

Missionary Month: October 2023

Sunday Gospel Reflections

Hearts on fire, feet on the move (cf. Lk 24:13–35)

Father Alexandre Kabera

Sunday, October 1, 2023 (Mt 21:28–32)

“Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.” (Mt 21:28)

Today, we begin the month of October, which is Missionary Month. For this year’s theme **“Hearts on fire, feet on the move”** (cf. Lk 24:13–35), Pope Francis makes reference to the disciples on the road to Emmaus after the Lord’s resurrection. Hearts on fire **“while he opened the scriptures to us.”** The Word of God enlightens and transforms the heart within the mission. In his message for World Mission Day (WMD), the Holy Father says: “Today, as then, the Risen Lord remains close to his missionary disciples and walks beside them, particularly when they feel disoriented, discouraged, fearful of the mystery of iniquity that surrounds them and seeks to overwhelm them. The Lord is greater than all our problems, above all if we encounter them in our mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the world. For in the end, this mission is his and we are nothing more than his humble co-workers, ‘useless servants’ (cf. Lk 17:10).” (1. “Hearts on fire,” message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2023).

In today’s Gospel, the Lord Jesus draws the attention on doing God’s will and the struggle with oneself. The son who says no to his father, but carries out the task, is better than the one who says yes, but disobeys. For a human being worthy of the name is judged by his actions, not by his changing intentions. Indeed, faith is more an “acting right” than a “thinking right.” With these words, **“Son, go out and work in the vineyard today,”** Jesus invites us, through mission, to be a Church that welcomes sinners who have been touched by conversion. Also, a Church that invites everyone to work in the Lord’s vineyard!

This year, Pope Francis gave a series of catechesis on an urgent and decisive theme for Christian life: the *passion for evangelization*, in other words, the *apostolic zeal*. It is a vital dimension for the Church: the community of Jesus’s disciples was in fact born apostolic, born missionary. Without apostolic zeal, faith withers. Mission, on the other hand, is the oxygen of Christian life: it invigorates and purifies it. During Missionary Month, let us embark, then, on a process of rediscovering the evangelizing passion, starting with the Scriptures and the Church’s teaching, to draw apostolic zeal from its sources. Then, let us get closer to some witnesses who have rekindled the passion for the Gospel within the Church, like Therese of the Child Jesus, Francis of Assisi, John XXIII, John-Paul II, so that they may help us rekindle the fire that the Holy Spirit wants to keep burning within us. (cf. Pope Francis, catechesis 2023, № 1. *The call to the apostolate*).

Sunday, October 8, 2023

“The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.” (Mt 21:43)

It is the second Sunday of Missionary Month, under the theme: **“Hearts on fire, feet on the move”** (cf. Lk 24:13–35). In his message for World Mission Day, Pope Francis reassures us: “I desire to express my closeness in Christ to all the men and women missionaries in the world, especially to those enduring any kind of hardship. Dear friends, the Risen Lord is always with you. He sees your generosity and the sacrifices you are making for the mission of evangelization in distant lands. Not every day of our lives is serene and unclouded, but let us never forget the words of the Lord Jesus to his friends before his Passion: **‘In the world you will have tribulations, but be courageous: I have conquered the world!’** (Jn 16:33).” (2. “Our eyes were open,” *message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2023*).

This Sunday, in the parable of the vineyard, God reveals himself: He loves every human being. He has every detail of human life to heart. The Kingdom is incumbent upon another community or people who will bear its fruits. Pope Francis explains to us: “In order to bear fruit, we must remain united to Jesus” (cf. Jn 15:4–9). This union is achieved through daily prayer, particularly in Eucharistic adoration, as we remain in silence in the presence of the Lord, who remains with us in the Blessed Sacrament. By lovingly cultivating this communion with Christ, the missionary disciple can become a mystic in action. May our hearts always yearn for the company of Jesus, echoing the ardent plea of the two disciples of Emmaus, especially in the evening hours: **“Stay with us, Lord!”** (cf. Lk 24:29).

In his catechesis on the passion for evangelization, Pope Francis explains that to sum up the action of the Church in one word, precisely the term “pastoral” is often used. And to evaluate our pastoral work we need to confront ourselves with the model, confront ourselves with Jesus, Jesus the Good Shepherd (cf. Jn 10). Above all, we can ask ourselves: do we imitate him, drinking from the wells of prayer so that our heart might be in harmony with his? Intimacy with him is *“the soul of every apostolate.”* Jesus himself clearly said it to his disciples: **“Apart from me you can do nothing”** (cf. Jn 15:5). If we stay with Jesus, we discover that his pastoral heart always beats for the person who is confused, lost, far away. In prayer, let us ask for the grace of a pastoral heart, an open heart that draws near to everyone, so as to bear the Lord’s message as well as to feel Christ’s longing for each of them. (cf. Pope Francis, catechesis 2023, № 2. *Jesus, model of evangelization*).

Sunday, October 15, 2023

“He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast” (Mt 22:3)

It is the third Sunday of Missionary Month, under the theme: **“Hearts on fire, feet on the move”** (cf. Lk 24:13–35). Our eyes were “opened and recognized him” in the breaking of the bread. Jesus in the Eucharist is the source and summit of the mission. In his message for World Mission Day, Pope Francis says: “The fact that their hearts burned for the word of God prompted the disciples of Emmaus to ask the mysterious wayfarer to stay with them as evening drew near. When they gathered around the table, their eyes were opened and they recognized him when he broke the bread. The risen Christ, then, is both the one who breaks the bread and, at the same time, the bread itself, broken for us. It follows that every missionary disciple is called to become, like Jesus and in him, through the working of the Holy Spirit, one who breaks the bread and one who is broken bread for the world. Here it should be remembered that breaking our material bread with the hungry in the name of Christ is already a work of Christian mission. How much more so is the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, which is Christ himself, a work of mission *par excellence*, since the Eucharist is the source and summit of the life and mission of the Church” (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2023).

The Evangelical passage of today emphasizes on the invitation to the wedding feast. The Old Testament promised a nuptial union between God and his people and the Gospel presents Jesus as the bridegroom of the eagerly awaited wedding (Mt 9:15). God invites, calls to the Kingdom, freely and largely. **“He sent other servants again... Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find.”** This new sending symbolizes the Church’s mission in the world and also, that in the Church, the wheat and the chaff merge. Now, a guest is not dressed in “a wedding garment” or his “Sunday best.” He should have changed, in other words, he should have converted himself. Pope Francis reminds us that: “Missionary conversion remains the principal goal that we must set for ourselves as individuals and as a community.”

In his homily for Sunday of the Word of God, Pope Francis explains that the Word of God, which is addressed to everyone and calls us to conversion, *makes us heralds*. Indeed, Jesus walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and calls Simon and Andrew, two brothers who were fishermen. With his Word he invites them to follow him, telling them that he will make them “fishers of men” (Mt. 4:19), experts in seeking others. And just as in sailing and fishing they had learned to leave the shore and cast their nets into the deep, in the same way they would become apostles capable of sailing upon the open seas of the world, of going out to meet their brothers and sisters and proclaiming the joy of the Gospel. Let us feel that we are called by Jesus in person to proclaim his Word, to bear witness to it in everyday life. This is our mission: to become seekers of the lost, oppressed and discouraged, to bring them the consolation and the light of the Word. Jesus said: **Go!** (cf. Pope Francis, *Homily for January 22, 2023*).

Sunday, October 22, 2023

“Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” (Mt 22:21)

This Sunday, which is World Mission Day, has the following theme: **“Hearts on fire, feet on the move”** (Lk 24:13–35). Pope Francis is amazed by the eternal youth of a Church that is always going forth. In his message, he says: “The image of ‘feet setting out’ reminds us once more of the perennial validity of the *missio ad gentes*, the mission entrusted to the Church by the risen Lord to evangelize all individuals and peoples, even to the ends of the earth. Today more than ever, our human family, wounded by so many situations of injustice, so many divisions and wars, is in need of the Good News of peace and salvation in Christ.” Pope Francis explains to us that the Pontifical Mission Societies are rooted in a twofold love namely Christ’s love for us and our love for Christ: “All of us can contribute to this missionary movement: with our prayers and activities, with material offerings and the offering of our sufferings, and with our personal witness. *The Pontifical Mission Societies* are the privileged means of fostering this missionary cooperation on both the spiritual and material levels. For this reason, the collection taken on World Mission Sunday is devoted to the *Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith*.” (3. “Our feet set out on the way,” message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2023).

Today’s Gospel, curiously, talks about money: a matter about paying taxes to the Emperor, an image and an inscription on the coin. The imperial coin has “Cesar’s image,” but mankind is God’s *effigy* or image (Gn 1:27). Cesar has the right to receive what belongs to him, but do not give him what belongs only to God within you. Christians submit to political authorities as long as the State does not take God’s place by being worshipped. This episode remains the helm of every Christian who is committed to the city and not a dividing wall between politics and religion. We can also financially support the Society for the evangelization of the world.

In his catechesis “The passion for evangelization, the apostolic zeal,” Pope Francis explains that in order to evangelize, there is a passion that involves everything: the mind, the heart, the hands, going out ... everything, the whole person is involved with this proclamation of the Gospel, and for this reason we talk about *the passion for evangelizing*. The Gospel says that Jesus **“appointed twelve, to be with Him, and to be sent out to preach”** (Mk 3:14). For Jesus there is no going without staying and there is no staying without going. First of all, *there is no going without staying*: before sending the disciples forth on mission, Christ—the Gospel says—“calls them to himself” (cf. Mt 10:1). The proclamation is born from the encounter with the Lord; every Christian activity, especially the mission, begins from there. In fact, following Christ is not an inward-looking fact: without proclamation, without service, without mission, the relationship with Jesus does not grow. This means that the experience of mission is part of Christian formation. Let us then recall these two constitutive moments for every disciple: staying with Jesus and going forth, sent by Jesus. (cf. Pope Francis, *catechesis 2023, № 4. The first apostolate*).

Sunday, October 29, 2023

“You shall love the Lord, your God and your neighbour as yourself.” (Mt 22:37–39)

We have reached the last Sunday of Missionary Month, under the theme: **“Hearts on fire, feet on the move”** (cf. Lk 24:13–35). For Pope Francis, “The urgency of the Church’s missionary activity naturally calls for an ever-closer missionary cooperation on the part of all her members and at every level. This is an essential goal of the synodal journey that the Church has undertaken, guided by the key words: *communion, participation, mission*. This journey is certainly not a turning of the Church in upon herself; nor is it a referendum about what we ought to believe and practise, nor a matter of human preferences. Rather, it is a process of setting out on the way and, like the disciples of Emmaus, listening to the risen Lord. For he always comes among us to explain the meaning of the Scriptures and to break bread for us, so that we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, carry out his mission in the world” (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2023).

In today’s Gospel, Jesus answers the question regarding the greatest commandment. Jesus cites the commandment of loving God (v. 37-38), which commits the depths of a person’s being (heart), energies (soul) and thoughts (mind). We can add to this the commandment of loving your neighbour (v. 39), which Jesus considers similar, inseparable from the first commandment. In the Bible, love is more than a feeling given to the seasonal variations of affectivity. It is the decision to become attached to someone to whom we give rights over ourselves and concrete actions that nourish this decision.

In his catechesis “The passion for evangelization, the apostolic zeal,” Pope Francis talks about the missionary discourse (cf. Mt 10) that Christ addresses to his disciples before sending them. The Pope draws out three aspects. First, why proclaim? Because I have received freely, and I should give freely. The proclamation does not begin from us, but from the beauty of what we have received for free, without merit: meeting Jesus, knowing him, discovering that we are loved and saved. It is such a great gift that we cannot keep it to ourselves. Then, what must we proclaim? Jesus says: “Preach as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (v. 7). This is what must be said, first: God is near. So, never forget this: God has always been close to the people. This closeness is one of the most important things about God. There are three important things: closeness, mercy, and tenderness. Don’t forget that. Who is God? The One who is Close, the One who is Tender, the One who is Merciful. This is the reality of God. Finally, how to proclaim? What should be the language for proclaiming? He tells us that the manner, the style is essential in witnessing. Witnessing does not just involve the mind and saying something. It involves everything, mind, heart, hands, everything, the three languages of the person: the language of thought, the language of affection, and the language of work. Everything is involved (cf. Pope Francis, *catechesis 2023, № 4. The first apostolate*).