil of misery and ethnic and religious discrimination. For Baba, school was a lifeline and his school brought hope to make people blossom in their fight against ignorance, tyranny, and fear, which was Baba's way of fighting for human dignity. He decided to bring education "home," giving everyone the opportunity to attend the "school under the tree," a school in the midst of everything, in the very heart of the Kirdi's life.

He went on to establish Saint Joseph School in Tokombéré and obtained permission to open other schools in Bzeskawé, Rindrimé, and Baka. He created a boarding school for the boys and another for the girls, which was run by the Servants of Mary. Baba Simon taught the Kirdis to love Muslims as their blood brothers and did the same with the Muslims towards the Kirdis. Through the school, the health clinics, his commitment against injustice, and an appeal to universal brotherhood, Simon helped bring about a real improvement of the living conditions of the Kirdi populations, too long neglected by the rest of the country. His concern for a constant dialogue with the leaders of traditional religions makes him a prophetic precursor of interreligious dialogue called for by the Second Vatican Council. He loved to travel and the first reason that motivated him to do so was to find the necessary assistance for his work with the Kirdi, especially for the students, inside and outside the community. His efforts brought him to France, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, and Israel. He shared the life of the Kirdi, their poverty, and their struggle against misery. His evangelization was imbued with prayer, love for the Church, and charity with respect to their traditions.

After an extended stay in France to seek treatment for a sickness, Baba Simon died on August 13, 1975. He was buried in Tokombéré.

## BLESSED TITUS BRANDSMA (1881-1942)

**A**nno Sjoerd Brandsma was born on February 23, 1881, in Oegekleooster, in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands. Attending a high school run by the Franciscans of Megen, he began to experience his vocation. He entered the Carmelite monastery of Boxmeer on September 22, 1898, and took the name Titus. In 1901, he published his first book, an anthology of the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, translating her works from Spanish into Dutch. After being ordained a priest in 1905, he was sent to Rome and attended the Pontifical Gregorian University. Back in the Netherlands, he taught, wrote, and published translations of the works of St. Teresa in Dutch.

Shortly before the establishment of the National Socialist Party in Germany, he was appointed president of the University of Nijmegen. A few years later, he was named an advisor for the Association of Catholic Journalists. In his university courses on the ideology of National Socialism, he spared no criticism and openly denounced the system. As a Carmelite, teacher, journalist, and president of the Association of Catholic Schools, he firmly opposed Nazi pressure.

Arrested in his monastery, Titus was taken to the Scheveningen prison where he underwent a harsh interrogation but held fast to his convictions. In prison, he translated the life of St. Teresa of Avila into Dutch. He was transferred to the concentration camp of Amersfoort, where he was forced to work and live in very harsh conditions. Brought back to Scheveningen for further interrogation he was later moved to a camp at Cleves, where he found greater dignity and relief, both human and spiritual.

In June 1942, he was transported with other prisoners by cattle car to the Dachau concentration camp, where living conditions were harsh to the extreme: forced labor, lack of food, and bizarre scientific experiments using prisoners as guinea pigs, including Titus. Sick and worn out by this inhumane treatment, he was consigned to the camp hospital where he was put to death by an injection of carbolic acid administered by a nurse to whom he gave a rosary. The same nurse underwent a profound conversion and, years later, was a primary witness for Titus' beatification. His liturgical memorial is celebrated on July 27.

"Prayer is not an oasis in the desert of life; it is all of life." In this beautiful expression this Carmelite priest, journalist and university professor indicates the intensity of his prayer life, which gave him the strength to carry out his apostolic activity with great balance and which nourished his courage to bear witness to the truth and to defend religious freedom during the time of Nazi brutalities. It allowed him to accept all kinds of poverty and deprivation by living out the commandment to love to the fullest. Quoting the words of Jesus, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (Jn 14:27), Titus proclaimed: "I would like to repeat these words, to make them resound all over the world, without worrying about who will listen. I would like to repeat them so often that those who have turned their heads the first time will have to listen to it, until everyone has heard and understood.... Our vocation and our happiness consist in making others happy" (Peace and Love through Peace Conference, St. Nicholas Church in Deventer, Netherlands, November 11, 1931). Titus also had a generous missionary heart. The international experiences of his religious family, especially during his time spent studying in Rome fueled his dream of being sent out as a Carmelite missionary to proclaim the Gospel *ad gentes*. Alas, this dream would never be realized, because his health was poor and so his religious superiors were reticent to send him abroad.

Although he could not leave for mission lands, he always maintained an attitude of universality, availability, dialogue, and openness to create bonds of fraternity in Christ. Life truly led him to live a special mission, because

his natural inclination to be a consoler of the afflicted found massive and heroic expression in the concentration camps. He died in the Dachau camp as a “missionary” in an “impossible” place, where he succeeded in bringing happiness and inspiring courage. Having reviewed numerous testimonies, St. John XXIII described Titus Brandsma as “a victim of his charity and of his constant defense of the truth.” While he was subjected to insults and beatings, he endured his torments with patience and treated his persecutors with sincere compassion, exhorting his companions to resistance and prayer for those who showed so much ruthlessness towards their neighbor. He was animated by the conviction that the divine light could shine through the priests of the camp, by their fraternity, hope, and trust in God, in whom they dwelt secure. Intimately united to God, he became a vessel overflowing with hope in places seemingly most distant from the divine gaze.

In fact, the mission fields he worked became his monastery, his place of prayer and welcome of the most disadvantaged. He made the university where he taught a place where the Gospel resounded by the example of his life. Drawing from the strength of his faith, he even made the printing house where he published and the concentration camps where he was imprisoned, places of profound encounter among people beyond all social distinctions united under the gaze of God. He was able to transcend and help others overcome situations of profound inhumanity. In the camps, he had words of consolation that expressed a deep certainty: “Entrust everything to the Lord. Do your best, and God will do what remains!” Because his only perspective was God, he was able to adapt to very different people and difficult situations. His solicitude in providing spiritual help enabled him to perform a precious service by administering the sacrament of confession and making himself available for spiritual direction.

To the nurse who administered the injection that killed him, he said, “Good priests are not those who say beautiful words from the pulpits, but those able to offer their pain for men. For this reason, I am happy to be able to suffer.”

## BLESSED VICTOIRE RASOAMANARIVO (1848-1894)

Queen Ranaivalona I, reigned over Madagascar from 1828 until her death in 1861. A relentless enemy of the Christian religion, she venerated *sampy* (a type of idol) and performed thousands of superstitious practices for her own protection and for that of her kingdom. Next to the Queen's family, the most powerful clan in the country was the one into which Victoire Rasoamanarivo was born. Her grandfather, Rainiharo, had been Prime Minister to the court for over twenty years. Two of his sons, Raharo and Rainilaiarivony, succeeded him in his duties.

Rainiharo had a daughter named Rambahinoro, to whom was born Victoire Rasoamanarivo. She was the third of seven or eight children from the marriage of Rambahinoro to a cousin. She was born in 1848, a year that seemed to be - as an old Malagasy proverb says - "like the long distance appointment a rooster has with the sun." That year was marked by both the industrial and proletarian revolutions and the reawakening of nationalism. In this context, Victoire's life would have a profound impact on her society, shaping its destiny and prompting the admiration of those who knew her.

In November of 1861, after the death of Queen Ranaivalona I, the first Catholic missionaries arrived in Tananarive (today Antananarivo). Victoire was thirteen years old and one of the first students to enroll in a school administered by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Clun. She distinguished herself by her modesty and devotion, and above all, by the care she took to attend Mass with piety and devotion every morning.

She was baptized at age fifteen, on November 1, 1863, and made her First Communion on January 17 of the following year. A few months



later, on May 13, she was married to Radriaka, her cousin, the eldest son of Rainilaiarivony. Later, she would insist that at that time she wanted to become a religious sister, but added that “Providence had decided otherwise.” Her new vocation, however, did not separate her from the Sisters. She continued to attend the school because the housework was carried out by servants.

Her difficulties began as her parents and their families tried to convert her to Protestantism, which was the state religion and the one most commonly practiced in high society. She was irreproachable and patient. She did not complain but pointed out to her husband the wrong that the families were doing to her dignity as a woman. Her husband, aware of how right she was, sometimes knelt beside her to pray. She was further burdened by infertility and quietly endured the social stigma that came with it, as many wondered if this was the result of spousal neglect.

Rejected by her own, Victoire then began to make the Church her second home. Despite many threats, she would spend seven or eight hours a day there, beginning at 4 o'clock in the morning. She created an oratory in her own house where she frequently spent time on her knees, prolonging her prayers until late evening. Victoire had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, so the rosary never left her hands. Her intense prayer life, rather than taking her away from her domestic duties, in fact, helped her to fulfill them with total dedication. She looked after her house, which included about thirty servants; she often visited the sick without any class distinction; she gave frequent alms; and she received poor and sick people in her house.

When the lay congregation of the Blessed Virgin was founded in 1876, Victoire was its President, endeavoring to instill in her companions a zeal for charity. She created a workshop for making clothes for the poor and for lepers. She also helped the poor churches, constructing a chapel of the sacred city of Ambohimanga. As a member of the Prime Minister's family, Victoire was a lady of the court. Forced to present herself at the Palace, she

went there as a Christian, with her rosary visible in her hand, and prayed before and after lunch. At the sound of the bell, she apologized and took her leave to go aside to recite the Angelus. When she was asked for the reason, she simply replied, "It is the custom of us Catholics." There was no stiffness, ostentation, or bigotry in her, simply faith, fidelity to God, and absolute respect for others.

What most earned the admiration of the royal court was the heroic patience that Victoire demonstrated toward her unworthy husband for nearly three years. She never uttered the slightest complaint against him. However, his behavior was such that the Prime Minister, in agreement with the Queen, tried to arrange for her a separation and divorce from him. When Victoire became aware of their intentions, she begged her father-in-law to renounce the plan because, she said, Catholic marriage is indissoluble.

On May 25, 1883, a persecution broke out against the Catholic mission. All of the French missionaries were expelled and the Catholic faithful were accused of being traitors against the customs of the island, that is, of their homeland. On the very day the missionaries were expelled from Tananarive, an ordinance decreed by an unknown authority and publicized by civil and religious officials, proclaimed that since Catholicism was the religion of the enemies of the homeland, its followers would be considered traitors.

On the Sunday following the exodus of the missionaries, Catholics looked sadly at their closed churches, but did not even dare to approach them. At nine o'clock in the morning, Victoire arrived in front of the Cathedral. Seeing it closed, she sent a message to the Prime Minister asking if the queen had forbidden Catholics from entering the church. There was no such order. Then Victoire, approaching the official at the door, ordered the doors opened. "If you oppose this by force, my blood will be the first you will shed. You have no right to prevent us from entering our churches to pray." The doors were opened. Victoire entered first and many

Christians followed her. It was a first victory, a most important one, since it established the principle of freedom of prayer.

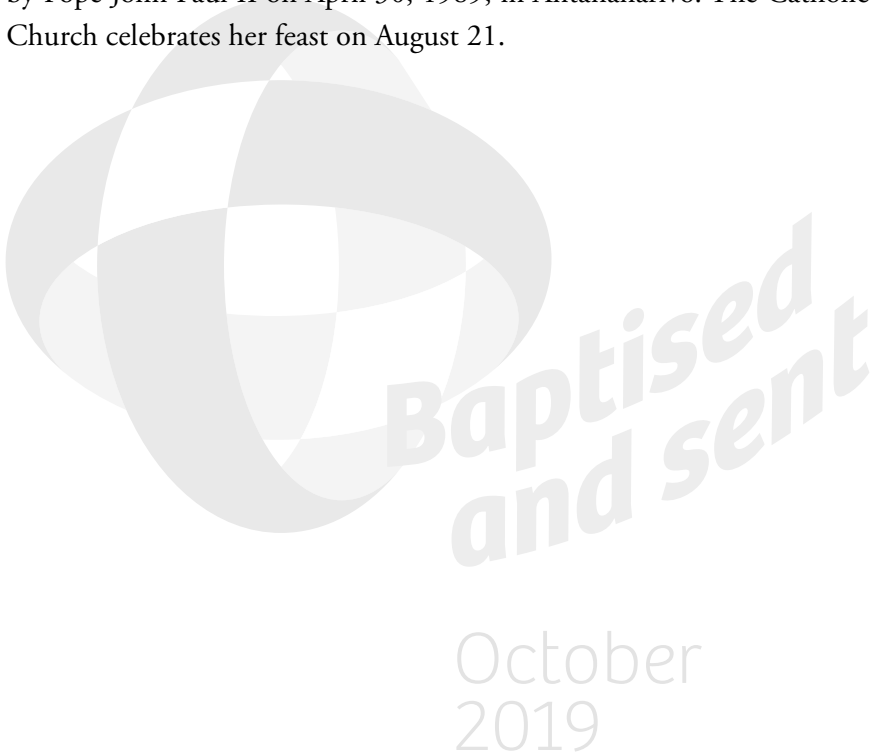
During the Franco-Malagasy war, the presence of missionaries of French nationality jeopardized the future of Catholicism, since it was seen the religion of the aggressor. Victoire had no prejudices against the French missionaries with whom she had excellent relationships but she wrote abroad to ask that, in view of the local situation, British missionaries be sent instead to Madagascar. But the expulsion was, in fact, applied also to the only English national missionary in the country, demonstrating opposition to Catholicism itself, regardless of the nationality of the missionaries.

Father Caussèque, a priest of the Cathedral, founded an association of men called “the Catholic Union,” which became the instrument Victoire used to maintain faith and the practice of worship throughout the mission. The members of the Catholic Union reopened chapels, gathered Christians together, and restored schools. It was not easy. Victoire sometimes visited people in the main squares of the town, offering courage by her presence to those who were weak. Some reports of the time describe the expressions of enthusiasm that these visits aroused. “Have confidence,” Victoire said. “The Catholic religion is not prohibited. The French left, but religion remains.”

When the missionaries finally returned to their posts, Victoire resumed her simple, modest, and humble life. The only thing that still concerned her was her husband’s conversion. She prayed and had prayers offered for that intention. Her last work of “spiritual maternity” concerned her husband. One evening, they brought him home drunk, after a fall that would prove fatal. Victoire convinced him to be baptized, which was administered on his deathbed in 1887. She mourned as a widow until her own death, which came seven years later. She had many Masses offered for her husband’s soul and took the occasion of her mourning to wear even simpler clothes and to withdraw almost completely from the court. Her most cherished children were the humble: the sick, the poor, the cruelly

chained prisoners, lepers tormented continuously by their disease and banished by society.

After a brief illness, Victoire died on August 21, 1894. Two months later, the missionaries were exiled again, until 1895. On her deathbed, Victoire raised her hands to heaven and holding her rosary beads uttered three times, “Mother, mother, mother,” and then expired. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II on April 30, 1989, in Antananarivo. The Catholic Church celebrates her feast on August 21.



## VIVIAN UCHECHI OGU (1995-2009)

The striking heroism in the story of Vivian is in the remarkable way in which she expressed her Christian faith, having extraordinary influence on the lives of others from the tender age of nine and the courage with which she put into practice what she had been preaching when the opportunity came at the age of fourteen, opting to be killed rather than to be defiled.

Vivian Uchechi Ogu was born in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1995, the second of four children of Mr. & Mrs. Peter Ogu. The family was one of the most dedicated at St. Paul's Catholic parish on Airport Road in Benin City, and her father was among those asked to organize the laity of Ascension Catholic Church, a neighboring Mass center at the Nigerian Air Force barracks that was just down the road.

Vivian was baptized at St. Paul Catholic Church, Benin City on July 1, 1995, and she received her First Holy Communion at the same parish on March 21, 2005. She was in the preparatory class for the sacrament of confirmation, which was slated for 2010, at the time of her death.

In academics, Vivian was excellent and she consistently remained at the top of her class from her primary school until her death in secondary school. She combined her academic prowess with a self-determined goal to live an exemplary Christian life, a life she felt would inspire others to greater spirituality and love for humanity so as to give glory to God. Vivian attended the Nigeria Air Force Women Association School for her Kindergarten education. She then attended the Air Force Primary School, where she distinguished herself academically. For her secondary education,

Vivian attended the Greater Tomorrow Secondary School, also in Benin City. At the time of her death, she was in Senior Secondary II, dreaming and working towards becoming a lawyer so she could fight the cause of the poor and downtrodden, especially widows and orphans or, as she told one of her animators, an aeronautic engineer, so she could prove to the world that it was not just a profession exclusive to the male population. Vivian represented her school in many activities. She excelled in Mathematics, which was her favorite subject, and represented her school in the local “Cow-Bell Mathematics Competition.” For extracurricular activities, Vivian joined an interdenominational group where she held the post of Assistant Prayer leader, a post she held until her death. Her hobbies were, reading, singing, and dancing.

Her spiritual journey received new energy thanks to the Charismatic Catholic Renewal in which she began to participate with her parents. As she grew older, she took part in the Bible study courses of the “Joy Group.” She lived out her faith among her friends by exchanging advice and experiences. She was a steward in her class and played prominent role in the yearly Teen Camp meetings which began in 2007.

St. Paul’s Church encouraged the participation of children and young people in the Sunday Eucharist by offering a special Bible activity for them during the Liturgy of the Word and then having them join their parents for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. After Mass, the children received further teachings from the parish catechists. It was here that Vivian, at the age of nine years, began to publicly demonstrate her zeal and courage in speaking to other children on the dignity of purity and virginity. Vivian joined the Sunday School Community as it was known then and later the choir. She was quite young but committed. She took part in all special events in the Church such as the yearly Children Day Celebration, the Annual Children Mission Day and the Christmas Carol Service as well as the end of year thanksgiving where the children are given the responsibility of organizing liturgical activities for the day. She took part in almost all the activities in the

parish community as much as her age then would allow. For liturgical celebrations, she would always take either the reading or prayer of the faithful.

After joining the children's choir in the parish her family started attending in 2005, Vivian found that the choir director was frequently absent from its practices and activities, and soon she had informally assumed the role of choir leader. She wanted so much to organize a skillful and disciplined choir that she developed, with her father's help, a formal statute instituting it. The proposal was approved by the parish council and thus the children's choir was officially established in the parish for the first time. Over the next four years, under Vivian's guidance, the choir grew from a small group of about twenty children to nearly sixty children at the time of her death. This choir frequently won first place in the various musical competitions organized by the Society of Holy Childhood, from 2007 right up to the most recent ones. With her deep conviction and love for God and her companions, Vivian proposed the idea of periodic sacrifice. She encouraged the children to engage in various acts of mortification for salvation, for their personal conversion, and for the material and spiritual needs of the neediest children in the parish and the world.

It is therefore not surprising that when the Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood (PAHC) was inaugurated in the parish of St. Paul in 2006, Vivian was unanimously elected as the first president. During her tenure, she worked tirelessly to make the parish's PAHC chapter second to none in the archdiocese in terms of carrying out works and prayers. Among the projects that she coordinated there was, on the occasion of Children's Day in 2008, the collection of funds to cover the medical expenses of some disabled children at the Central Hospital of Benin City, and also to meet the needs of some children from the orphanages in Benin City. Two institutions that benefited from this generosity were the orphanages in Edo and Oronsaye. For Children's Day 2009, Vivian mobilized the entire parish to establish a solidarity fund for the less fortunate parishioners. Vivian was the official representative of the parish during the meetings and activities

of PAHC in the archdiocese. She was also the first member of to contribute to the creation and circulation of the archdiocesan PAHC newsletter, called “Friends of Jesus.” Vivian loved reading the Holy Scriptures and asking for explanations from her priests and teachers concerning the teachings of the Church. Moved by her love for the Word of God, she had decided to commit himself to writing her understanding of the Gospels. She had arrived at chapter sixteen of the Gospel of St. Matthew by the time she was killed.

Through the archdiocesan training courses organized for children by the PAHC, Vivian became aware of the story of Saint Maria Goretti. She would continually retell the story of her favorite saint when she invited his companions to a life of faith and friendship with Jesus and instructed them on the value of virginity. With her heroic death, Vivian offered a concrete example of this teaching.

On Sunday, November 15, 2009, while she was at home in the evening, armed thieves came and robbed her family and then took Vivian and her sister out of town to a rural area. The thieves tried to rape her, but when she vigorously refused, they shot and killed her. On November 27, 2009, after the Mass of Christian Burial in St. Paul’s Church, her body was transported to her hometown of Aboh Mbaise for burial. Having learned the news of her heroic death, the government of Edo State granted the land where she was martyred to the Archdiocese of Benin City. Two years later, the local government council of Ikpoba Okha officially named the road on which she was killed, “Vivian Ogu”.

Since 2010, the faithful of the Archdiocese of Benin City gather every year on November 15 at the place she was killed for an annual memorial of Vivian Ogu. On March 29, 2014, the Archbishop of Benin City, Augustine Obiora Akubeze, inaugurated the Vivian Ogu Society, with the task of making known the story of her exemplary life, preserving the land where she was killed, collecting testimonies of people about her virtues and about potential miracles, for the promotion of the cause for her possible beatification.



## WANDA BŁEŃSKA (1911-2014)

Wanda Maria Błęńska was born to Teofil Błęński and Helena Brunsz on October 30, 1911, in Poznań, Poland. On December 9 of the same year, she was baptized in the parish of St. Martin, also in Poznań. Because Wanda's mother fell ill, the family moved to Puszczykowo, but Helena's condition did not improve. At only fifteen months old, little Wanda became motherless. In 1920, with her father and her brother Roman, she moved again, this time to Toruń. There she made her First Communion and attended the girls' high school. In 1928, she graduated, receiving a high school diploma and then took the first step to realize her dream, returning to Poznań to study at the School of Medicine.

Although she had to wait several years to go on a mission, during her studies, she worked sedulously in missionary organizations both in Poznań and at the national level. Initially she was part of a missionary group with the Marian Sodality Movement, where the idea of founding a Missionary Academic Circle was born.

On January 20, 1927, in the main hall of the University of Poznań and in the presence of Cardinal August Hlond, the Primate of Poland, the first Missionary Academic Circle was inaugurated. At that time about 150 people were involved. Soon, groups of this kind were established at the Universities of Krakow, Leopoldis, Lublin, Warsaw, and Vilnius. Today, the Poznań Missionary Academic Circle, reactivated in 2002, bears the name of Wanda Błęńska and sends young people each year for missionary experiences.

Wanda actively participated in the organization of the International Congress of Missionary Academic Circles held in Poznań from Septem-

ber 28 - October 2, 1927, which was boasted the participation of over two thousand people. At that time, the Association of Academic Mission Societies in Poland was founded and Wanda was appointed to the Central Council. For years she participated in national and international missionary conferences. In 1931, she became a member of the board of directors of the Poznań missionary group. She also participated in the editorial board of *Annales Missiologicae*, the first missionary journal in Poland, which, after the interruption of the war, resumed its publication under the new title of *Annales Missiologicae Posnanienses*. In 1932, Wanda received a diploma from Pope Pius XI to encourage the spread of the work of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

Wanda graduated with a medical degree on June 20, 1934. After finishing her studies, she returned to Toruń, where she first worked in the municipal hospital, and then, until the end of the war, at the National Institute of Hygiene. In 1942, she entered the ranks of the secret military organization Gryf Pomorski, later incorporated into the Home Army (Armia Krajowa), the main resistance movement in Nazi occupied Poland. In 1978, she was awarded the Military Cross of the Home Army. On June 23, 1944, her name day, Wanda was arrested for her conspiratorial activity. In prison, she was sentenced to death, but in the end, after more than two months in prison, she was released.

After the war, she took over the management of a hospital in Toruń and worked in the Hygiene Department in Gdańsk. In 1946, she decided to go to her dying brother, Roman, who was living in Germany. Not having received her passport, she traveled clandestinely in the coal storage of a ship destined for Lübeck and was able to join her ailing brother. After his death, she was not allowed to return to Poland and remained in Germany, where she worked in Polish military hospitals. In 1947, she attended a tropical medicine course in Hamburg. She then moved to England, where she continued her education in the field of tropical medicine and was admitted to the Royal Association of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in

London. There she met a missionary priest member of the Congregation of the White Fathers, who told her about plans to build a leper colony in Fort Portal, Uganda. In 1950, Dr. Błęńska received an invitation to work in Uganda from the local bishop, and in March of the same year began her service at the Fort Portal hospital. Unfortunately, however, the leper colony was never built.

The hospitals of Nyenga and Buluba, built in the 1930s by Mother Kevin, foundress of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa, were the first centers for the treatment of leprosy in Uganda. For years only nurses and laboratory technicians worked there because there were no doctors. On April 24, 1951, Błęńska arrived in Buluba, on Lake Victoria, and began her work in St. Francis Hospital, where she remained for another forty years as a doctor and lay missionary.

At the beginning, the working conditions were deplorable, but Wanda modernized both institutions, bringing them to a high level of treatment and patient care. In 1956, she founded a training center for medical assistants for the diagnosis and treatment of leprosy, which today bears her name. She taught many students in several African countries, participated in the International Congress of Doctors on Leprosy and became one of the most qualified specialists in the world in the treatment of this disease.

In the early eighties, Dr. Błęńska entrusted the management of the center in Buluba to her pupil, Dr. Joseph Kawumie, though she remained there working as a medical advisor until 1992. In 1986, she went with Father Marian Żelazek to India, where for nine months she worked in a center for lepers in Puri. The two Polish missionaries were united by a sincere friendship for many years.

Wanda Błęńska won the hearts of the people of Uganda not only through her professional skills but also through her compassionate approach to the sick. She was called the Mother of the Lepers. Thanks to her work, she helped overcome the social stigma against those struck with Hansen's disease and took many actions to restore their dignity. She examined them

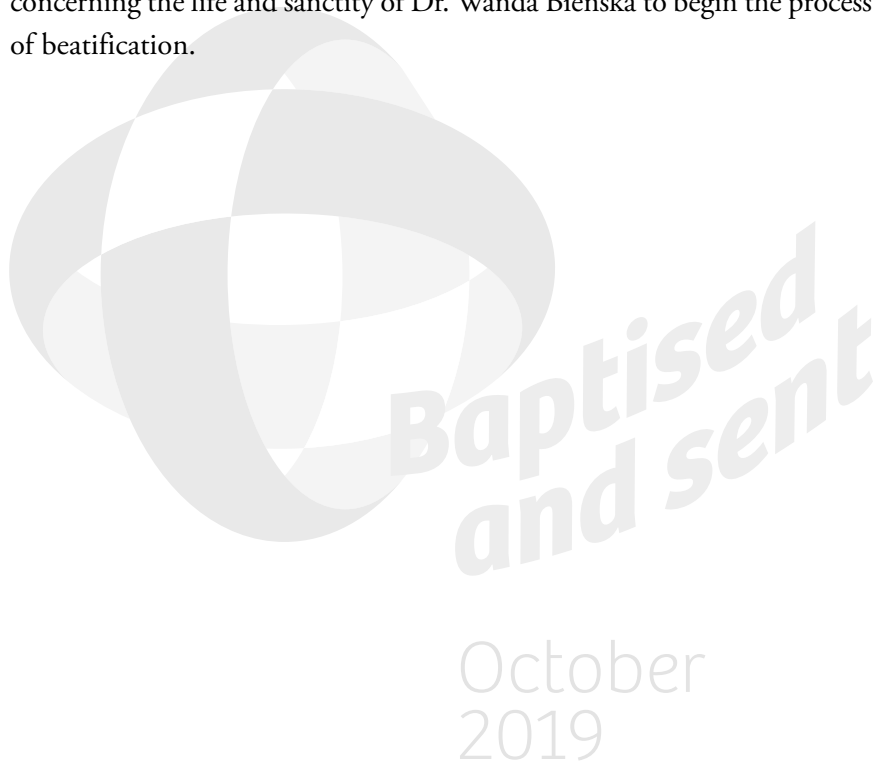
without gloves, unless a wound was open or when she was operating, because she did not want them to feel disrespected. Years later, she recounted, “First of all, I wanted to get my patients accustomed and familiar with their illness to lessen their fear. As with any disease, even with leprosy, one must become familiar. These patients are poor. There are always many people who make them feel afraid. Sometimes when an atmosphere of fear is created, it spreads, it is contagious. I always said to everyone, ‘Look at me, are my fingers infected?’ Obviously, I kept the usual hygienic principles. After examining a patient, I washed my hands. But I washed them not only after examining someone with leprosy, but after each patient, so that everyone could see that this gesture belongs to the habits of every doctor.”

Wanda Błęńska returned to Poland in 1992, but for two years she traveled between her two countries (Poland and Uganda). She re-settled permanently in Poznań in 1994. She went to Uganda for the last time in 2006. Despite her advanced age, she participated in the missionary life of the Church until the end of her life. Until the age of 93 she taught at the Warsaw Missionary Training Center. On June 7, 2003, the Institute for Lay Missionaries of the Polish Episcopal Conference was named in honor of her. For many years she visited schools, parishes, pastoral centers, and missionary groups, particularly inspiring children and adolescents. “When I talk to young people,” she said, “I always say: if you have some good and bright idea, cultivate it! Do not let it fall asleep, do not refuse it! Even if it seems impossible to reach and too difficult, do not be discouraged. You must cultivate your dreams!”

In addition to attending missionary conferences and conventions, Wanda organized medical and financial assistance for missionaries and missions, even with her own money. She was part of the group of organizers of the *Redemptoris Missio Humanitarian Aid Foundation* and was an honorary member of the foundation’s Council. A private school in Poznań and a school complex in Niepruszew both bear her name. She received numerous awards and honors, including the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* Cross, the *San*

*Silvestro* Medal, the *Order of Poland* (which she later decided to return), honorary citizenship of Uganda, the title of Doctor *Honoris Causa* from the Academy of Medical Sciences in Poznań, and, from children, the *Order of Smiles*.

Wanda Błęńska died in Poznań on November 27, 2014, at the age of 103. Currently, the Archdiocese of Poznań is gathering all the material concerning the life and sanctity of Dr. Wanda Błęńska to begin the process of beatification.





## PART THREE

### THOUGHTS ON MISSION

“Missionary outreach is paradigmatic  
for all the Church’s activity.”

*(Evangelii Gaudium, 15)*

Baptised  
and sent

October  
2019



EXTRAORDINARY MISSIONARY MONTH OCTOBER 2019

Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world





NOTABLE ASPECTS  
OF THE APOSTOLIC LETTER  
*MAXIMUM ILLUD*  
(November 30, 1919)<sup>1</sup>

The twentieth century has rightly been called “the century of the missions.” During these hundred years in the life of the Church, which was born at Pentecost and continues over time, some important events strengthened its dynamism and missionary commitment. Of course, this affirmation does not exclude many great missionary initiatives preceded that century. Indeed, without them, this modern flourishing of mission work would have been impossible.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, without the dynamism of the twentieth century it would be difficult to discover the “passion for mission” and the “passion for people” that marks the Catholic Church today.

Near the beginning of this “century of the missions,” we find the papal missionary document *Maximum Illud* (MI), issued by the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XV (November 30, 1919). To understand it well, it is important to grasp the social and ecclesial circumstances at the time of its publication. Despite being one of the most frequently cited documents in mission literature, *Maximum Illud* can rightly be considered “a great unknown.” And so Pope Francis, in proclaiming October 2019 to be an Extraordinary Missionary Month, on the occasion of the centenary of Benedict XV’s apostolic letter, stresses that this is a providential opportunity to do justice to this fundamental and prophetic text on mission.

<sup>1</sup> The numbering of the sections of *Maximum Illud* used here refers to the official Spanish translation of the text available on the Vatican’s website, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). (No English translation of *Maximum Illud* is available on the Vatican website.)

<sup>2</sup> “The Church of God, mindful of its divine mandate, never ceased, through the course of the centuries, to send to all places messengers and ministers of the divine word who proclaimed the eternal salvation offered to the human race by Christ” (MI 2).

It is important to note that the celebration of this centenary cannot simply be considered another anniversary in the Church's calendar. For this reason, it is the will of the Holy Father that all the Churches, in all the regions of the earth, place themselves in a permanent state of mission. The words of Francis are clear: the celebration of the Extraordinary Missionary Month is a magnificent opportunity for "fostering an increased awareness of the *missio ad gentes* and taking up again with renewed fervor the missionary transformation of the Church's life and pastoral activity." It is the great occasion to "open [ourselves] to the joyful newness of the Gospel" (Letter to Cardinal Filoni, October 22, 2017).

### 1. The historical context of *Maximum Illud*

*Maximum Illud* appeared in the context of a challenging time for the missionary commitment of the Church – or perhaps it is precisely this situation that prompted its publication. The First World War had recently ended, and the Church was experiencing a loss of missionary "fervor," as a consequence of both the great tragedies of that conflict and the factors that eventually led to the Second World War. It is not an exaggeration to say that the origin of this postmodern crisis lies in the West. However, Benedict XV did not hide his satisfaction and joy in seeing the expansion of some foreign missions and apostolic vicariates, which had never stopped preparing new growth for the kingdom of God (see MI 11, 23). The countries being evangelized were Western colonies and, therefore, colonialism often took priority over any evangelical objective, especially in cases where those who were announcing the Good News came from the nations that had colonized the very people they were evangelizing. The demands of progress, industry, and development to find new lands to sell their products and new places from which to obtain raw materials caused conflicts among European nations. Economic motivations led to wars and extended into the

colonies, especially in Africa, where European missionaries were at work. In short, and without going into detail, the peoples to be evangelized were also victims of the consequences of the world wars.

For this reason, Pope Francis insists today on the need to purify the exercise of missionary activity from any distortion, as happened during the colonizing activity of that time, and especially to avoid the danger of nationalist tendencies and ethnocentrisms.<sup>3</sup> Even today evangelical purity can be distorted by other interests, social or partisan, that obscure the universal and Catholic dimension that is at the heart of mission.

## 2. The problem of missionary vocations

Benedict XV published *Maximum Illud* as a prophetic and missionary papal document, to the point that it is sometimes considered the beginning of “the century of the missions.” Throughout the nineteenth century, numerous papal documents on mission appeared, including *Probe Nostis* (Gregory XVI, 1840), *Quanto Conficiamur* (Pius IX, 1863), *Sancta Dei Civitas* (Leo XIII, 1880), and *Catholicae Ecclesiae* (Leo XIII, 1890), each with the aim of strengthening the Church’s mission of cooperation, through the many missionary institutions that the Holy Spirit was bringing to birth in the world, especially in Africa.

Along with these circumstances were some difficulties that came from within the Church, the most serious of which was the missionary vocation crisis in the countries of origin. Many missionaries sent by the Church in the West were recruited to serve in their own nations’ military forces. The

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XV provides an example that makes clear the danger of such nationalist tendencies: “Let us assume that he [the missionary] has not completely put aside these human intentions and does not behave fully as a true apostolic man, but rather gives reason to suppose that he is acting in the interests of his country; certainly all his work will become suspect by the population, which will then easily be led to believe that the Christian religion is nothing more than the religion of a given nation, and that embracing it means being dependent on a foreign state, thus renouncing one’s own nationality” (MI 46).

world war had a major impact on the missionary process: the geographical and cultural areas from which these vocations had traditionally emerged were in ruins. Lacking economic, institutional, or personal resources, young people enrolled for military service, and vocations diminished. The situation was also worrisome from other points of view, as in the case of missionaries from defeated countries, such as Germany, or those who acted primarily as defenders of the interests of their own country (see MI 46).

Benedict XV also addressed another important issue, which until then had been neglected in the Church's missionary activity: the lack of attention to indigenous vocations. These had always been given a subordinate place of concern, with the consequent weaknesses in doctrinal, missionary, and spiritual formation. "In fact, it is true that converting and saving souls is immensely more important than knowledge; however, if one has not first acquired a certain grasp of doctrine, the result would be that he lacks the equipment he needs to achieve success in his holy ministry" (MI 54).

### 3. A prophetic and audacious document

*Maximum Illud* opened the doors to a reflection on mission *ad gentes* that remains highly relevant even a hundred years after its promulgation, such that it can well be considered a guiding text on missiology, helping us recognize that "mission can renew the Church," without saying it explicitly. It is enough to consider the missionary activity of the 1960s, with the political emancipations of the former colonies, to realize that that situation was in some ways foreseen by Benedict XV. Our reading of this apostolic letter cannot ignore these analyses and historical considerations.

Besides being the most quoted papal document on mission of the twentieth century, Benedict XV's successors on the Chair of Peter have taken several opportunities to return to its teaching and further develop

its content. We see this with Pius XI's *Rerum Ecclesiae* (February 28, 1926), in which many of Benedict XV's ideas are further developed. For his part, Pius XII, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Rerum Ecclesiae*, published *Evangelii Praecones* (June 2, 1951). Pius XII called for thanksgiving for the evangelizing work of the Church, but one of his great achievements was his openness to universality; while Benedict XV had highlighted this concern, Pius XII developed it, calling for more native clergy to be made bishops in their homelands. To these we can also add Pius XII's well-known *Fidei Donum* (April 21, 1957), and the document that ties itself most explicitly to *Maximum Illud*, on its fortieth anniversary, John XXIII's encyclical *Princeps Pastorum* (November 28, 1959). While reading those earlier documents can help us understand the thought of Benedict XV, John XXIII's is essential. For this reason, Pope Francis, in his October 22, 2017, letter to Cardinal Filoni, affirms that "Pope Benedict XV sought to give new impetus to the missionary task of proclaiming the Gospel."

#### 4. The universality of the missionary activity of the Church

From its first words, *Maximum Illud* insists that proclaiming the Gospel is not only about increasing the number of those who are baptized, but that it is the fruit of an encounter with Christ, born of faith, beyond races, cultures, peoples.<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis appreciates Benedict's document because, among other reasons, it shows that the Church is Catholic, missionary, and universal, and because it is all these things, missionary action is paradigmatic of the whole work of the Church. The missionary task, then, is not optional, but necessary and paramount.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict XV laments "missionaries who, forgetting their dignity, would think more of their terrestrial homeland than of the heavenly one; and who would who be more concerned about their power and glory above all things" (MI 44).

At the time, the proclamation of the Gospel seemed to imply revising or replacing a people's culture; colonialism was not only political and social, but also cultural, and it did great damage to evangelization. But *Maximum Illud* makes a very positive assessment of what the inculturation of faith is and means, placing the Church in a permanent state of mission. Pope Benedict XV assumes the duty of affirming that mission is defined by the universality of salvation and by the catholicity of the Church destined for all peoples. For the first time, mission clearly becomes part of the Church's concerns, fixing its attention on the need to take care of indigenous Churches, including their organic and inculturated development.

For this reason, one of the main challenges to which Benedict XV had to respond was the need to overcome the temptation of a colonial mindset based on nationalistic and ethnocentric concerns, which directly affected not only countries but also some missionary institutions that behaved as though the Holy See had given them a certain mission territory as property.<sup>5</sup> The time had come for the Holy See to clarify the difference between geographical/political boundaries and the ecclesiastical boundaries of the Church. Benedict XV for the first time addressed the problem of restoration to the local Church of those territories that had previously been entrusted to a missionary institution. In these situations, there were other problems that could not be ignored, such as the right of commissions or the assignment of mission territories to religious congregations. Every missionary institution to which the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* (now "for the Evangelization of Peoples") had entrusted a mission territory dealt with these boundaries and sought vocations or means for its missions.

<sup>5</sup> Moreover, *Maximum Illud* warns of the damage that can come from evangelization closing its doors to other cultural or social realities: "And what tremendous responsibility [a missionary order] would bear when it came to face the eternal Judge, especially if finding its little Christianity – as often happens – almost lost in the midst of a multitude of infidels, being inadequate to the task of catechizing among them because it refused to invite the help of other cooperators!" (MI 25).

## 5. Mission *ad gentes*, origin of the local Churches

This distinction is not simply theoretical or strategic, but fundamental to promoting the mission *ad gentes* in the particular Churches. It is a decisive step towards the establishment of local Churches, which will give rise to the development of a greater missionary awareness in the life of the Church of the twentieth century. With Benedict XV, the missions became local Churches. Also derived from this was Benedict's attention to the situation of the bishops in these local Churches, who until then were mostly of Western origin: "They must be, as is said, the soul of their Mission. Therefore, let them be so especially in their zeal for exemplary edification of their priests and collaborators, exhorting them and encouraging them always to greater good" (MI 15). One of the great contributions of the document was to acknowledge the establishment of the local Church presided over by an indigenous bishop and clergy as a sign that the proclaimed Gospel has taken root. It called for the creation of new training centers to give life to local communities through well-formed collaborators (see MI 22, 33).

Benedict XV called for missions that are led and served by these indigenous priests, because they will have a better approach with the local people; these vocations will be the fruit of developed and mature communities. Also, in the case of armed conflicts, these clergy would not be expelled from the nations in which they are working, as happened to Western missionaries in the first decades of the twentieth century. Thanks to these new and opportune directives to the apostolic vicars and to the bishops of the various places, a long and laborious process of the creation of Churches (*plantatio Ecclesiae*) began. The effects of these recommendations were not long in coming; only a few years later, the first ordinations of indigenous bishops took place.

## 6. Indigenous vocations

*Maximum Illud* supports the need to promote indigenous vocations. The document notes that the best evangelizers are people who know the local language and culture and are members of the community to which the Gospel is proclaimed. This is not simply about effective planning, but because no one should be deprived of the gift of the missionary vocation. Foreign missionaries who refuse to adapt to local circumstances and do not speak the language of the natives, but instead address them through intermediaries, were associated with the European colonial powers. Even the members of the indigenous clergy ended up being seen as their auxiliaries, foreigners in their own land, with the risk of creating isolated and independent groups.

Although women have never ceased to be present in evangelization, the document makes a decisive and surprising challenge in favor of the missionary vocation of women, not only in order to assign them the social roles associated most closely with women, but to identify them simply as sent by the Church. This is why many female missionary organizations were established at that time (see MI 76).

## 7. Theology of mission

The apostolic letter offers some directions that will be further developed later by other papal documents and become part of a Theology of Mission. Among the reasons for developing such a theology is the necessity of preparing and training missionaries. Benedict XV insists that their sending must be preceded by a preparation and formation that is the basis of all missionary work. Many defections by those who left their vocations had to do with the absence of such formation. It is true that the theology of the time did not yet make available to Benedict XV an organic and



systematic missiological foundation, but early suggestions of it appear in the conclusion of the document, where vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life in the emerging Churches are seen as the best indicator of the maturity of these Christian communities. To this end, the Pontiff promoted collaboration between the missionary institutions, beyond the territorial boundaries assigned to each of them. The practice of assigning mission territories to missionary congregations and institutes had once been an adequate response to evangelization, but these institutions ran the risk of closing in on themselves, often refusing to consider, when it might be needed, collaboration with other missionary institutions. *Maximum Illud* disapproves of these limitations and pushes for more cooperation.

## 8. The relevance of *Maximum Illud*

We mustn't hesitate to underline again that the contents of the apostolic letter continue to be relevant one hundred years after its publication. Let us consider some of its most relevant aspects.

### a) *The vitality of mission*

Today as then, the mission *ad gentes* is in need of redevelopment. It is particularly interesting to consider the content of *Evangelii Gaudium* nn. 14-15, because it helps “to overcome divisions and opposing views between ordinary and missionary pastoral work” (Letter of Cardinal Filoni to the Bishops, December 3, 2017). How are we to deal with this problem today, given the new circumstances? An answer is offered: We must overcome the imbalance “between the challenges of evangelization in previously Christian areas that are now secularized and indifferent to religion and the *missio ad gentes*” (ibid.). It is interesting to discover that this peculiarity is present both in countries with a long Christian tradition and in the Churches that

have emerged in mission countries, and that, despite their differences, the first proclamation of the Gospel is central in both cases. It is the spiritual dimension: if we do not start from here, from evangelical purity and from the passion for evangelization, evangelization will not be possible. It is therefore urgent, as Benedict XV indicated in *Maximum Illud* and as Pope Francis has insisted, to renew our evangelical approach to mission.

### *b) Multidirectional cooperation*

Missionary cooperation up until then had a unidirectional orientation: the Gospel came from outside; the help came from far away. For that reason, local Churches perceived themselves to be only receivers of the message. And when a missionary was sent from one local Church to another, they were seen as auxiliary, as a secondary help, whose role was to serve the primary missionaries in that land. For the first time, mission is placed at the center of the Church's concerns. Unfortunately, despite this document, mission, or the missions, continued to be perceived for a long time as something additional and secondary. Benedict XV insists on one of the most urgent problems, the promotion of indigenous vocations. The fostering and the accompaniment of these vocations are the best signs of growth of a Christian community: "Where then there exists a sufficient number of indigenous clergy, well educated and worthy of his holy vocation, the Church can be said to be well founded, and the work of the missionary accomplished" (MI 36, see 39, 89).

### *c) Universality*

*Maximum Illud*, surprisingly, is strongly characterized by catholicity and cultural and geographical universality. Reading it today suggests that the

expression “missionary disciples,” a favorite concept of Pope Francis, could have been paraphrased from Benedict XV. This expression is nothing more than, in the language of Francis, the union of “passion for Jesus” (disciples) and “passion for people” (missionary). The relevance of *Maximum Illud* becomes clear by re-reading statements such as these: “If everyone, including the Missionaries abroad and the faithful at home, does, as we are certain they will, their duty, we can confidently hope that the sacred missions, recovered from the most serious damages of war, will return to prospering” (MI 109).

#### *d) Maximum Illud and the Pontifical Mission Societies*

On the occasion of the centenary of *Maximum Illud*, it is appropriate to rethink, promote, and re-evaluate the current meaning of the Pontifical Mission Societies. The Apostolic See, through the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, assumes the missionary responsibility that belongs to it. It is an example of the importance of the primacy of the Successor of Peter at the service of the universality of the Church and the missionary nature of the local Churches: above the particularisms of the congregations, nations, ideology, politics, economy, etc., which ecclesial institution should take responsibility for evangelization? In *Maximum Illud*, the Pope, as Successor of Peter, firmly committed himself to his service of communion, taking a global, Catholic perspective of universality and unity. It was then that management of the various works of missionary support that had emerged – many in France in the nineteenth century – passed to Rome (in 1922), expressing their charismatic catholicity in a more explicit way. That is to say, the center of support of global missionary efforts was no longer found in Lyons or in France, as it had been; by moving to Rome, it became universal, stimulating collaboration between the universal Church and particular Churches. This helped bring missionary concerns to

the center of the Church's attention. This not only resulted in the recovery of a vigorous missionary dynamism, but it was also an invitation to the International PMS Secretariats to support the missionary responsibility of the Christian communities spread about in the particular Churches and carried on by the people of God. For this reason, too, the local Church, in *Maximum Illud*, acquires its centrality thanks to mission.



## TRINITY, MISSION, AND CHURCH

One can speak of the interrelationship of Trinity, Mission, and Church in the sense that the three realities can never be fully understood apart from one another. On the contrary, they include and complement each other, as we see by carefully reading in parallel *Lumen Gentium* 2-5 and *Ad Gentes* 2-5. The Church is the icon of the Most Holy Trinity, and the *missio Dei* is at the origin of the Church's mission.

"The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (*Ad Gentes*, 2). This teaching of the Council is a succinct summary of the vital interconnection between the Church, the Trinity, and mission. Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, offered a remarkable synthesis of the reciprocal and indissoluble bonds between the Church and evangelization when he affirmed that the Church is born of the evangelizing work of Jesus and the Twelve Apostles (see *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15). It was later sent by Christ and, as the depositary of the Good News, it is first called to evangelize itself. This ontological interdependence between mission and the ecclesial community also reflects the nature of the one and triune God who is at the same time communion and mission. The sacramental character of the Church is possible insofar as it is an "icon of the Trinity." And if the Church is prophetically a sign of the Trinitarian family and an instrument of the gift of mission, it is because of its generation within the *agape* of the Trinitarian communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Triune God is therefore the foundation, the principle,

and the paradigm of the Church, the endpoint and the fulfillment of its earthly pilgrimage. The Church is a participant *in divine love* and destined *for divine love*, which is the reason it is sacrament of and participation in the Trinity, the reason it is *Ecclesia de Trinitate*; living in the Trinity, it is *Ecclesia in Trinitate*; and journeying towards the Trinity, it is *Ecclesia ad Trinitatem*. The word *sacrament*, as it is used in *Lumen Gentium* n. 1 in reference to the Church, means sign and instrument of the intimate vertical union with God and of the horizontal communion of the whole human race. For the Second Vatican Council, the term *sacrament*, whose connotation is dynamic, defines the Church as both a gift and a mission. This is not just to say that each of its members has gifts and a mission, but that the Church intrinsically constitutes a gift and a mission (see *Evangelii Gaudium*, 273). For this reason, the Church and its sons and daughters, as signs and instruments, make visible the mission of the invisible God and reflect in a tangible way the Trinitarian communion that, in the dynamics of the *exitus* of God, is poured out for the benefit of humanity.

“Re-unification,” which evokes the Letter to the Ephesians (see Eph 2:13-22), is the “destruction” by God of a powerful dynamic of separation rooted in man. In God’s relationship with the individual sinning person, and in general with all humanity in its slavery to sin, it is God who takes the first step. It is he, the Holy of Holies, who approaches and walks in communion with those who were far from him. He eradicates the hatred buried deep inside humanity. He makes brothers and sisters of those who were once separated and reunites them in him. He makes of them a community, which is the Church. The Cross is the source of the sacrament of unshakable love and of the communion of God with humanity. The Church, a community of faithful gathered by God thanks to the sacrifice of his Son, is the community of God. The Church of God is therefore the community of men and women animated by a new force, the grace of God who forgives, reconciles, and makes one. The Church is a community transformed to its very depths thanks to the Holy Spirit. The Church is

born of divine communion and receives from its Lord the gift and exercise of communion.

The Church of God, a mystery of communion, is in itself oriented towards the vocation of the universal with regard to salvation. Of course, it expresses itself in a thousand different ways in its individual members, but it does not close them in on their individuality. The Church's horizon is the horizon of God, who is Lord of communion in his Son Jesus Christ through the Spirit. The Church, God's people in communion, was born from the overcoming of all hatred and every barrier, all sources of division. It is anchored in the *already and not yet* of the "fulfillment" and perfection of humanity's communion in God. The Church of *union*, or better still, the Church of *communion*, is rooted historically in the history of Israel. The Church finds its origins in God "before the creation of the world" (Eph 1:4). It cannot and must not be separated from its source. Anything that does not contribute to ecclesial communion would be contrary to the nature of the Church. Thus we read in the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, "All men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God's will may be fulfilled. In the beginning God made human nature one and decreed that all His children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one (see Jn 11:52)" (*Lumen Gentium*, 13). Christ is the Author of the "recapitulation" in which and through which "reconciliation" takes place, the only Mediator between God and humanity, in creation and redemption.

Mission, rather than being simply something the Church does, is an *actio Dei*, a divine activity, because God, in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, is the first missionary – God "goes out of himself" by sending and being sent. Consequently, we can say that the *missiones Ecclesiae* are subsequent to, subordinate to, and participate in the *missio Dei*. The missionary activity of the Church is authentic and meaningful only to the extent that it participates

in the continuation and renewal of the intra-divine processions in history, the prolongation and development of the self-communication *ad intra* and *ad extra* of the Triune God in space and time. As the epiphany of the kingdom of God, the Church performs a prophetic and sacramental role, but it is never identical to and never replaces the *missio Dei*; the Church's missionary work and God's own missions are different both in the *modus operandi* and in who performs them. While Jesus is at the same time, in his very essence, the one who is sent and the one who sends, the herald and the self-revelation of the Kingdom in his own person, the Church and the missionary disciple act by participation and witness, charged with offering the gift God's love. The Church in its mission never replaces God or God's work. It participates effectively in the sacraments, making salvation effective in us and manifesting itself as the kingdom of God at the beginning of its earthly pilgrimage. This dynamic is set in motion only if the Church cooperates in being the obedient sign and instrument of the gift of grace, and its mission is inserted into the process of the "outgoing of the Trinitarian God" who self-communicates personally through the Incarnation of the Word and the outpouring of the Easter-Pentecost Spirit. This Church, then, born of inspiration and of the Trinity, becomes, as the image of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a "communion in mission." By virtue of this, it must make the gift of salvation accessible to all humanity, since it is not a people called and chosen by itself and for itself, but sent and commissioned to spread the grace of the Covenant with God beyond its structural borders, its visible confines (see *Lumen Gentium*, 13-17).

The mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Church is therefore a vocation, a call to make perennial this active and passive, receiving and giving, dynamic and progressive communion of the Trinity (*pericoresi*), which, through the sacramental mediation of its ecclesial icon, wants to continue giving itself to the world to save it. In the Church, the gift is never received to be preserved and hidden, but to be communicated and shared. The Spirit of the seven gifts does not authorize the Christian to



remain closed in on herself; rather, the Spirit encourages her, pushes her, to open herself to God and to her neighbor, in a flowing forth of generosity that makes the gift grow. In terms of missionary communion, we can say that the gift becomes a mission and the mission becomes a gift, rooted in the ongoing gift and revelation of God, reflecting the life of the Trinity. Faith is strengthened by being given.

A first missiological conclusion from what we have said is that for the Church, fruit of the divine missions, evangelization becomes a grace given by Christ, a pure gift of election to participate in the missionary work of God. Apostolicity makes of the Church a family, a communion in mission and a mission in communion in the uninterrupted apostolic succession of generations of believers. Catholicity, on the other hand, commits it always to be more, for all, a symbol of unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

A second possible implication of the consubstantiality between the Church and mission in light of the Trinity is to understand ecclesial intersubjectivity as an analogy of the Triune God. This means that the universal Church, icon of the processions and missions of the Word and the Spirit, is the place where immanence, the mutual complementarity of Christians, and the equality in the midst of difference that they share, are promoted and lived by analogy to the indwelling of the Divine Persons (intratrinitarian perichoresis). In short, the members of the same ecclesial community do not simply coexist side by side; they are pro-existent, each one “with, in, and for” the other, in a state of permanent gift and vocation (baptism, eucharist, and marriage).

The Creator God offers himself by generating the Son in the Spirit and instituting through him a Church-family, an icon of the Trinitarian “family.” The mission of the Church has the sole objective of communicating and transmitting that divine life which makes us sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters in Christ. Our participation in the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the ultimate goal of the Church’s missionary activity. When the Church strengthens and restores the bonds of

communion, reconciliation, conviviality, charity, peace, and justice among people, it carries out the will of God, who wants all people to be saved, and actualizes the kingdom of God, which is already among us.

To achieve this family unity and fraternal communion among humanity, the Church, in the communication and witness of the apostolic faith it has received, must take the risk of stepping outside itself, to venture out of its visible and cultural boundaries. This going out does not mean turning away from its home, its temple, but it involves expanding the spaces and times of mission so that the Church may correspond more and more to the saving love of God, its founder. Being in constant *exitus* towards the geographic and, above all, existential peripheries means adopting prophetic attitudes in the initiatives of ecumenical, intercultural, inter-religious dialogue, to open broad prospects for a universal fraternity in which all those who recognize God as Father and Jesus Christ as Savior can live harmoniously as brothers and sisters.

To conclude, following in the footsteps of the Trinitarian God who communicates himself pushes ecclesial communities to distance themselves from all egoistic and ethno-centric self-referentiality. In reality, in the creative self-giving of the Father, as well as in the redemptive work of the Son and the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the whole of the Trinitarian family is interacting, as no Person of the Trinity works independently of the others, but with, in, and for the other Divine Persons. The Church must strive to imitate this contemplative and interactive communion, harmonizing in its bosom the exercise of charisms, the service of institutions, and the division of ministries, so that all the faithful in Christ – laity, bishops, priests, deacons, and consecrated religious – cooperate in mission, in the one mission of God that makes the Church itself.

## THE PASSEOVER OF JESUS CHRIST: THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI declared that “Jesus Himself, the Good News of God, was the very first and the greatest evangelizer; He was so through and through: to perfection and to the point of the sacrifice of His earthly life” (n. 7). John Paul II took up the same idea in *Redemptoris Missio* when he affirmed that “Since the ‘Good News’ is Christ, there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing and being” (n. 13). Not only does Christ proclaim the Kingdom, but he *is*, also and above all, the Kingdom itself made present, to such an extent that we can say the effectiveness of his mission resides in the total identification of his person with the Good News that is proclaimed. More precisely, the Son’s mission is nothing less than the communication of God’s own life to humanity in a continuous self-giving, from his Incarnation to his Resurrection from the dead, and including along the way his miracles, his actions, and his teachings. The Mystery of Christ and his earthly ministry are a double offering: the gift of his life to the Father, from whom he received his mission, and the gift of his life to his brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters of God, which he wished to call together into one family. In carrying out this mission, Jesus’ *modus operandi*, before and after Easter, is differentiated, the latter building upon the former. In the pre-Easter period, the mission that Jesus entrusted to his disciples seemed limited in time and space (see Mt 10:1-16), while after Easter, there is a universalization and globalization of the mission (see Mt 28:16-20). This enhances the character of the Paschal Mystery as center and source of the mission and as the action of God and the gift-responsibility of the Church.

In his passion-death-resurrection, Jesus the Christ pursues and accomplishes in a more incisive, decisive, and definitive way his mission of self-giving, which consists in the communication of divine life for the salvation of the multitudes (see Mark 10:45). In the post-Easter mission entrusted to his apostles, the gift of new life is universalized and spreads to the ends of the earth. In *Redemptoris Missio*, 22, John Paul II observed that “all the Evangelists, when they describe the risen Christ’s meeting with his apostles, conclude with the ‘missionary mandate’” (see Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-18, Lk 24:46-49, Jn 20:21-23). This concomitance or link between mission and resurrection is so strong that one can accurately say that *resurrection means mission*, since the glorification of the Risen One is the founding event of the universal mission (see Mt 28:18). Mission, and therefore the resurrection of Christ, are none other than the transmission of new life in the Spirit, divine life to which all of humanity is called to take part thanks to the centrifugal movement of the universal mission which the Risen One initiates by sending his disciples into all the world. This mission of communicating the life of God through the outpouring of the Spirit of the Father and the Son is universalized in the paschal event of Pentecost. Proclamation, baptism, and discipleship are the framework, starting from Jesus himself, of the sending on mission of the twelve apostles and the disciples.

Before Easter, the Spirit dwells in the Person of Christ and works through him. After his resurrection, the Paraclete is transmitted to the apostles and acts through them and with them to make the Risen Christ present. Starting from the outpouring of the Spirit at Easter, John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio* n. 23, taught that each mission has two common aspects. On one hand, there is a universal dimension, that is, a catholic one, which is found in the expressions “all nations” (Mt 28:19), “all peoples” (Lk 24:47), “into the whole world . . . to every creature” (Mk 16:15), “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). On the other, evangelization has a pneumatological foundation that is expressed by the omnipresence and omnipotence of

the Spirit. The gift of tongues means, fundamentally, that the Spirit is the architect of unity in diversity and the protagonist of diversity in unity, both in the Church and in the world. The divine plan for the gathering of humanity into one flock is realized through the Church. Through the Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, humanity is not only reconciled with God, but enjoys, in the Church and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, true communion with God.

The building up, permanent “renewal,” and, in general, the mission of the Church, are realized thanks to the “two hands of God” (as Saint Irenaeus of Lyons beautifully put it), Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Church of God is radically marked by the “Event” of the Cross. Starting from the Death-Resurrection, humanity is reconciled with God. It is introduced into “God’s time,” and the Church is constituted as a privileged space of communion with God. “God’s time” is the time of grace for the Church. Through his Cross, Christ breaks down the wall that separated sinful humanity from God. “God’s time” becomes the “time of the Church” in Jesus Christ. With his Resurrection, Christ, the firstborn among the dead, draws the ecclesial body into the communion of the Most Holy Trinity. The Church is thus in communion with the holiness of God. A community sanctified by the sacrifice of the Cross, the Church is the body of Christ who is, in turn, the Head of the Church. It is not a static community but is rather dynamic and growing in time and space, a community enriched and permanently assisted by the Holy Spirit.

The Church is, in this world, “the concrete portion of humanity” that effectively and visibly manifests the glory of God. This glory passes through “the space of salvation” opened by the Cross, through which Christ unites himself to his Church, or all of humanity, and saves it. The Church does not exist for itself but for the redemption of humanity, the manifestation of the glory of God. The mission of the Church has its origins in Easter. The proclamation of the Risen Christ is at the same time the foundation, the source, and the mission of the Church (see Acts of the Apostles). The

Church's very reason for being consists in continuing the reconciling work of Jesus Christ through his Holy Cross in the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Church is that it is called to be, in its entirety, the sacrament of reconciliation of humanity with God. According to the affirmation of Irenaeus, "For the glory of God is the human person fully alive, and the life of humanity consists in the vision of God: if already the revelation of God through creation gives life to all beings who live on earth, still more the manifestation of the Father through the Word is the cause of life for those who see God" (*Adversus Haereses* IV, 20.7).

The Church, the Body of Christ, participates with the Lord Jesus in the building up and growth of the kingdom of God. The growth of the Kingdom of God is the growth of the Church itself. In Jesus Christ, the sanctification of humanity is realized and increases his Body the Church: "In the human nature united to Himself the Son of God, by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection, redeemed man and re-molded him into a new creation (cf. Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, mystically the components of His own Body" (*Lumen Gentium*, 7).

The Church is holy because in Jesus Christ, its spouse, it shares in the holiness of God. The Church finds in Jesus Christ, its Head, the perfection towards which it progresses and is attracted (see Eph 4:13). The Church is intimately linked to Christ. Only in Christ does she truly exist: "Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8).

Saint Augustine used the sublime expression “the whole Christ” to speak of the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church and to express the splendor and fullness towards which every Church on the journey strives. The “whole Christ” is the intimate union between the Christ-Head and the Church-Body, in every time and every place. There is no Church without Christ: “In fact, head and body are the one Christ; not because without a body it is not whole, but because the One who, even without us, is complete has deigned to be totally with us; not only inasmuch as he is the Word, the only Son equal to the Father, but also in his very humanity which he assumed and with which he is both God and man. . . . All together we are members and body of Christ, not only we who are here in this place, but everyone over the entire earth. And not just us who live in this time, but what can we say? from the righteous Abel to the end of the world, for as long as there is a human race. Whatever right makes its passage in this life, all of humanity present and far beyond this place, and all of humanity in the future, all form the one body of Christ and each one is a member of it. . . . And since it is said of him that he is the head of every principality and of every power (Col 2:10), it is clear that this Church, now a pilgrim, is to be joined to that heavenly Church where we have the angels as fellow citizens. . . . And when [Paul] that preacher of Christ had to endure the persecutions that he had inflicted on others, he said ‘to make up in my body what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24),’ thus showing that his suffering belonged to the sufferings of Christ. [These words] should not be understood as referring to the head who, now in heaven, suffers nothing, but to the body, that is to the Church, the body which with its head is the only Christ” (St. Augustine, *Discourse* 341, 11- 12: PL 39, 1499-1500).

From Pentecost onwards, the Lord Jesus Christ is inseparable from the Church, although he transcends it and it owes to him all that it is. There is no Church without the Risen Christ. Augustine’s notion of the “whole Christ” illuminates in a remarkable way the communion between Christ and the Church and also between the members of the Church and Christ,

both personally and communally. The Church is one with Jesus Christ. The “whole Christ” is the Head (Christ) and the Body (the Church).

The Cross, the Resurrection, and Pentecost are decisive moments of ecclesial communion with the Most Holy Trinity. These moments are distinct but not separate. In Pentecost, the linguistic unity once broken by Babel is restored through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The confusion of languages and the separation of the human race that Babel symbolizes in chapter 11 of Genesis (see Gen 11:1-9) corresponds to the reunification of humanity through the preaching of the apostles, in the reconciling power of the Spirit. At Babel, there was only one language, a symbol of unity lived and then broken by human pride; at Pentecost, the multitude of languages, symbol of the barrier raised between peoples, was unified in the common understanding of the apostolic Word. This is the work of the Spirit in the “last days.” The fire of this one Spirit, who takes possession of each individual in his or her singularity, embraces the multitude and forms them into a single unity. The community that is born of Pentecost is reunited in God through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Pentecost, human pride gives way to communion; human diversity is enclosed by unity in the many. Thanks to the active presence of the Holy Spirit, the Church actualizes and proclaims the Gospel. The Church does not exercise this ministry of communion to acquire its own merit. The Church that preaches does so with the duty of the quality of its attachment to Christ. The reconciled Church evangelizes and participates, in time and space, in the building up of the kingdom of God, of which it is itself fully a part *hic et nunc*.



## MARY AND THE CHURCH

St. Augustine, in Sermon 25, affirms that Mary's greatness does not lie in the privilege of having generated the Son of God in the flesh. Rather, she is great thanks to the faith with which she welcomed, conceived, gave birth, and nourished the Son of God. It is her faith (obedience expressed with her yes/fiat) that generates, in her alone, the body of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Mary generates the flesh of Jesus in her mind, her will, and her heart, through an act of faith that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. This fruitful faith is, for St. Augustine, the reason for her honor. To the Church, Mary is great much more because of her faith than because of her unique privilege of having given a human body to the Son of God.

The Gospels bear witness to the journey, the mission, and the pilgrimage of faith that Mary is called to live. John Paul II tells us in n. 2 of his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (quoting *Lumen Gentium*, 58) that Mary had to grow in faith to fully give birth to Jesus Christ. Mary is a disciple and a pilgrim in faith. A Christian, a missionary disciple, is called to follow and participate in Mary's journey of faith. Only in this way, thanks to faith, can the Holy Spirit give birth to Jesus in each one of us. Let us retrace with Mary the steps of her pilgrimage in faith, growing in her mission as a daughter, disciple, and mother.

**Luke 1:26-38**

The Annunciation, as well as the virginal conception of Jesus Christ in Mt 1:18-25, is the first moment of her faith. The “yes” of the Annunciation does not yet seem fully realized, although it is, on the part of Mary, total. It is the beginning of maternal obedience and, therefore, a “yes” that is humanly a stance of absolute availability. But it is not yet complete, because it has not yet been fully consummated. In the Annunciation, as she asks questions of the angel, Mary is still the protagonist. She says “yes” only after this dialogue and encounter. The Son of God, while destined to be salvation for all humanity, appears in the Annunciation to be as yet just the exclusive fruit of Mary’s virginal womb and the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit.

**Luke 1:39-45**

When Mary visits Elizabeth, the latter recognizes Mary’s divine motherhood. It is the coming together of the Old Covenant and the New. The divine motherhood of Mary is portrayed as the fruit of her faith: “Blessed is she who believed that the word of the Lord would be done.”

**Luke 1:46-56**

With her Magnificat, we have Mary’s response to Elizabeth’s profession of faith. It is a song of exultation, which expresses Mary’s awareness that what she carries in her womb comes from God through her free adherence of faith.

And yet what the Holy Spirit does and achieves through Mary’s obedient mediation will not be solely for Mary but for all. From generation to generation, all of humanity and all creation will receive the benefits obtained through her virginal faith. In Mary is realized for all humanity the historical

mediation of the fulfillment of the ancient promises to Israel, the beginning of the reconciled world. Through the mediation of Israel in Mary, the world begins its journey of salvation and reconciliation. We are the new Israel: in Mary, by faith, the Church begins.

### **Luke 2:1-20**

The birth of Jesus (see Mt 2:1-12) already shows, through the shepherds, the signs of the reconciliation of all peoples. Luke describes, in the shepherds, the beginning of the transfiguration of the world, while Matthew presents us, in the Magi, the universal reach and the greatness of the fruit of the Virgin Mary's womb. Here, the mother of Jesus does not speak, but keeps everything in the secret of her heart. She contemplates the unity of the Mystery, the meaning of the things that are happening to her and that she is called to live in faith.

### **Matthew 2:13-19**

Through the story of the flight into Egypt and the massacre of the Innocents, we see that from early childhood, the relationship of Jesus Christ with Mary is marked by the shedding of blood, a clear sign of a bloody separation that leads to the maturity of faith. Luke presents this truth also in the circumcision episode (see Lk 2:21): the firstborn does not belong to Mary, and her maternal relationship already seems to take on a sacrificial form (the knife, the blood, and the name given to Jesus through the blood: Jesus means "Yahweh saves"). Jesus belongs to God, and separation from his mother will be violent. In the separation of the cross, thanks to faith, the Son of Mary is given to all, for the salvation of all, and becomes Lord of all, head of his body which is the Church (see Jn 12:32).

**Luke 2:22-38**

Simeon's prophecy speaks of the sword that will pierce Mary's heart as a specific maternal consequence of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. The child is a "sign of contradiction." He will reveal faith hidden in the hearts of people, in the depths of our spirit; when he is raised on the cross, he will draw all people to himself.

**Luke 2:41-51**

In Jerusalem, the adolescent Jesus abandons his parents and remains in the Temple, taking possession of what belongs to him (see Jn 2:13-22; Lk 4:16-30). Jesus says to his parents, "Did you not know that I must take care of the things of my Father?" The separation is clear for Joseph – he clearly is not Jesus' father – but it also refers to Mary.

In the following Gospel passages, what Christ says about the adult relationship between Mother and Son becomes clear. In a journey of discipleship, Jesus forms Mary's motherhood and opens it to the mission of motherhood of the Church through obedient faith in listening and in the life of her Word.

**John 2:1-12**

In the story of the wedding at Cana, we see wine and marriage, both eschatological signs of the heavenly Jerusalem, where all of us, judged by the truth of God's Word and by his Love, will be together one with God: "I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2). To say

“heaven” is to say spousal union between God and humanity. The world will be judged in order to be reconciled.

At Cana, Mary tries to “take advantage” of her maternal privilege as mother in the flesh, but she receives a lesson from her Son, so that she can fulfill her true role. At Cana, Mary is mother, but she is not yet fully a daughter. Jesus Christ distances himself from her, because he wants to transfigure her privilege of motherhood in the flesh. First he addresses her, not calling her “mother,” but connecting her to the rest of humanity by calling her “woman.” Christ responds to his mother as the Lord of humanity, emphasizing the distance between himself and Mary with harsh words (“Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not yet come,” Jn 2:4). Jesus also indicates to Mary the fullness of time of his passion: “If you grow in your faith,” he seems to tell her, “I will make you the mother of all humanity through your participation in the sacrifice of my cross.” Mary accepts the challenge of her Son and shows us that the way of faith is obedience to all that the Son says: “His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you’” (Jn 2:5). Mary, as a student on the path of discipleship, learns about the nature of faith from her Son through separation from him, through his death on the cross. Faith is fully accomplished only in his Passover, which will reveal her universal maternal mission.

**Mark 3:31-35 (Mt 12:46-50; Lk 8:19-21)**

Still motivated by her privilege in the flesh, Mary seeks Jesus as her own Son. He does not receive his mother, nor allow her to enter. He looks at the disciples and asks: “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” And he answers his own question: “Whoever does the will of God, this one for me is brother, sister and mother.” Jesus is describing what happened in the Annunciation. He is saying that the faith lived by Mary transforms those who believe into mothers; through them, faith generates sons and

daughters of God. Jesus teaches Mary, revealing to her the true meaning and the universal scope of her privilege of fleshly maternity, to amplify her motherhood and make her Mother of the Church and of saved humanity.

### **Luke 11:27ff**

“Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.” To these words, Jesus replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” The motherhood that generates (womb) and nourishes (breast) is generation in the Word that, listened to and obeyed, becomes flesh (that is, it is put into practice) and sacrifices itself (through the Eucharistic offering on the cross) in order to nourish and sustain faith by building up the Church, a community of believers.

### **John 19:25-37**

The time has come. Jesus is hanging on the cross, exposed, and has handed himself over entirely to the Father. In this Jesus not only makes himself fully available to the will of the Father, but allows himself to be delivered by the Father, for the salvation of humanity. By surrendering himself, Jesus allows the Father to surrender him for our salvation. This is the reason that Jesus said earlier that when he was raised up from the earth, he would draw all people to himself (see Jn 12:32), and that all will “look upon him whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37, see Zech 12:10). It is time! Within this “hour,” in this context, Jesus surrenders his Mother for us.

Jesus addresses his mother and calls her “woman” (female humanity), offering her as a mother to John. John receives Mary as “woman.” It is the fulfillment of what Jesus had said in Jn 2:4. Mary becomes the Mother of all the living, reversing and converting Eve’s disobedience (see Gen 3:20).

Mary's motherhood at the foot of the cross recognizes that Jesus is the fruit of her womb and that he surrenders her so that she may become the mother of all the living, Mother of the Church, of humanity, and of the reconciled world.

At the foot of the cross, a new and true Adam generates the true and new Eve. At the foot of the new tree, the old disobedience is conquered and redeemed (see Gen 3:9-15). Through the mediation of John the apostle, Mary becomes the Mother of all humanity. The Church, reconciled humanity, has its origin in the Paschal Mystery.

Jesus teaches Mary so that she can move from the "yes" of the Annunciation to the "yes" of the Cross. Here, at the foot of the cross, in silence, letting herself be surrendered, Mary realizes the utmost fidelity to her "yes." She lets herself be shaped, created, and used by God. If, in the Annunciation, she surrenders herself through the human word of her faith, at the foot of the cross she surrenders herself through the silence of loving and fruitful contemplation of the self-abandonment and surrender of her own Son.

And after the cross, Mary will not speak again. All that she says will always be to return and obey his Son, for our salvation. Even in Marian apparitions, it is the words of Jesus her Son that we hear, inviting us to do what he tells us through his Church.

## Acts 1:14

The Church awaits the Spirit to confirm it, to introduce it into the fullness of Truth, to console it, and to defend it. At Pentecost, Mary, in silence, is in the midst of the apostles, at the center of the confirmation of the apostolic, Petrine, and Marian foundation of the Church. Mary is placed in the heart of the universal mission of the nascent Church. Now Christ is complete: He, the Head, and us, in Mary, his Body, united to Him in the Spirit. Mary, mother of all the redeemed, never lost the unique

and exclusive role of being the mother of Jesus: on the Cross, Jesus extends his motherhood to the whole Church, and at Pentecost, it is confirmed. In the Church her motherhood becomes universal. The faith of the Church can generate Jesus in the hearts of believers through the faith of and in the motherhood of the Virgin Mary, the fruit and work of the Holy Spirit (see *Lumen Gentium* nn. 53, 63-65). In this logic of filial generation in the Spirit of God, where freedom and faith meet in the Passover of Jesus, the sacrament of baptism originates and takes shape.

Marian faith, fruit of Mary's maternal collaboration, is subordinate to, relative to, and derived from the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ (see *Lumen Gentium*, 60-62). Everything in Mary comes to correspond to what Jesus had said to his disciples: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:23; see Mt 16:24-27, Mk 8:34-38, Jn 12:25).

Mary denies herself, takes up her cross, and follows her Son in the glory of the cross and resurrection (in her Assumption, body and soul into heaven). Dying to herself, she participates as a mother in the cross of her Son and follows him, letting herself be taken to the point where, through the Spirit, her earthly motherhood of Jesus becomes universal motherhood in the Church.

## 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Christ, the new Adam, is the first of those who rise from the dead; he is the firstborn of all creation (see Col 1:15) and the firstborn of the dead (see Col 1:18). Just as he is the new Adam, his Mother is the new Eve (see Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 22, 3-4; on this Mary-Eve parallelism, Irenaeus refers to Justin, whose thought is based on St. Paul's Christ-Adam parallelism). She will be the first to participate in his glorious



resurrection: “Just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:22-23). Mary, in her turn, as the mother of Jesus in her immaculate flesh, is the first among all created things to be resurrected; as the mother of the Church, she is the first work of creation fully fulfilled and glorified, and it is thus in her soul and in her body, that is, in her totality. Her soul was obedient through faith, and her body was shaped by her virginal obedience.

As a Mother, Mary draws us to the glory of the Son, interceding for us in Heaven. Assumed soul and body into heaven, she remains Mother of the Son and our Mother, a guarantee that what happened to her will happen also to us: we will be glorified in soul and body, on the day of our resurrection, if we are faithful as she was, if we believe with Marian faith, with her faith. Mary, in her motherhood, is the firm point and sure hope that the resurrection of Jesus Christ will be effective, will open eternal life for us, and that the new life of his resurrection be at work in us. It is for this reason that, in the Eucharistic Prayer, when we remember our living communion with the heavenly Church, the first glorified creature we name, with respect to the order of the resurrection of the dead (see 1 Cor 15:23), is the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. In her divine motherhood is the effective beginning of her ecclesial motherhood.

### **Revelation 12:1-17, 21:1-14**

The relationship between the woman clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and the Christian community persecuted for its witness leads us to a greater understanding of the Marian principle in the Church. In the narration, the persecutions suffered by Christians are described in terms of apocalyptic battles, in the atmosphere of the eschatological victory of the woman by virtue of the birth and mission of the Son. The woman

crowned with twelve stars, giving birth in the midst of the battle between the dragon and her with her Son, speaks to us of a connection between the woman and the community of the Church. It shows us that this connection is much more than symbolic-nominalist and arbitrary. This connection emerges further if we consider that our dwelling place with God, in heavenly glory, is presented as a city that descends from Heaven, like the Bride of the Lamb, bride of the victorious Risen Lord.

It is possible to understand the woman who gives birth as Virgin Mary, in the Incarnation-Birth of Jesus Christ, at the same time as the mother of her Son and, as Church, the mother of children generated through and in her Son, always in the historicity of his passion and death on cross (see Rev 12:10-12). It is possible that John, in chapter 12 of the book of Revelation, has Mary in mind, the new Eve, daughter of Zion, who gave birth to the Messiah. We can glimpse the relationship between the generation of the faith of Christians in persecution and the generation of the Son of God in Mary and in them.

Beyond this, we have seen that the Virgin's ability to signify, represent, and be humanity as Virgin-Church Bride – as the already redeemed beginning of salvation and as co-operative in this salvation – is rooted in the fact that her Son clearly identified her as “woman” in his preaching on the kingdom of God, in his works that realized the kingdom of God, and up to the cross. Known as the Mother of Jesus, Mary is called “woman” by him, both at the wedding at Cana (see Jn 2:4) and at the foot of the cross (see Jn 19:26). Jesus himself indicates that the motherhood of his mother, Mary, extends to ecclesial motherhood: what she did (hearing and obeying the Word of God) makes her mother, in the flesh, of the Son of God, just as we, hearing and obeying to the Word of God, will be generated as disciples (whom Jesus calls “my brothers, my sisters”; see Mk 3:33-35, Mt 12:48-50, Lk 8:21) who are also capable of generating (in the same passages, he also calls them “my mother”). In calling his mother in the flesh “woman,” Jesus emphasizes the need for Mary to grow as a disciple in order to become, in

the mystery of the cross, the first of all creatures to be glorified. This, for us, has the theological meaning that she is the new Eve, mother of the living, the principle-beginning, prefiguration, and guarantee that our salvation, as humanity, is realizable and effective.

Mary, already glorified through her assumption into heaven in soul and body, as the first creature to participate in the redemptive efficacy of the Paschal Mystery of her own Son, remains present, like humanity already made definitively victorious, in the community of the Church that generates Christ in the faithful pilgrims still in the midst of worldly struggles and persecutions. She, already belonging totally to God, prefigures what will happen to all, in the glory of the Son. She guarantees it, to the extent possible, to all men and women, as a glorified creature and by maternal intercession for them all before her Son. In her already redeemed and glorified motherhood, Mary cooperates as a mother in the generation of sons and daughters in her Son; she cooperates in the generation of the Church. As the creaturely principle of the Church and of the world already and definitively reconciled with God the Father through Christ in the Spirit, Mary testifies to us that humanity together with all creation (sun, moon, stars, sky and earth, city), when they are saved, will be saved as Church and Bride (see Rev 21:1-7).

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## WORD OF GOD, BAPTISM, EUCHARIST IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

“In calling upon all the faithful to proclaim God’s word, the Synod Fathers [of the 2008 General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops] restated the need in our day too for a decisive commitment to the *missio ad gentes*. In no way can the Church restrict her pastoral work to the ‘ordinary maintenance’ of those who already know the Gospel of Christ. Missionary outreach is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community. The Fathers also insisted that the word of God is the saving truth which men and women in every age need to hear. For this reason, it must be explicitly proclaimed. The Church must go out to meet each person in the strength of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:5) and continue her prophetic defense of people’s right and freedom to hear the word of God, while constantly seeking out the most effective ways of proclaiming that word, even at the risk of persecution. The Church feels duty-bound to proclaim to every man and woman the word that saves (cf. Rom 1:14)” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 95).

In the Old Testament, the Word prepares the way for the event of the Word becoming flesh. The New Testament’s Letter to the Hebrews begins precisely underlining this extreme dynamism of the Word: “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe” (Heb 1: 1-2). The Word gathers us as the priestly People of God, unifying us inwardly, freeing our identity, and giving us back the awareness of universal fraternity under the gaze of a single Father. It is the Word that is placed at the origin of every relationship: “Out of the abundance of His love, [God] speaks

to men as friends (see Ex 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself” (*Dei Verbum*, 2).

Proclaiming the Gospel under any circumstances does not mean having courage, but having faith. It means believing that the frank and constant proclamation of the Word that saves, without recoiling in the face of difficulties and failures, corresponds to the deepest needs and the most universal concerns of the human heart. The Church, in her liturgy, often repeats the warning not to grow weary in this journey of faith. The word of God grows and spreads through persecutions, diasporas, rejection, or unexpected welcome (see Is 55:10-11). Faith is the certainty and conviction that the Gospel of Jesus is, for people of all times, the Truth that gives Life and indicates the Way for a life of eternal communion with God (see Jn 14:6).

“The first Christians saw their missionary preaching as a necessity rooted in the very nature of faith: the God in whom they believed was the God of all, the one true God who revealed himself in Israel’s history and ultimately in his Son, who thus provided the response which, in their inmost being, all men and women awaited. The first Christian communities felt that their faith was not part of a particular cultural tradition, differing from one people to another, but belonged instead to the realm of truth, which concerns everyone equally. . . . In fact, the newness of Christian proclamation is that we can tell all peoples: God has shown himself. In person. And now the way to him is open. The novelty of the Christian message does not consist in an idea but in a fact: God has revealed himself” (*Verbum Domini*, 92).

Believing in Jesus Christ is not a religious opinion or an ideological choice: it is a fundamental choice of life in the face of the revelation of Truth. The Christian paradox of the Cross of Jesus reveals the meaning of suffering, which is inevitable, and of the human condition, opening it to its deepest dimension and the possibility of total self-giving for life. The faith transmitted (Word of God and baptism) is always the faith of the Church and in the Church, which gives God’s own life through Christ

and the Spirit (the Incarnate Word and Eucharist). Faith is the substance of hope in eternal life (see Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 2-9).

“The Church’s faith is essentially a eucharistic faith, and it is especially nourished at the table of the Eucharist. Faith and the sacraments are two complementary aspects of ecclesial life. Awakened by the preaching of God’s word, faith is nourished and grows in the grace-filled encounter with the Risen Lord which takes place in the sacraments. . . . the Sacrament of the Altar is always at the heart of the Church’s life: thanks to the Eucharist, the Church is reborn ever anew! The more lively the eucharistic faith of the People of God, the deeper is its sharing in ecclesial life in steadfast commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples. The Church’s very history bears witness to this. Every great reform has in some way been linked to the rediscovery of belief in the Lord’s eucharistic presence among his people” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 6).

The dynamic of faith is fascinating: from encounter with Christ to mission of proclaiming Christ. It is the joy of making Christ known and loved. Mission means to share with Christ his own work of evangelization: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21). The sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist, are effective and visible signs that really communicate the life of God in Christ and involve us in the dynamic of his mission and his passion for the life and salvation of every person. Praying the Word of God reveals the encounter with this love and it is an experience of the presence of the Lord Jesus who dwells in us together with the Father, in the Spirit. In this way, *Lectio Divina* becomes a gradual path of knowledge and interiorization that leads to transformation and the fullness of mission. The prayerful reading of Scripture, which is the living Word, makes us aware of a Presence that absorbs human time and wraps it up in the divine. Following attentive study comes meditation, allowing the Word to enter our experience and leading spontaneously to the next step of prayer as a personal dialogue with God, as an experiential way of knowledge and love, the contemplation that expands the heart in charity. The prayerful

reading of the Word is impregnated with the sacramental dimension of the Christian event, because the one who speaks communicates himself in flesh and blood, communicates divine grace and new life in water and the Spirit. The word of God meets, in the today of history, the resurrected flesh of the Lord Jesus in the sacraments of the Church and in the witness of the baptized faithful's faith, hope, and charity.

"The word of God has bestowed upon us the divine life which transfigures the face of the earth, making all things new (cf. Rev 21:5). His word engages us not only as hearers of divine revelation, but also as its heralds. The one whom the Father has sent to do his will (cf. Jn 5:36-38; 6:38-40; 7:16-18) draws us to himself and makes us part of his life and mission. The Spirit of the Risen Lord empowers us to proclaim the word everywhere by the witness of our lives. . . . This is why the Church is missionary by her very nature. We cannot keep to ourselves the words of eternal life given to us in our encounter with Jesus Christ: they are meant for everyone, for every man and woman. Everyone today, whether he or she knows it or not, needs this message. . . . It is our responsibility to pass on what, by God's grace, we ourselves have received" (*Verbum Domini*, 91).

Christ's mission knows no limits and extends to the entire world (see Mt 28:19). In view of the encounter with Christ through baptism, the Christian knows that Jesus has entered his very life, truly transforms him (conversion), and sends him. Thanks to baptism, the Word proclaimed and received by faith involves us in the flow of the revelation of God. Christian life is a process of becoming, by the action of the Holy Spirit, a reflection of Christ to the Father and to one's brothers and sisters. It is a "new life," a baptismal involvement in the Passover of the Lord (see Rom 6), because we live "according to the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). It is a real victory over sin, a process of constant conversion in the hard struggle against sin.

Thanks to baptism, the faith of the Church, freely accepted, generates new children of God, new brothers and sisters in the family of God. The baptismal font generates because the Church is a true fruitful mother of



the Word that saves and of the Spirit that gives life. The Eucharist makes the flesh and blood of the baptized generative through their participation in the Passover of Jesus. Communion with the body and blood of Christ makes them sharers in the generative power of the love of the Father (the Holy Spirit) that unites Christ to his Church. This sacramental unity makes the Bride Church a true mother of a multitude of believers. From the earliest times, Christians understood themselves to be involved in this missionary reality of the motherhood of the Church: Jesus dared to compare his apostles to a mother suffering in childbirth but full of joy for having transmitted life (see Jn 16:21-22). Thus St. Paul, recalling that Jesus himself “was born of a woman,” said, “I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you!” (Gal 4:19).

Pope Francis has said, “Baptism is the Sacrament on which our very faith is founded and which grafts us as a living member onto Christ and his Church. Together with the Eucharist and Confirmation it forms what is known as ‘Christian initiation,’ like one great sacramental event that configures us to the Lord and turns us into a living sign of his presence and of his love.

“Yet a question may stir within us: is Baptism really necessary to live as Christians and follow Jesus? After all, isn’t it merely a ritual, a formal act of the Church in order to give a name to the little boy or girl? This question can arise. And on this point what the Apostle Paul writes is illuminating: ‘Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life’ (Rom 6:3-4). Therefore, it is not a formality! It is an act that touches the depths of our existence. A baptized child and an unbaptized child are not the same. A person who is baptized and a person who is not baptized are not the same. We, by Baptism, are immersed in that inexhaustible source of life which is the death of Jesus, the greatest act of love in all of history; and thanks to this love we

can live a new life, no longer at the mercy of evil, of sin and of death, but in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters” (Pope Francis, General Audience, January 8, 2014).

Those who are baptized find themselves saying, with Christ and in Christ, “Our Father,” because each of us is now part of the one human family, the Church. Baptism makes us children, members of the People of God, missionary disciples (see *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120), revealing to us the fatherhood of God. Mission is the form of new life in Christ as a free offering of oneself to God in the specific circumstance of the vocation of each one. Baptism makes the Christian capable of the total gift of herself by enabling her heart and her flesh for the Eucharistic sacrifice. The total gift of God in the body and blood of Jesus brings us into and involves us in his eternal movement of love: it is a true bodily communication, a true participation according to the dynamics of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist manifests to all of creation, thanks to human freedom, the true meaning of mission: the salvation of all by communicating the Life of God so that all may live (see Jn 6 and Jn 10).

“The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history (cf. Eph 1:10; 3:8-11). There the *Deus Trinitas*, who is essentially love (cf. 1 Jn 4:7-8), becomes fully a part of our human condition. In the bread and wine under whose appearances Christ gives himself to us in the paschal meal (cf. Lk 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26), God’s whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us. God is a perfect communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At creation itself, man was called to have some share in God’s breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). But it is in Christ, dead and risen, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, given without measure (cf. Jn 3:34), that we have become sharers of God’s inmost life” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 8).

“The mission for which Jesus came among us was accomplished in the Paschal Mystery. On the Cross from which he draws all people to himself (cf. Jn 12:32), just before ‘giving up the Spirit,’ he utters the words: ‘it is

finished' (Jn 19:30). In the mystery of Christ's obedience unto death, even death on a Cross (cf. Phil 2:8), the new and eternal covenant was brought about. In his crucified flesh, God's freedom and our human freedom met definitively in an inviolable, eternally valid pact. Human sin was also redeemed once for all by God's Son (cf. Heb 7:27; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). . . Christ's death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form" (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 9).

As a bread of life, the Eucharist establishes the sacrificial offering of oneself (see Rom 12:1-2) as a measure of the true charity and witness of the missionary disciple. Christians do not give their lives in addition to that of the Master, but offering themselves in baptism, they give themselves in the single oblation of Jesus. The Eucharist reveals the true meaning of the flesh and blood of our humanity. We received a body of flesh and blood so that by doing the will of the One who created us, we could give ourselves and bear fruit (see Heb 10). Existentially the baptismal and eucharistic gift of oneself takes place in conjugal love or in the vocation to radical virginal consecration. Both in marriage and in consecrated virginity, Christians live their mission in the free offering of themselves through their own body.

With the eucharist Jesus involves us in his own offering of himself to the Father for our sake, showing us the bond of communion he wants to establish with us, and also with his Church that he generates through the sacrifice of the cross as his bride and his body. The possibility of celebrating the Eucharist is rooted entirely in the gift that Christ makes of himself. In this way we experience that God truly "loved us first" (1 Jn 4:19). In every Eucharistic celebration we confess the primacy of the gift of Christ that makes us his Church. The causal influence of the Eucharist at the origin of the Church definitively reveals the precedence, not only in time but also in the depths of our being Christians, of his having loved us "first." He is, for all eternity, he who loves us first; his grace precedes us in the baptism undeservedly given to us and in the Eucharist freely offered to us.

“In the sacrament of the altar, the Lord meets us, men and women created in God’s image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27), and becomes our companion along the way. In this sacrament, the Lord truly becomes food for us, to satisfy our hunger for truth and freedom. Since only the truth can make us free (cf. Jn 8:32), Christ becomes for us the food of truth. . . . Each of us has an innate and irrepressible desire for ultimate and definitive truth. The Lord Jesus, ‘the way, and the truth, and the life’ (Jn 14:6), speaks to our thirsting, pilgrim hearts, our hearts yearning for the source of life, our hearts longing for truth. Jesus Christ is the Truth in person, drawing the world to himself. . . . In the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus shows us in particular *the truth about the love* which is the very essence of God. It is this evangelical truth which challenges each of us and our whole being. For this reason, the Church, which finds in the Eucharist the very center of her life, is constantly concerned to proclaim to all, in season or out of season (cf. 2 Tm 4:2), that God is love. Precisely because Christ has become for us the food of truth, the Church turns to every man and woman, inviting them freely to accept God’s gift” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 2).

October  
2019

# THE BAPTIZED FAITHFUL AND THE ORDAINED MINISTERS IN THE *MISSIO AD GENTES*: THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

## The Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS)

The centenary of the apostolic letter *Maximum Illud* offers a good opportunity to reaffirm, promote, and look again at the meaning that the PMS have today, through the fourth Society, the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU), which is known as their heart and soul. At the time of Benedict XV, the Holy See, through what we today call the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, strengthened its role in the universal mission of the Church, above all the charisms of the religious orders, nations, ideologies, politics, and economics. Rome committed itself decisively in its service of communion and plurality, guaranteeing a global outlook, a true Catholic identity of mission. Moving the central headquarters of the various missionary societies, which had arisen largely in France, to Rome meant their universality would be more explicitly demonstrated. And not only would direction of this missionary activity pass through Rome, but mission would be at the very heart of the Church's administrative concerns. This does not imply that there had been, before this, a lesser missionary dynamism; it means, rather, that the International Secretariats of the PMS would make more possible the empowerment for mission of the various Christian communities scattered in the local Churches and animated by the people of God. This is why the local Church has a prominent place in *Maximum Illud*.

The decade from 1916 to 1926 was a significant period for the Church. On May 3, 1922, the three missionary societies that were the main in-

struments for missionary development and cooperation were designated as Pontifical. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith (established in 1822), the Association of the Holy Childhood (established in 1843) and the Society of Saint Peter the Apostle (established in 1889 for the formation of indigenous priestly vocations) each became an instrument to express the Pope's solicitude towards all the Churches of the world by virtue of his mission as successor of Peter and Universal Shepherd.

### Formation of the missions of the PMS and the PMU

Benedict XV concludes *Maximum Illud* with an exhortation to the bishops to do everything possible to establish in their respective dioceses the Missionary Union of the Clergy, which he himself approved on October 31, 1916. He calls it a marvelous and fruitful reality that is giving new encouragement to the missionary commitment of the people of God, "because through it the action of the clergy come to be wisely ordered, both to interest the faithful in the conversion of many pagans and to give development and increase to all the works already approved from this Apostolic See for the benefit of the Missions" (*Maximum Illud*, 107). It was conceived because, through priests and bishops, the baptized faithful were increasingly aware of their own missionary responsibility towards the world in support of the work of those who dedicate their whole life to the *missio ad gentes*.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, interpreting the sentiments of Pope Francis, informed all the bishops of the world that "the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) together with this Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples are directly involved in the work of preparing and implementing the Extraordinary Missionary Month" (Letter from Cardinal Filoni to the Bishops, December 3, 2017). He also recalled that "the na-

tional and diocesan PMS Directors, present and active in your particular Churches, are asked to work together with you so that this initiative of the Holy Father may indeed bring about renewed passion for the Gospel, greater zeal, and missionary fervor within our Churches.” Together with the three Mission Societies more directly involved in the distribution of subsidies and economic aid, the International Secretariat of the Pontifical Missionary Union has worked to coordinate the preparation, formation, and development of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019.

The missionary spirit that *Maximum Illud* wanted to develop and rein-vigorate, under the impulse of the Missionary Union of the Clergy, found support in the other three Pontifical Mission Societies, which, through different paths, sought to promote among the people of God their commitment to mission. Recovering the baptismal missionary dimension of the whole People of God, the Pontifical Missionary Union, a continuation of the Missionary Union of the Clergy, owes its birth to Blessed Paolo Manna. Having been a missionary in Burma, he was aware that the task of spreading awareness of the mission could no longer belong only to the missionaries who were thousands of kilometers away, busy in their work of evangelization and service to the peoples who lived in mission territories.

The main purpose and reason for the existence of the PMU is to help in the missionary formation of leaders of the Christian communities and, in particular, of those involved in missionary activity – in essence, whoever is called to participate actively as a missionary among the People of God. The missionary formation of bishops and priests is central, because the missionary commitment of the Church needs their commitment and service as a principle of vital and evangelizing unity that stimulates the missionary responsibility of each person and of each institution entrusted to them. “The task of proclaiming the Gospel everywhere on earth pertains to the body of pastors, to all of whom in common Christ gave His command, thereby imposing upon them a common duty” (*Lumen Gentium*, 23). Furthermore, bishops are urged to be an active part of mission: “the bishop,

stimulating, promoting and directing the work for the missions, makes the mission spirit and zeal of the People of God present and as it were visible, so that the whole diocese becomes missionary” (*Ad Gentes*, 38).

Unlike the other Pontifical Mission Societies, the PMU does not have a specific, pre-established agenda, but acts permanently within and in co-operation with the others, as their soul (see Paul VI, *Graves et Increscentes*, September 5, 1966). If missionary awareness is the indicator of the vitality of a Christian community, if pastoral life is to be filled with missionary zeal, if every Christian faithful must look to the vast horizons of evangelization, those responsible for ordinary pastoral care will go about their work by means of constant information and missionary formation so that the immediacy of the internal urgencies of the community itself do not stand in the way of pastoral projects. This is the great challenge of the Pontifical Missionary Union within the PMS, with its objective of contributing with its specific provision and its peculiar characteristics so that the local needs for ongoing formation of the Churches are open to the universal horizon of the Catholic faith and its ecclesial mission.

### Contributions of the PMS

The task of the PMS reflects a desire expressed by Paul VI and John Paul II. The latter wrote, “It is not right to give an incomplete picture of missionary activity, as if it consisted principally in helping the poor, contributing to the liberation of the oppressed, promoting development or defending human rights. The missionary Church is certainly involved on these fronts but her primary task lies elsewhere: the poor are hungry for God, not just for bread and freedom. Missionary activity must first of all bear witness to and proclaim salvation in Christ, and establish local churches which then become means of liberation in every sense.” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 83). Moreover, wrote Paul VI, “Evangelization will also



always contain – as the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy” (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 27). In this way, three fundamental features can be guaranteed:

### 1) *Ecclesial Consciousness*

The PMS testify to the universality of the Church by promoting “a bond of close communion whereby they share spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources” (*Lumen Gentium*, 13). This means that the PMS must tirelessly promote the mutual exchange of gifts that the Lord, through his Spirit, has distributed throughout the particular Churches and in the universal Church; they must arouse a spirit of fraternity among all the Churches which have as their aim the evangelization of the world; and, ultimately, they must act, on the one hand, as a privileged means of union between the particular Churches among themselves, and on the other, between each of them and the Pope, who, in the name of Christ, presides over the universal sharing of charity .

### 2) *Catholic mentality*

In the heart of the Church, the PMS are addressed to all the baptized, to all the Christian communities; they are concerned with the needs of all the missionary Churches, and principally of the poorest; and they are an expression of universal communion, because through them “the individual churches bear the burden of care for them all, and make their necessities known to one another, and exchange mutual communications regarding their affairs” (*Ad Gentes*, 38). For this reason, they are also the

privileged channel for a fraternal sharing and an equitable distribution of goods among all the Churches, united in the common effort to support the evangelization of peoples.

### *3) Personal call: to help global evangelization*

Benedict XV, in *Maximum Illud*, affirmed, regarding the formation that the local Church offers to those who are considering priestly ministry or the consecrated life, that “therefore any rudimentary formation is not enough to be admitted to the priesthood, but rather it must be complete and perfect” (nn. 32-33).

The PMS do not exclude collaboration for the needs of the various Churches in the fields of education, health, charity, etc. But their primary commitment is to make it possible for the Good News of Jesus – his mystery, his person and his message, his Passover – to reach every corner of the Earth, and that new Churches are born and develop that, in and from the heart of every people and race, bear witness to the values of the Gospel.

## **PMS characteristics**

To understand the character of an institution and for that institution to be faithful to the reason for which it exists, it is necessary to know its origins. In the case of the PMS, the following factors are important.

### *1) Established through private initiative*

PMS originated as a lay and private initiative. The PMS are not born as a structure imposed upon ecclesiastics or upon the church’s hierarchy. The

founders of each took personal initiative as an answer to the call of the Holy Spirit and in harmony with ecclesiastical authority. This highlights the vocational character of this initiative. Its insertion in each community always takes into consideration the needs and conditions of the community itself, of the parish, of the diocese, and the formation of the workers who are entrusted with this task, so that they serve the whole community. It is time to recognize the countless initiatives at the service of the mission.

### *2) Accepted and recognized by the ecclesiastical hierarchy*

The role of the ecclesiastical hierarchy cannot be limited to merely guaranteeing and approving these services, but it must assume full responsibility for them. Thus the decree *Ad Gentes* decree insists that “it is only right to give these works pride of place, since they are the means of imbuing Catholics from their very infancy with a real universal and missionary outlook; and they are also the means of making an effective collection of funds to subsidize all missions, each according to its needs” (*Ad Gentes*, 38).

### *3) Necessary coordination*

From private initiative to the responsibility of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, there is a wide range of real possibilities for the service of missionary cooperation. Therefore, to show the ecclesial union found at the base of this great work, a general coordination is recommended, keeping institutional structure from getting in the way of its work and helping to ensure that these initiatives are carried out amicably in the same missionary breath. “Episcopal conferences should take common counsel to deal with weightier questions and urgent problems, without however neglecting

local differences. Lest the already insufficient supply of men and means be further dissipated, or lest projects be multiplied without necessity, it is recommended that they pool their resources to found projects which will serve the good of all as for instance, seminaries; technical schools and schools of higher learning; pastoral, catechetical, and liturgical centers; as well as the means of social communication” (*Ad Gentes*, 31).



## LAITY AND FAMILIES ON MISSION IN THE WORLD

The Second Vatican Council, positively describing the vocation of lay people and their mission, undoubtedly marked a turning point. The lay faithful “are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world” (*Lumen Gentium*, 31).

Over the following decades, the vital role of the laity has progressively been clarified, and the 1987 Synod of Bishops – on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World – marked a new and important turning point. In 1988, summarizing that Synod’s reflections, John Paul II promulgated *Christifideles Laici*, which describes the vocation and mission of the laity with the image of workers that a landowner, after agreeing on their pay, sends to work in his vineyard (see Mt 20:1-2). “The vineyard,” the Pope said, “is the whole world (cf. Mt 13:38), which is to be transformed according to the plan of God in view of the final coming of the Kingdom of God” (*Christifideles Laici*, 1). The world, then, is the place where the laity live and witness to their faith: “This ‘place’ is treated and presented in dynamic terms: the lay faithful live in the world, that is, in every one of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very fabric of their existence is woven” (*Christifideles Laici*, 15). In fact, the laity are normal people who live their lives in the world, study, work, establish friendships, and weave social, professional, cultural relationships.

And it is precisely within these environments in the world that they are called to live their faith and Christian witness. This is their mission. “Thus for the lay faithful, to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well. In fact, in their situation in the world God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (*Christifideles Laici*, 15).

The lay person finds his or her model in Jesus, who participated in human coexistence and sanctified his relationships, from those within the family to those within society. As Jesus lived a profound, human-divine experience in the world, so all of the baptized laity are called to do. To be a lay person, then, is not an inferior or second-level position. The roots of its existence and therefore of its meaning are found in baptism, as is the case for every Christian. Pope Francis explains this with his effective and realistic style: “Our first and fundamental consecration is rooted in our Baptism. No one has been baptized a priest or a bishop. They baptized us as lay people and it is the indelible sign that no one can ever erase. It does us good to remember that the Church is not an elite of priests, of consecrated men, of bishops, but that everyone forms the faithful Holy People of God” (Letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, March 19, 2016).

The beginning of Christian life for all people is baptism, which makes us children of God and places us as Christians in the world. We all enter the Church as baptized laity. The relationship between faith and the world is at the heart of the identity of the Christian, who, as an authentic disciple, is missionary because he carries the world within him, with him, and around him in order to transfigure it in the Passover of Jesus. Baptism immerses a person in the Mystery Easter, placing him in an always more Christian way in the world, calling him to die to the world and to be reborn in God. Bodiliness is the very human way of being in the world, whose paschal form is the Church (see Gal 4:20). Mission is a relationship between God and the

world, between the Church and the world, and between the Christian faith and cultures and religions. At the heart of this relationship is the baptized lay person who, in marriage or virginity, chooses her saving relationship with the world within herself and outside of herself, through and within the Church, the Body and Bride of Christ, which is always in world for the salvation of the world (People of God).

The baptismal identity of the lay Christian should re-establish the Eucharistic centrality of marriage and consecrated virginity. In the Eucharist the deepest sense of our being in the world is revealed: the body offered and the blood shed show the total, gratuitous gift of oneself as the sole meaning of living and of life to the full (see Jn 10:10). Marriage and virginity are existential forms of self-offering for sanctification through one's own body (see Rom 12:1-2), which place each missionary disciple in a specific and unique relationship with the world. Freedom, justice, peace, dialogue, fraternity, and the unity of the human race are not simply values of the Kingdom to be promoted and applied; they are dimensions of a mission that builds the Church-Kingdom as a true transfiguration of the world through the Passover of Jesus on the way to the heavenly Jerusalem, the eschatological fulfillment of the Kingdom. The beatific union will be of a spousal nature. Each Christian lives, is sanctified, and is transfigured within his or her vocation as a mission. The Church is the principle and seed of the Kingdom. Hence the Kingdom, once accomplished in the eschatological Passover, is the Church in fullness, the Bride of the Lamb (see Rev 19:9; 21; 22:17).

Marriage and family, together with work, articulate the transfiguration of the world, that is, the daily way that the great majority of lay people to carry out their mission, witnessing to their faith in charity. There is an intimate relationship between mission and the Christian family. The family is generated by mission: to become a Christian family, it was once evangelized, receiving the proclamation of Christ. It is through mission that the family establishes itself as such, above all in its duty to build a

true communion of love between the spouses, and to generate and educate the children. The apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* affirms, “The Christian family is called upon to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific, by placing itself, in what it is and what it does as an ‘intimate community of life and love,’ at the service of the Church and of society” (n. 50). The Christian family, founded on the sacrament of marriage, is missionary by definition, by virtue of the vocation and the task of transmitting faith and life. The mission of educating sons and daughters, introducing them to the true meaning of reality and of human and ecological relationships in the light of the Christian truth of faith, represents the specific missionary role of the Christian family. Educating in faith highlights the responsibility of evangelizing children and making them disciples and missionaries of Christ in a socio-cultural context that is not always favorable to the human family founded on marriage, a reality of love and unity of man and woman.

The family is a universal reality that is the basic cell of society. The numerous changes and mutations that afflict it in space and time (see *Amoris Laetitia*, 31-57) require us to remember that, whatever the waves of changes that cause a certain erosion and perversion, the family is not merely a socio-anthropological reality, but a theological reality that is inscribed in the saving plan of the triune God who is, himself, the original communion of love (see *Amoris Laetitia*, 10-11). In fact, with the concepts of couple and family, the God of love reveals himself to humanity as Spouse (see *Familiaris Consortio*, 13), as if to signify that the Trinitarian family is the archetype of the human family and that the human family is the icon of the divine communion made up of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In this regard, human and Christian families, called to become domestic Churches, serve as an anthropological foundation for edifices of the Church and society. Even better, the bridal covenant expressed in the image of the spousal union of Christ with humanity (the Church) makes the human family a place of spiritual growth and a pedagogical tool of Christ’s mission to lead



humanity to full communion with God who is Love. The natural family and the bonds of blood, made fruitful by this Trinitarian communion, are a means of deeper understanding of the personal and universal love that God has for every human being, who are his sons and daughters and who are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. This unequivocal link between the Church and the family means that, in Jesus Christ, the family bonds that are founded on faith and nourished through the faith of those who hear the Word of God and put it into practice take precedence over family relationships of blood, without negating the latter (see Lk 8:21).

Professional competence, understood as a free, intelligent, and creative ability to relate to the world and transform it, is the ordinary way in which the lay faithful perform their baptismal mission. By vocation and profession, we mean the competent and engaged dedication of one's own person in faith through the conjugal spousal relationship and through one's work. Being a good father and husband, a good mother and wife is related to professional competence no less than being a good worker, a doctor or a competent professor, a careful and capable farmer. Even those who are physically, morally, or mentally incapable of this active and efficient contribution become fruitful in the Church's mission thanks to the Eucharistic offering of oneself united with the Passover of Jesus, which becomes part of it thanks to the situation of personal suffering, illness, or sorrow.

Mission, as a paschal transformation of the world, requires rediscovering the sacramental identity proper to the ministry of the bishop and priest in the lay baptismal context of the people of God. There is no distinction of superiority or inferiority between clergy and laity, but there is an ontological difference, not only in degree, so that the Eucharist and sacramental reconciliation are the unique prerogative of the ministerial priesthood (see *Lumen Gentium*, 10). This difference, however, is at the service of the uninterrupted apostolic unity of the Church (Tradition) that contributes to the transmission of the Truth that saves. The only true baptismal distinction with respect to the salvation of the Christian is that which is established

between marriage and virginity, that is, between the only two ways of making the world-body relationship a place of fruitful revelation of God, of his salvation for us and for the world, of the offering of ourselves to God.

Today Pope Francis pushes the Church towards the peripheries, in the direction of a constant commitment to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate, in order to create a culture of encounter, acceptance, and communion that offers a credible response to the throwaway culture, the culture of death, of discriminated and rejected migrants, of human trafficking. His proposal is clear: “A Church that goes forth – a laity that goes forth.’ Therefore, you also must look up and look ‘beyond,’ look at the many people who are ‘distant’ in our world, to the many families who are in difficulty and in need of mercy, to the many fields of apostolate that are still unexplored” (Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, June 17, 2016). The laity are therefore called to be in the forefront precisely in environments that are difficult to reach, with a commitment of dedication that can in no way be less than that of consecrated men and women. Not only the Church, but the human family today needs lay faithful with solid human and Christian formation, but above all young men and women who have had a decisive, personal encounter with Christ. In fact, only the transfiguring sign left by this personal encounter makes a man or a woman capable of ‘getting their hands dirty’ and ‘risk taking,’ continues Pope Francis, finding the courage to go forward in one’s mission: proclaiming Christ with our lives and with our words.

In today’s world, the privileged theater of this proclamation and witness are cities and, in particular, the great metropolises. Within these immense urban centers, alongside despair and contradictions, there is a great thirst for God. It is here that the baptized lay people, by faith and professional competence, are called to witness to their encounter with Christ and to proclaim his Good News.

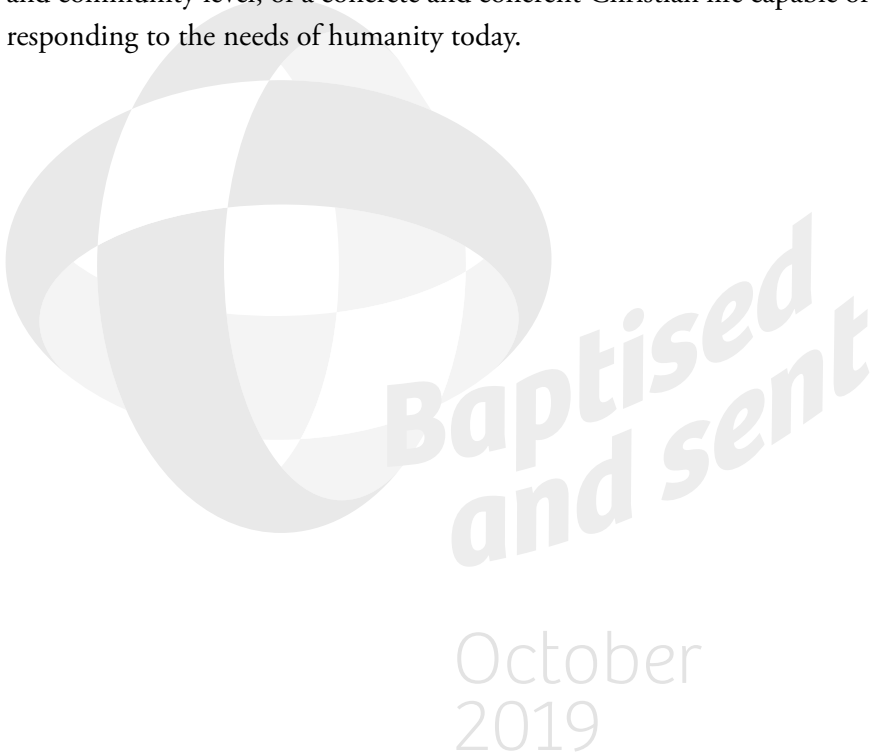
In these complex contexts, where life is often rushing by, two things are particularly necessary to make the mission of lay Christians authentic and

fruitful. In the first place, formation remains central, so that mission can be effective and in harmony with the Church. It is essential to have a Christian formation that allows the lay faithful, who are engaged in different sectors, to be able to grasp the challenges offered by the present world in the light of the faith of the Church.

Second is the need for mission to take place as a fruit and a sign of communion. This was highlighted by John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, the apostolic letter with which he inaugurated the third millennium. In it, *communion* is defined as an “important area in which there has to be commitment and planning on the part of the universal Church and the particular Churches . . . which embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 42). It is precisely by living in the spirit of communion and love, John Paul II continues, that “the Church appears as ‘sacrament,’ as the sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race.” The Polish Holy Father understood the crucial role of communion within the Church and, in particular, its relevance in ensuring credibility and efficacy to proclamation, whether it be realized by consecrated persons or by lay people or, even better, by a community where both live the word of God in communion, according to their respective vocations, around the Eucharist, source of unity. For this it is necessary to make of all the communities (parishes, dioceses, associations, groups, base communities, and ecclesial movements) “homes and schools of communion.” This is the great challenge at the beginning of the millennium. Therefore, “before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43).

Precisely in reference to these two aspects – formation and communion – an important contribution today is that given by the ecclesial movements and new communities and organizations that were established in the Church during the years just before the Council and gradually up

through to our own day. Despite their great charismatic variety, these ecclesial movements demonstrate a strong sense of the missionary baptismal commitment of the laity, offering an adequate Christian formation in the face of the challenges of contemporary society and, in some cases more than in others, a marked spirituality of communion as a guiding force. These communities have increasingly emerged as places of witness, on a personal and community level, of a concrete and coherent Christian life capable of responding to the needs of humanity today.



## MISSION AND CONSECRATED VIRGINITY

Jesus Christ is the first missionary, totally consecrated to the mission entrusted to him by his Father (see Lk 4:16-22). His whole existence is marked by love for the Father and for his brothers and sisters. Whoever chooses to follow him must be a missionary disciple, participate in Christ's own life as the Son of God, assuming his own attitudes, witnessing to the same love of the Father for the life of humanity. The Passover of the death and resurrection of Jesus, in which we participate through baptism and the Eucharist, makes the proclamation of his Word the source of salvation and hope for all. Dying and rising with Christ (see Rom 6, Jn 6) becomes the heart of the Christian experience to the extent that it calls some people to offer the total gift of self in body and spirit even now. Those who are called to a life of special consecration experience the radical nature of this baptismal belonging by making a total gift of themselves to God for the cause of his mission in the world, which is the Church (see 1 Cor 7). A community's original charism, given by the Spirit, determines, from its foundation, the different personal and communitarian forms of virginal consecration for the service of the mission in the Church.

The proclamation of the Good News must be the only passion of the missionary, so that people who do not know Christ can come to know him. The mission entrusted to her, therefore, is to help others encounter and know Christ and to live a personal relationship of communion with him. The primacy of evangelization as a form of the missionary vocation is not something extrinsic and accessory to the life of the disciple who is called to virginal consecration. Rather it is an intensely felt choice that touches the

soul. Thus we become subjects of this choice, which involves our faith, our heart, our conscience, our freedom, our body, and our relationships. Taking up one's cross to follow and witness to the Master is a demanding process of conversion and, for some chosen ones, a motive for total consecration to him and to his Kingdom (see Mark 8:34).

One of the fundamental aspects for a consecrated virgin is the missionary dimension *ad vitam*, which must be understood in a quantitative and qualitative sense: quantitative because one dedicates his or her whole life to it, and qualitative because mission constitutes the profound reason of life itself. For the mission of Jesus in his Church, some are called to leave everything, to follow him in order to proclaim the kingdom of God, helping to build his Church. In a world where people are afraid of making definitive choices, where everything changes rapidly and nothing seems to last over time, where one lives in a culture of the instant and the provisional, an *ad vitam* choice is certainly neither easy nor obvious. But precisely for this reason, consecrated virgins ought to be the paradigm of this mission *ad vitam*, of this baptismal radicality of belonging to Christ in his Church for the sake of one's brothers and sisters.

Baptismal consecration, in its virginal radicality, immerses us in the mystery of Christ, making us "come out of ourselves and our things" in order to fully know cultures, languages, customs, communities, peoples, and hearts that await divine salvation through an authenticity and fullness of life, through a dignified and happy human existence. In order to be able to penetrate the heart of humanity, in the depths of a culture, it is necessary that those who are intimately pervaded by the Spirit of the Risen Lord give their whole lives, and to stay with Jesus and with the sisters and brothers to whom they are sent for life.

Today, a new reality that accompanies insertion into contexts far from one's own country, culture, family, and friends is, paradoxically, the abundance and accessibility of the means of communication that are available almost everywhere. While they represent a precious way of communicating

and also of evangelizing, they are at the same time a “dangerous” bond that can keep us anchored to our habits, interests, and relationships. Creating a healthy detachment in order to be truly free in evangelizing becomes more and more necessary for acquiring authenticity in mission. In a world no longer used to familiarity with God and the Church, technologically structured with ever more rapid forms of connection, leaving everything to follow Jesus requires courage, clarity, and determination to embrace silence, prayer, and loneliness, living new forms of community and apostolic life. No consecrated person leaves the world to escape from the world or to oppose the world. Being enraptured and embraced by the Lord, encountered as overflowing love and meaning of the world, pushes and moves some chosen disciples to new Christian forms of life and courageous virginal consecration for the mission.

One aspect of proclamation is to know and love the other: the Other who is God, and the other who is one’s brother or sister in Christ. One does not proclaim to abstract figures, but to real people, wrapped in a particular culture and view of the world, of things, of relationships, and of the relationship with the transcendent, which has always determined the course of life beyond death. For this reason, it is necessary to look in every setting for the most appropriate and specific terms of encounter – not just words, but also gestures and attitudes that can translate with the greatest fidelity what is essential about Jesus’ mission and about the kingdom of his Father. In the proclamation there must be mutual enrichment in the logic of Christian communion and of human fraternity. It is the experience of the disciples of Emmaus (see Lk 24:13-35). Jesus approaches, listens, understands, acknowledges what is positive, and then dispels ignorance and disbelief. The breaking of the bread of the Eucharist brings to fullness the thirst for life and salvation that since the creation of the world dwells in the heart and in the desire of every man and woman.

Language is important for communicating with today’s humanity. It must be simple and concrete, so that it reaches the person in what is

essential, touches the heart, engages the intelligence, challenges the conscience, and moves the will towards the good, the truth, Christ. Language is dynamic, because life, history, and relationships are always on the move. The missionary must commit himself to find new languages and means for the communication of the Gospel, ever more suitable to proclaim Christ today. It is not a matter of imposing moral rules or religious practices to be observed in order to obtain salvation, but to invite people to give themselves to Christ for their own and for others' salvation. Moral burdens placed on the shoulders of people do not advance the Church and its mission; the men and women of our times struggle, rightly, to accept this type of religious experience. Instead, it is the joy of believing that gives life and manifests the personal encounter with the Savior of one's life, God and Lord (see Jn 1:35-51; 20:11-29). For this reason, the missionary is called above all to propose a possible journey of life and of faith, starting from his own personal experience of meeting and experiencing Jesus alive in his Church (see *Deus Caritas Est*, 1). The effective form of mission requires authenticity in the witness of the fullness of life where love opens to eternity.

The mission *ad gentes* is therefore the set of dynamisms that are proper to the missionary disciple: to leave his or her own land, to encounter the other, to nurture the seeds of faith in others, to communicate and witness to the faith of the Church in the Crucified and Risen Jesus, to disclose its essence and share its eternal fullness. All this is expressed as proximity to the poor, to the least ones, to human situations of deprivation – material or spiritual – that, being universal, require a struggle against personal sin and the evil of unjust and oppressive social structures. For the encounter with Jesus to be efficacious and fruitful, what is required only of some, by free divine choice, by free human response, is the total gift of self: a missionary journey that lasts a lifetime, beyond the geographical and visible boundaries of one's own culture, land, and people, beyond the exclusivity typical of the bonds and conjugal love of marriage.

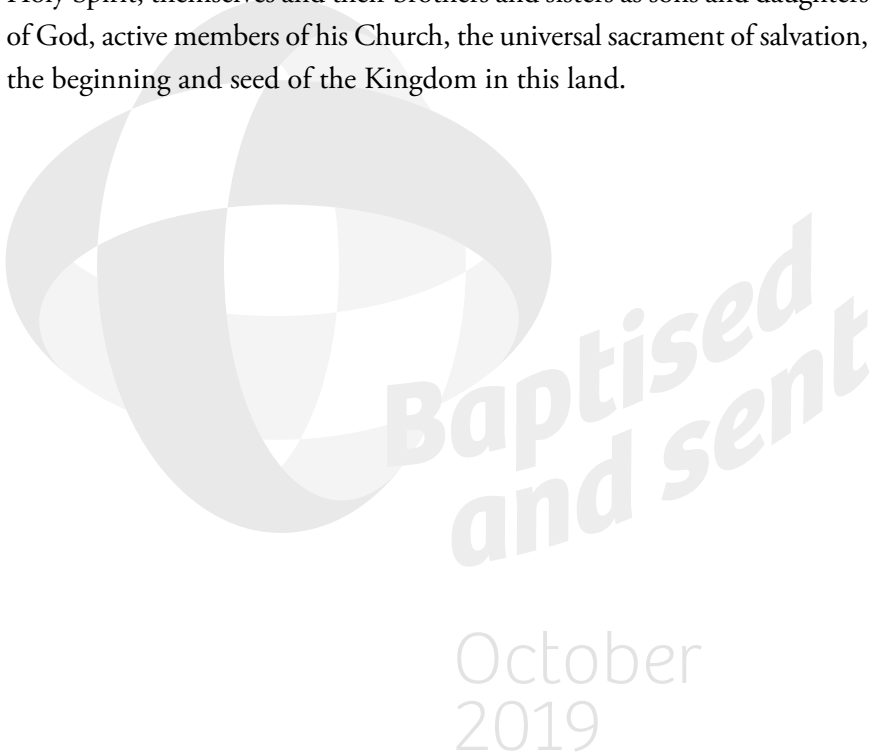


Very often missionaries are sent to serve of existing local Churches. Sometimes these are very young Churches that need accompaniment, missionaries with great capacity to listen, learn, and teach wisely. They are communities that have primary needs yet to be met and need concrete help; but they are also communities that wish to walk and grow in faith and in mission. Missionaries, often foreigners, can help by encouraging them and helping them to discover their resources, to look with faith to their own limits and weaknesses. Overcoming the temptation of self-referentiality and pastoral introversion in the name of a mistaken understanding of inculturation, the mission *ad gentes* can help all, local and foreign Christians, to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus (see Heb 12:2), to turn away from oneself and from sin to encounter him where he calls us and awaits us. This can be the way of accompanying a community on its journey towards the discovery and development of its missionary nature. It is sometimes difficult for missionaries to move from the role of protagonists to that of collaborators, from the attitude of leading to that of walking side by side, listening, and accompanying, just as it is not easy for local Christians to overcome forms of ethnic introversion. Reducing the Gospel of Jesus to one's own culture means being closed to the universality of faith and of God's love.

The "ideal" community that one always wishes to encounter does not exist. We encounter individuals, live interpersonal relationships that are sometimes difficult to manage, confront different characters, different cultures, struggles, and joys that challenge us and push us to live our vocation as religious with more responsibility, learning to talk together, to reflect on ourselves, to discern, and also to change in order to grow and better convert ourselves to Christ. Prayer is the privileged place to offer oneself, to encounter Christ and to ask for the spiritual gift of discernment. In the daily dialogue with the Lord and with his Word, and in the grace of his sacraments, we find the strength and the light for mission. Educated in an orderly and structured life of prayer, in mission life we face times, needs, and urgencies that hinder order, regularity, and continuity. And then we

must learn again and in different ways to put prayer always in the first place, to give it the apostolic form of mission without replacing Christ with our self-centered work and creativity.

The divine Word proclaimed by the Church has in itself all its saving power. Not having a product to sell, but the life of God to witness and communicate, missionaries are called to generate, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, themselves and their brothers and sisters as sons and daughters of God, active members of his Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, the beginning and seed of the Kingdom in this land.



## MISSION: THE CHURCH AND THE ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS

Movements in the Church are called to reflect the Mystery of that love from which the Church was born and is continually generated, since in the bosom of the Church, the People of God, they express that manifold movement that is humanity's response to the Revelation and Gospel of Jesus. The Church itself, born of the eternal love of the Father, through the missions of the Son and the Spirit, is inscribed as a movement in the history of humanity and of human communities. To the freedom of contemporary humanity, the Church proposes the Jesus event: his mission is rooted in the awareness that "being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1). The movement of the love of God the Trinity towards us sets his creation in movement for salvation. Every one of the movements of and in the Church reflect and manifest this Trinitarian logic through charismatic spiritual gifts.

From the link between the Church and mission, St. John Paul II shed the first meaningful light on the nature of the movements. They are understandable only within the mission of the Church; indeed, they were born through the mission of the Church. In fact, their emergence can be largely connected with the Second Vatican Council, which energetically reaffirmed the missionary nature of the Church. The dynamism of the Church's growth – and, by analogy, the growth of the ecclesial movements – must be its identity as the bearer of a message of salvation and of an encounter to the ends of the world, avoiding any self-referentiality and exclusivity.

Charism – a gift of the Holy Spirit and the origin of any ecclesial movement – is recognized and affirmed as a path that leads to Jesus, as a historical and concrete actualization of that pedagogy with which God continually and in many ways revives and leads the body of Christ that is the Church. The Spirit, who instructs and directs the Church, rejuvenates and renews it with hierarchical and charismatic gifts rooted in the experience of the Passover of Jesus, leading it to perfect union with his Spouse (see *Lumen Gentium*, 4). Thus, fidelity to the founding charism, continually confirmed, will increase the missionary power of the movements, making them readier to serve the Church for the salvation of the world.

These two elements, the Church's mission and the charism of foundation, represent the constant invitation to live from the universality of the Church, at whose service the ecclesial movements are placed. This is the challenge of catholicity. In it, in fact, the movements are destined to grow or decrease according to the measure of God's will for the mission in the world. "Catholicity," in this context, means the ability to live the charism without separating it from the whole, keeping it in relation with all the implications of the Mystery of Christ that the Church offers. However, "catholicity" also indicates the energy with which to witness, through the change of one's own life, the centrality of Christ for every person. The world, in fact, as Pope Francis recently emphasized, "vitally needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the Church, Christ continues his mission as the *Good Samaritan*, caring for the bleeding wounds of humanity, and as *Good Shepherd*, constantly seeking out those who wander along winding paths that lead nowhere. essentially needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the Church, he continues his mission as a Good Samaritan, taking care of the bleeding wounds of humanity, and of the Good Shepherd, constantly looking for those who have lost themselves on twisted paths and without a goal" (Message for World Mission Sunday 2017, June 4, 2017). This is why the Church, God's people journeying through history, always encountering new realities and different human

conditions, wishes to proclaim the Good News in a concrete, understandable, and convincing ways. To evangelize in a missionary way today does not mean only to heading out for distant continents, but to penetrate the settings of everyday life, which, with the transformations of society, take on characteristics and propose challenges that are ever new. It is in these places that we want to show that encountering Jesus makes person's life new and allows her to reach her fulfillment. The great novelty of the Council is to underline that this task belongs to all the baptized faithful and is made possible by the charismatic variety of ecclesial movements. In this sense, the only true protagonist of the mission is Christ, who wants to meet each person in the context of his or her own life and teach her in the faith of the Christian community. The ecclesial movements correspond to the superabundant creative richness of God in meeting each one in the context of various human situations, cultures, languages, and sensibilities.

The way that ecclesial movements have been called to live this mission takes the form of an invitation to build a civilization of truth and love. This requires a method of education of mature personalities, missionary disciples capable of penetrating with faith every possible condition of humanity. Scripture, faith, sacraments, communion, and obedience (see *Lumen Gentium*, 14) are fundamental elements for evaluating the ecclesial authenticity of movements and their missionary efficacy. In particular, once the foundation phase has concluded and the recognition by the ecclesiastical authority is completed, the movements can reach a maturity in which the Church's mission becomes essential so that the charisms continue to be living and fruitful. Missionary commitment, in the encounter with the other, is nourished through education and growth within the movements themselves, opportunities to deepen the received charismatic gift.

Although the hierarchy does not hold a monopoly on charisms, it possesses the charism of discernment and of ordering all the charisms for the common good of the Church. Filial deference to the Pope and the

bishops by the movements must not diminish their charismatic service of opening and widening the ecclesial horizons towards all those experiences and human conditions that, in different ways, have need of the mission of the Church.

With regard to the pastoral problem of integrating the activities of movements into the ordinary activity of the Church, we can not expect to solve it through ecclesiastical strategies or simple canonical and pastoral planning. Rather, it is necessary to look to the Spirit, to see what the Spirit brings about in the life of the Church, to see where the best missionary relationship between the Church and the world is manifested concretely and begins to bear fruit. The answer to this tension is not, then, a human plan, but an initiative of the Spirit within the dynamism of the Church's mission. Personal vocation, the family based on marriage, culture, work and economy, the integral care of human life, social justice, peace, and respect for the environment – all of these are places of true pastoral engagement and discernment in which one can find both missionary conversion and useless tensions and oppositions. It is in the mission and in the effort to serve it that all ecclesial, sacramental, and charismatic organizations, local Churches, parishes, and movements, are invited to express their genuine willingness to serve the universal call to holiness, common to all men and women eager for salvation.

Saint John Paul II called the young movements to create more authentic forms of relationship with the ordinary life of the Church. The often problematic relationship between diocesan Churches and parishes, on the one hand, and ecclesial movements and free lay associations, on the other, is part of the wider context of the relationship between particular Churches and the universal Church. The particular Church stands as a way in which the universal Church can encounter people directly, reaching them in the context of their own lives. In fact, the parish, as an institution that lives in the midst of the places of everyday life, is originally configured as the expression of this local Church. In this way the nearness of

God to humanity is manifested concretely, within the social contexts in which people live. The one and whole Church of Christ is localized. Seen in these terms, the universal Church and the particular Church are not two different entities, but two dimensions of the one Church of Christ.

In the same way, ecclesial movements relate to the Church as such, in its universal and particular dimensions. Now the changed and ever-changing situations of life impose a rethinking of Christian presence and witness. In the context of people living their lives in their homes and neighborhoods, the parish still maintains the precious value of community in which faith is transmitted, lived, and sustained through the centrality of the Eucharistic celebration. On the other hand, however, greater personal dynamism and greater creativity in evangelization are required; it is the person who lives in the various and fragmented settings to whom faith must be witnessed. For the parish, then, the task of transmitting the faith and accompanying people requires a growing and challenging openness and communion with all the ecclesial realities that make it possible in the places of study, work, and public and social duties. Parishes and movements, in the communion of particular Churches within the universal Church, are called to collaborate, according to their own roles, in the one mission of the Church. On one hand, movements can reach men and women in the settings of their lives according to each person's spiritual sensibilities. On the other hand, the parish offers the presence of God in the midst of our homes and safeguards the universality of the proclamation of salvation that is addressed to all without discrimination, based simply on the area in which we live. The frenetic movement of contemporary life, the digital speed of connections, together with the massive migrations and movements of peoples, requires the Church to be present everywhere, always flexible and on journey.

The apostolic flexibility and the new forms of community life generated by the charisms of ecclesial movements seem to correspond to these new traits of postmodern and digital cultures at the center of which there is a

strong concern for the emotions and feelings of human subjects. The freedom of the Spirit in the creativity of ecclesial movements, lay associations, and new communities of Christian life responds to the new challenges of Christian proclamation and witness.





## CHURCH MISSION, RELIGIONS, AND CULTURES IN DIALOGUE

In his encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (n. 55), St. John Paul II wrote, “Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions. This mission, in fact, is addressed to those who do not know Christ and his Gospel, and who belong for the most part to other religions. In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love. He does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain ‘gaps, insufficiencies and errors.’ All of this has been given ample emphasis by the Council and the subsequent Magisterium, without detracting in any way from the fact that *salvation comes from Christ and that dialogue does not dispense from evangelization.*”

The Pope continued, “In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.”

Mission and dialogue each include respect for the other, founded on the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, recognizing and promoting

religious freedom and commitment to the missionary imperative. Both affirm the need never to impose anything on anyone, but also the necessity of proposing Christ, faith in Christ, and Christian belonging to his Church. There are at least two distinct entities in dialogue and mission, as well as a series of positive and fruitful tensions. There are not only dualities or dialectics, but also dimensions that act in different directions and which are motivated by different cultural and religious elements. For simplicity, practicality, and clarity, it is often useful to consider these elements in pairs, but they are more than dialectical forces between two poles; all the various dimensions contribute to define the overall result, each with its weight and its direction. The existence of multiple dimensions confirms the complexity of the one reality of mission (see *Redemptoris Missio*, 41).

Mission and dialogue take place at the meeting point of the community of faith with all that constitutes the context in which the Christian community lives and works. The whole Christian mission is realized in the relationship between the Church and the world, and people in the world. Both the deposit of faith received from the Church (Holy Scriptures, sacraments, and charity) and the cultures, languages, and situations in which and to which that Tradition is communicated are involved. All faith and theology are contextual; the socio-cultural horizon is an essential factor for mission. Mission takes place entirely within specific settings, and all missionary theologies must stand in an open and critical relationship with local cultures and religions. It is only through dialogue that Christians can understand others and their cultural and religious expressions that God calls us to love and to evangelize. By committing ourselves to dialogue with these realities, we can understand in our time and in the different scenarios of our world the constants of God's love for the salvation of all.

In the Western vision of the world, culture and religion are usually considered as separate entities. It is possible to speak of a European cultural identity without any reference to religious identification, such as Christian or Muslim. This relatively clear division between religion and culture

in personal or social identification, however, is often not found in other socio-cultural realities of the world. In many nations, religious affiliation is constitutive of one's own ethnic identity. It is precisely because of this richness in the different visions of the world that the dialogue conducted by the Church should not be undertaken only at inter-religious level, but also at the level of intercultural awareness.

Engaging in the mission of the Church necessarily involves engaging in forms of dialogue. Mission as proclamation of the Gospel involves communication, spiritual discernment, and conversion. This means having the patience and wisdom to learn the language and to understand the symbols and cultural dynamics that give meaning and identity to the person with whom you want to share faith in Jesus Christ. Action and commitment for justice and peace, for the poor and the marginalized, and for the integrity of creation necessarily require understanding the existential context of people, the cultural, social, and religious forms in which they live and by which they are molded or oppressed. The proclamation of the Gospel in dialogue can require forms of witness and liberation that bring Christians and adherents to other religions together.

A very important and influential text that collects these themes is a joint document produced in 1991 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, called *Dialogue and Proclamation*. It affirms both the significant elements of dialogue, especially inter-religious dialogue, and those of the Church's evangelizing mission, and at the same time studies the mutual relationship that binds them. This document highlights four forms of dialogue (see *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 42) that can be considered complementary to and interactive with one another:

- a) the dialogue of life, where people strive to live in a spirit of openness and good neighborliness, sharing the joys and sorrows, problems and challenges of human life for better mutual understanding and respect;

- b) the dialogue of action, in which Christians and other believers collaborate for integral development, religious freedom, and the liberation of neighbor;
- c) the dialogue of theological exchange, where experts try to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, Sacred Scriptures, and traditions to appreciate one another's spiritual values;
- d) the dialogue of religious experience and prayer, in which people rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches of prayer, contemplation, faith, and the mystical paths in the search for God or the Absolute.

Pope Francis emphasizes that the primary dimension of dialogue, essential for Christian mission, is dialogue with God (see *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 29, 169). Our fundamental and life-giving encounter with the Absolute transforms us. For us Christians it consists in the encounter with the Lord Jesus, dead and risen, the God of love and holiness. It is through this encounter that our interior involvement with God in Christ, lived as spirituality, reveals itself as a true call to holiness through mission and dialogue. "We do not impose anything, we do not employ any subtle strategies for attracting believers; rather, we bear witness to what we believe and who we are with joy and simplicity" (Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, November 28, 2013).

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue is not reserved for specialists, but represents the commitment of the whole Church. "Guided by the Pope and their bishops, all local Churches, and all the members of these Churches, are called to dialogue" (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, 43). The various members of the Church exercise different forms of dialogue – of life, of action, of theological exchange, of religious experience – according to their experience, responsibility in the Church, and their state of life. The purpose of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the Church's mission is not necessarily conversion to Christianity, but the conversion

of people to a better mutual understanding, to honest knowledge and mutual respect, to the service of peace, harmony, justice, reconciliation, and religious freedom. Nonetheless, members of other religions can freely decide to convert and embrace the Christian faith by entering the Church, when they are moved by the Holy Spirit and their conscience calls them to do so. Mutual trust and openness, based on religious freedom, are the basis for a commitment to authentic and fruitful dialogue.

“Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is ‘the way, and the truth and the life.’ The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people. Indeed Christ himself while expressly insisting on the need for faith and baptism, at the same time confirmed the need for the Church, into which people enter through Baptism as through a door. Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 55).

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## MISSIONARY CHARITY AND COMMUNION BETWEEN THE CHURCHES

An exchange of opinions on the methods and possibilities of systematic fundraising for the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) draws our attention to one of the main challenges that is faced in the daily work of raising money for the mission of the Church. The question of the theological fundamentals of this dimension of fundraising work puts us in a sort of dilemma, because mission and money do not seem to easily get along with each other.

On one hand, we are aware of Jesus' instructions to his disciples concerning the proclamation of the Good News in the cities and villages of Galilee: "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick" (Mt 10:8-10). Service and gratuitousness characterize the credibility of those who spread the Good News of the kingdom of God in a world where, as a rule, completely different attitudes prevail. In fact, the accusation that missionaries have done their work for personal gain or by using material incentives has repeatedly damaged their reputation and, consequently, discredited their cause. In light of this, the joint ecumenical document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* (2011) unequivocally states that situations of poverty and necessity must not be exploited to encourage people to convert through enticements, including financial incentives and fees (Principles, 4).

On the other hand, missionary work, as a systematic enterprise designed to spread the Christian faith, needed a goal and a plan from the beginning,

in order to be successfully implemented. It required planning, organization, structures, and strategies. But above all, it needed resources – people trained and equipped to do the work and, ultimately, the financial means to translate the projects into reality. The venture began with the planning of missionary journeys undertaken by the Apostle Paul and his companions. The desire to provide missionaries with ample support for their efforts was the main stimulus for the foundation of the Pontifical Mission Societies (1822/1922). Even today, to carry out its task of evangelization, the Church continues to need adequate spiritual and material resources, which not all local Churches have at their disposal.

It is clear that evangelization is impossible without financial resources. This raises the question of how money can be collected without harming the credibility of the Church, or the theological and ethical foundation of fundraising efforts within the Church, in the missionary context.

### **Biblical references**

What is immediately apparent is the marked skepticism of Jesus towards material goods and the destructive power they can have on us. His words resound in our ears and in our hearts: “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24); “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Lk 18:25); “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth. . . . But store up treasures in heaven” (Mt 6:19-20).

On the contrary, considerable importance is given in the Old Testament to material support for the poor and the disadvantaged. This is true, in particular, with the general prohibition of usury, for the forgiveness of debts in a jubilee year, and for the giving of alms. Social works of this type were not intended primarily to serve the interests of donors in order to increase their social prestige. They were oriented, above all, to the well-being of the



needy, and before God they had a meaning in themselves. In their sharp criticism of society, the prophets emphasize the significance of these works for the marginalized and establish a link between them and the history of the faith of the people of Israel. Jesus picks these ideas back up and amplifies them. Thus, it is God himself who rewards the good deeds and the attitude that inspires them (see Mt 6:1-4). In fact, it is God who ultimately rewards good deeds, because he identifies himself so much with the destiny of the poor and the humblest that they represent him to a certain extent (see Mt 25:31-46).

Of particular importance on this topic is the collection that the apostle Paul solicited from the Christian communities he founded to support the first Church in Jerusalem. The reason he did so was that this Church was in need. It evidently was facing material poverty that could not be alleviated with the resources available in the Church of Jerusalem. The collection was therefore intended to express the bond of spiritual and Eucharistic communion between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, a bond whose value was manifested in the hour of need in the form of concrete support. This help was not an act of charity but rather a spiritual duty towards those from whom the gift of faith was received: a true act of spiritual communion for the love of Christ and evangelization.

The theological foundation of this collection thus helps us understand the Apostle's understanding of the Church. For Paul, the Churches are not isolated from one another but linked by a spiritual, Eucharistic belonging. Like the parts of a body, the Churches are interconnected and interdependent, living in communion (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). For Paul, the spiritual experience that underlies and supports the unity of this ecclesial body is Jesus Christ, in his Revelation, in the preaching of the Gospel, and in the Eucharist. Through his Spirit, the individual parts are integrated into the body by baptism. In a sense, all the distinctions and differences between individual human beings are dispelled in Christ for the sake of true fruitful communion. There are no more Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people,

men and women, because they are all “one” in Christ (see Gal 3:28). Paul’s new way of looking at things is reflected, in particular, in the meaning he attributes to the weaker and humble members, for “if one member suffers, all the members suffer together” (1 Cor 12:26).

### The Pontifical Mission Societies

This image of a body and its many parts explains not only the interdependence of the strong and weak members of a Church, but also constitutes the foundation for the relationships of communion among the local Churches within the universal Church. Here too, the strong are bound to support the weak. This form of sharing presents a fundamental difference compared to offering simple contributions. While the flow of donations is the result of a marked social divide between the donor and the recipient, this distinction is abolished in Christ by the common belonging of all parts to the spiritual body of the universal Church. Within the spiritual community of the universal Church one cannot speak of donors and recipients. On the contrary, each member has something indispensable to offer, to contribute to the spirit-inspired community of the faithful. This exchange of gifts allows participants in the one body to become brothers and sisters who meet on equal ground.

Even if from the outside it may seem that it is a mere material help, practical communion within the universal Church has, above all, a spiritual, theological meaning. It is the realization of this link that underlies the crucial importance of the inspiring motivation of Pauline Jaricot: the connection between daily prayer for the work of propagating the faith and practical support for the Church’s missionary efforts through a regular donation (“every day an Our Father and a coin for the mission”). Mission then becomes a common effort on the part of all believers, to which every single person can contribute. Thus Pauline Jaricot anticipated in a very practical

way to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the Church is, as a whole and by its very nature, missionary and that each baptized person therefore must participate in the missionary task of the Church to preach the Gospel, to witness to the risen Lord, share the sacraments, and live in divine love.

Spiritual motivation is the primary motivation for donations and is enhanced by active efforts. This dialectical connection is probably the reason for the resounding success of Pauline Jaricot's idea. She thus intuitively anticipated one of the essential elements of a successful fundraising effort. Today fundraising is understood as a systematic activity carried out by a charitable organization in order to obtain the resources necessary to carry out its purpose at the lowest possible cost. This is done by ensuring that there is constant attention to the needs of donors. The fundraising is therefore oriented towards the motivation of donors. Donors should be able to identify with the objective they are supporting through their material gift. At the same time, the act of fraternal union expressed by their giving should be able to add spiritual value and motivation to their own experience of ecclesial life and faith. The success of fundraising, therefore, has to do first of all with the motivation and the missionary inspiration of faith.

The proclamation of the Gospel, prayer, and the invitation to share material involve, both for those who collect funds and for those who donate, a demanding call to conversion. Fundraising is always an invitation to conversion; everyone is called to a new, more spiritual relationship with their desires, their needs, their intentions, and their resources. In this particular vision, those who raise funds are not the only ones who profit, because even the donors participate in a new, edifying communion in the name of the Gospel, a network of sharing and fraternity. Raising funds as ministry is a subject we rarely consider from a spiritual point of view.

For the Gospel, on the other hand, the raising of funds is not only a response to a need, but above all a form of service to promote unity and communion in the Church. In a sense, it is a further opportunity to pro-

claim our faith and extend an invitation to other people to share the mission of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ and his Church. Therefore, raising money is the opposite of asking for alms. We know that we have been given a clear task: all of humanity is called to be saved and to become one body in Jesus Christ. We invite donors to freely invest the resources that God has given them – energy, prayers, and money – for this goal to which our common faith has called us.

### **Collection of funds for the PMS**

The observations made so far have practical consequences for the fundraising work of the Pontifical Mission Societies. The crucial starting point is the motivation of donors, and the way to motivate and support them. The success of fundraising is based on the presentation of a convincing and compelling mission, whose purpose is to make donors aware of the opportunity of every single Christian to play an active role in the Church's mission of evangelization.

Motivational work must be accompanied by practical opportunities to give tangible expression to this personal orientation. This is the biggest challenge for the fundraising work of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Communication at the beginning of the nineteenth century was largely limited to letters and periodicals, while nowadays there are many ways and means of keeping in touch with the reality of mission work in the field. People must be able to experience the fact that their gift makes them part of a wider network of people and activities that has a meaning that goes beyond any financial commitment. For this reason, the collection of funds for mission must constantly emphasize that the money is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a tool to promote activity that ultimately no amount of money in the world could buy: the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus, the building up of his Church around the propagation of the Christian faith,

the celebration of the sacraments, and the realization of many works of Christian charity.

Increasing importance is attributed to the presentation of concrete and clear goals that donors can support and follow closely. Regardless of how important it may be to meet donors' expectations, we should never lose sight of the real meaning and purpose of fundraising. Ultimately, it is about participating in the life of the Church throughout the world. The Societies, precisely because they are Pontifical, guarantee the universal character of the way the funds will be used, working to distribute them fairly, so that no local Church is lacking the means to evangelize. The PMS, in direct service of the Pope, serve him in his solicitude as Pastor of the universal Church even in this material and economic dimension of the mission. It is a matter of helping to make it possible for all the Churches to live their baptismal responsibility for mission.

Emphasizing that all the funds collected during the month of October 2019 will be offered to the Pope toward the costs of evangelization, we reaffirm that the contribution of the experience of our National and Diocesan Directors is extremely valuable. Rethinking the ecclesiological nature and the role of the PMS, in view of a renewed focus on the work they do during the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019, means also keeping this in mind. The material support of the mission to proclaim the Gospel has always represented the extension of the faith and prayers of a large number of Christians for the *missio ad gentes*. The construction of churches and chapels for worship and places for catechesis and Christian formation, together with other activities such as the translation into local languages of the Holy Scriptures, liturgical texts, and documents of the Pope's magisterial teaching, need concrete gestures of Christian charity for the missions. The formation of catechists, pastoral agents, and lay Catholics engaged in secular fields, as well as the formation of seminarians and novices, has always been part of the missionary work of the PMS. Therefore, the task of rethinking the economic-material dimension of the PMS, rooting

it in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel and building up the Church, will be of great benefit to all.

Although the help given must be used for the specific needs of the individual local Churches, and these have the right to evaluate their own needs, the communion and universality of the Church must grow thanks to this work of raising awareness and raising funds. Therefore, structures must be set up to coordinate the activities of the various people and offices involved in this missionary work.

Great importance, therefore, must be attributed to accounting, in order to ensure the correct use of donations received and to comply with the relevant regulations in force in the various countries. There should never be the slightest doubt that the institution is doing everything possible to serve the common goal and does not pursue other interests. They must pay attention to the admonition of Jesus: "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give" (Mt 10:8).

Fundraising and the mission must not be understood as opposed and irreconcilable. It is imperative, however, that there be ethical reflection on the opportunities of fundraising activities and their limitations, in the context of Church activities, since not everything that is possible is necessarily right. Within the range of open possibilities, choices must be made that reflect the specific character of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Ultimately, this means giving priority to the activities that contribute to the fulfillment of the missionary task of Jesus.

## CHURCH MISSION, POVERTY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Catholic social teaching is part of the evangelizing mission of the universal Church. “*With her social teaching the Church seeks to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations.* It is not simply a matter of reaching out to man in society – man as the recipient of the proclamation of the Gospel – but of *enriching and permeating society itself with the Gospel.* For the Church, therefore, tending to the needs of man means that she also involves society in her missionary and salvific work. [...] Society – and with it, politics, the economy, labor, law, culture – is not simply a secular and worldly reality, and therefore outside or foreign to the message and economy of salvation. Society in fact, with all that is accomplished within it, concerns man. Society is made up of men and women, who are the primary and fundamental way for the Church” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 62).

Catholic social teaching's values and its orientation toward the common good, which have always been the content and strength of this doctrine, call today more than ever for their concrete application to current issues of great importance and gravity. The profound crisis facing a huge segment of the world's population today makes even more urgent the use of this resource that represents “Knowledge illuminated by faith, In friendly dialogue with all branches of knowledge” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, headings of two sections in Chapter Two, Section II).

“Economy, as the very word indicates, should be the art of achieving a fitting management of our common home, which is the world as a whole. Each meaningful economic decision made in one part of the world has

repercussions everywhere else; consequently, no government can act without regard for shared responsibility. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find local solutions for enormous global problems which overwhelm local politics with difficulties to resolve. If we really want to achieve a healthy world economy, what is needed at this juncture of history is a more efficient way of interacting which, with due regard for the sovereignty of each nation, ensures the economic well-being of all countries, not just of a few” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 206).

Pope Francis has repeatedly recalled the urgent need for “generating new models of economic progress more clearly directed to the universal common good, inclusion and integral development, the creation of labor and investment in human resources” (“Address to Participants in the International Conference of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation,” May 13, 2016).

There are many challenges for lay Catholics involved in the world of economics to “generate new models of economic progress.” These include:

1. promoting a concept of business at the service of the common good, avoiding the unilateral logic of maximization of profit;
2. encouraging hybrid forms of business, between for-profit and non-profit, often more suitable for carrying out certain activities of production;
3. developing a new generation of entrepreneurs attentive to the issues of sustainability and the common good, in response to the great global challenge namely of employment;
4. promoting corporate welfare and family-work reconciliation solutions, also to support the birth rate in those contexts marked by the demographic crisis;
5. fostering collaboration, up to the creation of partnerships, between Christian entrepreneurs from the northern and the southern hemispheres of the world, so that solidarity takes on the face of sharing knowledge, technology transfer, support in accessing markets, and



creation of production chains that are respectful of both the human person and the environment.

It is clear now that it is necessary to rethink a growth paradigm – which, although not the only one in progress, has certainly been dominant in recent decades – a paradigm based on the idea that the market always knows how to self-regulate, that exaggerated individualism is a necessity for progress, and that the development of emerging and non-emerging countries can only take place by adopting that paradigm. Catholic social teaching, on this account, is full of concrete alternative directions. It offers a model of development based on the enhancement of the person and interpersonal relationships marked by solidarity. Above all, greater attention must be paid to the poor and excluded: “Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticize governments. It will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 207). If in the future we want to avoid new and more dramatic crises, it will be necessary to direct the national and international economic systems towards real development, solid and sustainable over time, abandoning the limitless consumption of the last decades and focusing instead on investments and employment.

The crisis, derived from the irreversible change that has taken place in recent decades in the relations between rich countries and the rest of the world, requires today a profound rethinking of international economic relations and a rediscovery of dynamic solidarity that, in addition to the distribution of existing resources, also concerns itself with production and concerns the North-South and East-West relations. This form of sharing is expressed through the various components of development: economic development promoted by institutions, by society, and by companies, made

up of entrepreneurs and workers; intergenerational development, which is based on sustainable social security systems and which leads to the enhancement of the family based on marriage between men and women; and social development, which promotes the cohesion of society and territories.

“The economic well-being of a country is not measured exclusively by the quantity of goods it produces but also by taking into account the manner in which they are produced and the level of equity in the distribution of income, which should allow everyone access to what is necessary for their personal development and perfection. An equitable distribution of income is to be sought on the basis of criteria not merely of commutative justice but also of social justice that is, considering, beyond the objective value of the work rendered, the human dignity of the subjects who perform it. Authentic economic well-being is pursued also by means of suitable *social policies for the redistribution of income* which, taking general conditions into account, look at merit as well as at the need of each citizen” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 303).

Today it is urgent to encourage and adopt a long-term vision that can get beyond individualistic selfishness and instead is capable of building a politics of the common good. “The principle of the universal destination of goods is an invitation to develop an economic vision inspired by moral values that permit people not to lose sight of the origin or purpose of these goods, so as to bring about a world of fairness and solidarity, in which the creation of wealth can take on a positive function” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 174). In this regard, subsidiarity, which is an enhancement of the person and each person’s autonomy and responsibility in pursuing the objectives of the common good, remains the cardinal principle of a democracy that wants to implement a balanced distribution of functions among the institutional, social, and economic subjects of the market.

An extraordinarily effective concept of development that is oriented towards the common good and the promotion of the human person can be found through the combination of subsidiarity and solidarity, as out-

lined by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*: “The principle of subsidiarity must remain closely linked to the principle of solidarity and vice versa, since the former without the latter gives way to social privatism, while the latter without the former gives way to paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need” (n. 58). It follows that only through the interdependence of institutions, society, and the market, placed within the paradigm of subsidiarity and solidarity, can development emerge in the full sense of the term.

Taken together, all of this suggests a direction of development, including specific guidelines for concrete policy choices in the economic, social, and political fields. And it is precisely this contribution of trust and hope that the Catholic social teaching provides to today’s troubled humanity, because “the Church has no models to present; models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political and cultural aspects, as these interact with one another” (*Centesimus Annus*, 43).

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## THE OCTOBER 2019 LOGO SYMBOLS AND COLORS<sup>6</sup>

### BAPTIZED AND SENT: THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD

“The symbol is always a bridge that connects the visible to the invisible and transports them one into the other” (P. Evdokimov).

The logo of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019 depicts a missionary cross whose traditional colors recall the five continents. The Cross embraces the world and connects peoples, in communication between people with the universal Church and as a link, it creates real bonds between peoples. The Cross is the instrument and the efficacious sign of the communion between God and humanity for the universality of our mission. The Cross is luminous, full of color, a sign of victory and resurrection.

The world is transparent, because our action of evangelization has no barriers or boundaries; it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Cross embraces every person of this world, and thanks to the Cross we are united, connected, and open to communion for mission.

Christian charity and the world transfigured in the Spirit overcome distances and open the gaze of our mind and heart. It is the love of Jesus that knows no limits and boundaries.

The words BAPTIZED AND SENT, which accompany the image, indicate the two characteristic and inalienable elements of every Christian:

<sup>6</sup> See the logo design presented on the cover of this October 2019 Guide.

baptism and proclamation. From the Cross flows baptism for the salvation of the world to which we are sent to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus.

The colors of the Cross are those traditionally attributed to the five continents: red for America, green for Africa, white for Europe, yellow for Asia, and blue for Oceania. Each color has a symbolic meaning that makes the connection between the continents possible through their peoples, in the communion of God with humanity.

Red recalls the blood of the martyrs of the American continent, seeds of a new life in the Christian faith. It is the color of the passion of the missionaries who, having arrived in a new land, are interested in the salvation of the people. Even today it is a sign of the passion of those who remain faithful to the Gospel without accepting compromises. Red recalls the earth and all that is terrestrial. It is a vivid and communicative color.

Green is the color of life, nature, and vegetation. It symbolizes growth, fertility, youth, and vitality. Green is the color that harmonizes the whole. The African continent is called to such harmony even in the midst of the desert and suffering. It is also the color of hope, one of the three theological virtues.

White is a symbol of joy, the beginning of new life in Christ. It is the challenge for an old Europe, that it might rediscover the evangelizing force that it generated thanks to so many Churches and so many saints.

Yellow is a color of light, which feeds on light by invoking the true Light. Asia is the continent where Jesus, the Son of God and our Sun which rises from above, was born.

Blue is the color of Oceania, formed by innumerable islands scattered in the ocean. It is the color that is closest to the invisible, recalls the divine life, points to the mystery, and invites us to transcendence in relation to all that is earthly and sensitive. It is the color of the water of life that quenches us and restores us along the path to God. It is also the color of our sky, a sign of God's dwelling with us.

**PRAYER**  
**FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY MISSION MONTH**  
**OCTOBER 2019**

Heavenly Father,  
when your only begotten Son Jesus Christ  
rose from the dead,  
he commissioned his followers  
to “go and make disciples of all nations”  
and you remind us that through our Baptism  
we are made sharers in the mission of the Church.

Empower us by the gifts of the Holy Spirit  
to be courageous and zealous  
in bearing witness to the Gospel,  
so that the mission entrusted to the Church,  
which is still very far from completion,  
may find new and efficacious expressions  
that bring life and light to the world.

Help us make it possible for all peoples  
to experience the saving love  
and mercy of Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
One God, forever and ever.

**Amen.**

OMNIS TERRA  
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