

Sunday Gospel Reflections for Missionary Month 2024

Sunday, October 6, 2024: Reflection on the Gospel of Mark 10:2–16

On this first missionary Sunday of October, let us recognize the blessings that the Lord wishes to grant us since the Creation of the world! The blessing of the couple that helps each other (First reading); the blessing of the family life and the joy of walking on the Lord's path (Psalm); the blessing of the sanctification brought by Jesus Christ, that leads us on the path of love (Second reading); and finally, the blessing of the children's hearts, who welcome the Kingdom's life (Gospel).

Thus, on this Missionary Month, let us celebrate the blessed of the Lord, who through the consecrated life, as through married life and family life, commit themselves in the name of their faith, to build the Kingdom of justice, fraternity, mutual aid, charity and solidarity. Through them, God works on uniting people and helping the poor. Together, and not alone, people learn to go beyond every individualism, egocentrism and hardness of heart to grow through love, sharing, forgetfulness and self-sacrifice. We are used to see priests and religious communities who are committed because of the Kingdom, our time grants us the grace of missionary couples and families, who also come from movements that rise to the Mission's challenge: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations!" (Mt 28:19) and "**Go and invite everyone to the banquet!**" (cf. Mt 22 :9) (Theme for WMD 2024). Regarding the theme chosen by Pope Francis, it points out that: **In the king's command to his servants we find two words that express the heart of the mission: the verbs "to go out" and "to invite." As for the first, we need to remember that the servants had previously been sent to deliver the king's invitation to the guests (cf. vv. 3–4). Mission, we see, is a tireless going out to all men and women, in order to invite them to encounter God and enter into communion with him. Tireless! God, great in love and rich in mercy, constantly sets out to encounter all men and women, and to call them to the happiness of his kingdom, even in the face of their indifference or refusal** (Message for World Mission Day 2024).

Let us remember this passage from the 7th catechesis on the passion for evangelization by Pope Francis: "**The Council says: 'the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate' (Decree Apostolicam actuositatem [AA], 2). It is a calling that is common, just as 'a common dignity [is shared] as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common, one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity' (Lumen gentium, 32). It is a call that concerns both those who have received the sacrament of Orders, consecrated people, and all lay faithful, man or woman: it is a call to all.**"

Mission is a matter of the heart that welcomes the Kingdom. The blessed Pauline Jaricot discovered this in her prayer life, and she explains it as follows: "**Prayer is the Kingdom of God within us. May our heart be overcome by the infinite love of Jesus Christ!**" (Novena to Blessed Pauline Jaricot, Pontifical Mission Societies of Canada, 2022). Mission is also a matter of proclaiming the kingdom, a God who is near, loving and merciful. **Jesus says: "Preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (v. 7). This is what must be said, foremost: God is near. So, never forget this: God has always been close to the people. He said it to the people himself: He said, "Look, what God is as close to the nations as I am to you?" 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 Who is Merciful** (4th catechesis on the passion for evangelization).

Let us pray so that every person, couple and family find the blessing and beauty of God's love plan upon them. By welcoming his Kingdom within us, as his children, our hearts will bear the fruits of love, mutual aid, communion, unity and we will see happiness, as the psalmist says. May Saint Therese of the Child Jesus guide us, throughout this Missionary Month that begins, in the Mission of all baptized people. Inspired by her, Pope Francis says: **Missionaries, of whom Therese is patroness, are not only those who travel long distances, learn new languages, do good works, and are good at proclamation; no, a missionary is also anyone who lives as an instrument of God's love, no matter where he is. He does everything so that, through his witness, his prayer, his intercession, Jesus might manifest himself. This is the apostolic zeal that, let us always remember, never works by proselytism but rather by attraction. Faith is born by attraction. One does not become Christian because he is forced by someone, but because they have been touched by love** (16th catechesis on the passion for evangelization).

Pope Francis also presented the testimony of a layman from Venezuela, who was a missionary and an instrument of God's love no matter where he was: the blessed José Gregorio Hernández Cisneros. **He was born in 1864 and learned the faith from his mother: "My mother taught me virtue from the time I was in a crib, made me grow in the knowledge of God and gave me charity as my guide."** Let us take note: it is moms who pass on the faith. The faith is passed on in the language of moms, that dialect that moms use to speak with their children. Charity was the north star that oriented the existence of Blessed José Gregorio: a good and joyful person with a cheerful disposition, he was endowed with a marked intelligence. He became a physician, a university professor, and a scientist. But he was foremost a doctor close to the weakest, so much so that he was known in his homeland as "the doctor of the poor." He always cared for the poor. To the riches of money, he preferred the riches of the Gospel, spending his existence helping the needy. And the success he never sought in the world, he received, and continues to receive, from the people, who call him "saint of the people," "apostle of charity," "missionary of hope" (20th catechesis). He is the living proof that, as this Sunday's Gospel proclaims: **Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us (1 Jn 4:12).**

Sunday, October 13, 2024: Reflection on the Gospel of Mark 10:17–30

On this Missionary Month, Christ calls us to follow him, to leave everything behind for the Gospel and Eternal Life. He wants people who are poor in spirit, who seek only the richness of his Word to live, who pray to receive his Wisdom and shine. Being a missionary disciple leads us to renounce the riches of this world and choose the only richness that can fill our hearts, the one of the Lords' Love, which is asked in today's Psalm: "Fill us at daybreak with your mercy" (Ps 89).

Pope Francis held up as an example of God seeker, Madeleine Delbrel, who lived in agnosticism until she was 20 years old. Thus, she set out in search of God with a profound thirst and emptiness that cried out her anguish. Her journey of faith led her to choose a life that was given entirely to God, in the heart of the Church and in the heart of the world. **Dazzled by the encounter with the Lord, she wrote: "Once we have heard God's Word, we no longer have the right not to accept it; once we have accepted it, we no longer have the right not to let it become flesh in us; once it has become flesh in us, we no longer have the right to keep it for ourselves alone. Henceforward, we belong to all those who are waiting for the Word" (We, the Ordinary People of the Streets, trans. David Louis Schindler, Jr. and Charles F. Mann. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, 62)** (25th catechesis on

the passion for evangelization). Is this not what the letter to the Hebrews shows this Sunday: “Indeed the word of God is living, effective, and will become incarnate within us so that we might bear witness of it to others?”

Brother Charles de Foucault is another missionary disciple who left everything behind to follow Christ and bear witness of his Gospel. **After living his youth being distant from God, without believing in anything other than the disordered pursuit of pleasure, he confides this to a non-believing friend, to whom, after having converted by accepting the grace of God’s forgiveness in Confession, he reveals the reason of his life. He writes: “I have lost my heart to Jesus of Nazareth.”** Brother Charles thus reminds us that the first step in evangelizing is to have Jesus inside one’s heart; it is to “fall head over heels” for him. If this does not happen, we can hardly show it with our lives. Instead, we risk talking about ourselves, the group to which we belong, morality or, even worse, a set of rules, but not about Jesus, his love, his mercy (23rd catechesis on the passion for evangelization).

The missionary disciple has found the treasure that Jesus mentions in today’s Gospel. Pope Francis continues his catechesis on Charles de Foucault and mentions this treasure: **When one of us gets to know Jesus better, the desire to make him known, to share this treasure, arises. In his commentary on the account of Our Lady’s visit to Saint Elizabeth, he makes him say: I have given myself to the world ... take me to the world. Yes, but how is this done? Like Mary did in the mystery of the Visitation: “in silence, by example, by life.” With one’s life, because “our entire existence,” writes Brother Charles, “must shout the Gospel.”** He then decides to settle in distant regions to cry out the Gospel in silence, living in the spirit of Nazareth, in poverty and concealment. He goes to the Sahara Desert, among non-Christians, and he goes there as a friend and a brother, bearing the meekness of Jesus the Eucharist (23rd catechesis).

Jesus’ promise to whoever leaves everything behind for Him and the Gospel, ensures to enter into eternal life, into the Kingdom! This is impossible for human beings, but it is possible with God! During this Missionary Month, let us celebrate the call that he makes to everyone: to follow him and to give oneself to the Gospel and the Kingdom. Finally, let us allow God to make possible our desire to embrace Mission with all our hearts. This call can also be found in next Sunday’s theme for World Mission Day: **“Go and invite everyone to the banquet”** (Mt 22: 9).

In **“Come and follow me,”** as well as in **“Go and invite everyone,”** there is a call to set out. Let us go back to the testimony of Madeleine Delbrel: **“To be with you on your path, we must go, even when our laziness begs us to stay. You have chosen us to stay in a strange balance, a balance that can be achieved and maintained only in movement, only in momentum. A bit like a bicycle, which does not stay upright unless its wheels turn [...]. We can stay upright only by going forward, moving, in a surge of charity”** (25th catechesis)

In today’s Gospel, the rich young man who seeks to gain eternal life didn’t find joy, but rather the sadness of materialism. For those who, on the contrary, have found true joy in giving everything and choosing Jesus, Pope Francis reminds us that this is the right moment to proclaim Jesus and the joy of the Gospel: **Thus, like the two disciples at Emmaus, one returns to daily life with the enthusiasm of one who has found a treasure: they were joyful, those two, because they had found Jesus, and he changed their life. And one discovers that humanity abounds with brothers and sisters waiting for a word of hope. The Gospel is awaited even today. People of today are like people of all times: they need it. Even the civilization of programmed unbelief and institutionalized secularity; indeed, especially the society that leaves the spaces of religious meaning deserted, needs Jesus. This is the right moment for the proclamation of Jesus. Therefore, I would like to say again to everyone: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who**

accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew” (26th catechesis).

In this Missionary Month, along with Pope Francis, let us be grateful for all those who have answered the call to leave everything behind and proclaim the Gospel:

I take this opportunity to thank all those missionaries who, in response to Christ’s call, have left everything behind to go far from their homeland and bring the Good News to places where people have not yet received it, or received it only recently. Dear friends, your generous dedication is a tangible expression of your commitment to the mission *ad gentes* that Jesus entrusted to his disciples: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). We continue to pray and we thank God for the new and numerous missionary vocations for the task of evangelization to the ends of the earth (Message for World Mission Day 2024).

WORLD MISSION DAY



Sunday, October 20, 2024: Reflection on the Gospel of Mark 10:35–45

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for World Mission Day is: “Go and invite everyone to the Banquet!” (Mt 22:9). This banquet takes place during the Son’s wedding, the One who comes to marry all humanity and thus, wants everyone to be present at the nuptial rendezvous. He said: “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.” What is this baptism for Jesus, if not of being immersed in our humanity from birth to his passion and death, where he will give his life for many? The Bridegroom has been tried in every way and offers us a Love of compassion, kindness and liberation (Psalm of the day). More than that, he offers us his Life in return, what could be more beautiful than this grace, this gift? We are invited to take part in a sublime, marvellous and merciful wedding (2nd reading)!

The Bridegroom wishes to serve us, but this is not customary in a wedding. He is the Servant that was crushed with pain and shall justify all his brothers and sisters in humanity (1st reading). Therefore, he offers to serve us salvation on the banquet menu, nothing less! Through his sacrifice offered in the Holy Eucharist, a restorative grace is given to our wounded humanity. Indeed, we await our new Life from Him, sings the Psalm, may his Love be upon us, our hope is on him. Let us invite everyone to the Banquet of the Eucharist, the wedding day of the Lamb, that is our Universal Mission, *ad gentes*, in every nation. Today, Pope Francis tells us in his message that: “While the world sets before us the various ‘banquets’ of consumerism, selfish comfort, the accumulation of wealth and individualism, the Gospel calls everyone to the divine banquet, marked by joy, sharing, justice and fraternity, in communion with God and with others. This fullness of life, which is Christ’s gift, is anticipated even now in the banquet of the Eucharist, which the Church celebrates at the Lord’s command in memory of him. The invitation to the eschatological banquet that we bring to everyone in our mission of evangelization is intrinsically linked to the invitation to the Eucharistic table, where the Lord feeds us with his word and with his Body and Blood” (Message for World Mission Day 2024).

Let us take a closer look in the life of a baptized person to see what this grace of serving our loved ones means, even to the point of drinking the cup of suffering and sacrifice. Pope Francis gives us the example of Josephine Bakhita of Soudan: Born in Darfur in 1869, she was abducted from her family at the age of seven, and made

a slave. She had eight different masters—each one sold her on to the next. The physical and moral suffering she experienced as a child left her with no identity. She suffered cruelty and violence. But she herself testified: “As a slave I never despaired, because I felt a mysterious force supporting me.” What was Saint Bakhita’s secret? We know that a wounded person often wounds in turn: the oppressed easily becomes the oppressor. Instead, the vocation of the oppressed is that of freeing themselves and their oppressors, becoming restorers of humanity. Only in the weakness of the oppressed can the strength of God’s love, which frees both, be revealed. Saint Bakhita expresses this truth very well.

One day her tutor gave her a small crucifix and she treasured it jealously, given that she had never owned anything. She experienced inner liberation while looking at it, because she felt she was understood and loved and therefore capable of understanding and loving: this was the beginning. She felt she was understood, she felt loved, and as a consequence, capable of understanding and loving others. Indeed, she would go on to say: “God’s love has always accompanied me in a mysterious way... The Lord has loved me very much: you have to love everyone ... you have to have pity!” This is Bakhita’s soul. Truly, to feel pity means both to suffer with the victims of the great inhumanity in the world, and also to pity those who commit errors and injustices, not justifying, but humanizing. This is the caress she teaches us: to humanize. When we enter the logic of fighting, of division among us, of bad feelings, one against the other, we lose our humanity. And very often we think we are in need of humanity, of being more humane. Saint Bakhita teaches us: to humanize, to humanize ourselves and to humanize others.

When Saint Bakhita became Christian, she was transformed by the following words of Christ, upon which she meditated every day: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk 11:34) [...]. We can say that Saint Bakhita’s life became an existential parable of forgiveness. It is nice to be able to say about someone: “he was capable, she was capable of forgiving, always” [...]. Forgiveness set her free. Forgiveness she first received through God’s merciful love, and then the forgiveness given, made her a joyful, free woman, capable of loving. Bakhita was able to experience service not as slavery, but as an expression of the gift of self. Made a servant against her will—she was sold as a slave—she later freely chose to become a servant, to bear the burdens of others on her shoulders (22nd catechesis on the passion for evangelization).

Finally, the call to drink the cup and give its life can ask the missionary disciples to give their lives for Christ. They are fed at the banquet of the Eucharist and they are called to shape their life on that nuptial love mystery. Since Jesus gave his life for us, they can give their lives out of love for Him and for their loved ones. Inspired by the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence, Pope Francis explains: **Saint Augustine often underlines this dynamic of gratitude and the gratuitous reciprocation of giving. Here, for example, is what he preached on the feast of Saint Lawrence: “He performed the office of deacon; it was there that he administered the sacred chalice of Christ’s blood; there that he shed his own blood in the name of Christ. The blessed apostle John clearly explained the mystery of the Lord’s supper when he said, ‘Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers’ (1 Jn 3:16). Saint Lawrence understood this, my brothers, and he did it; and he undoubtedly prepared things similar to what he received at that table. He loved Christ in his life, he imitated him in his death” (Sermons 304, 14; pl 38, 1395–1397). In this way, Saint Augustine explained the spiritual dynamism that inspired the martyrs (11th catechesis on the passion for evangelization).**

Vatican Council II reminds us that: “martyrdom makes the disciple like his master, who willingly accepted death for the salvation of the world and through it he is conformed to him by the shedding of blood. Therefore the Church considers martyrdom the highest gift and supreme proof of love” (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 42). Pope Francis explains: **“Imitating Christ and with his grace, martyrs turn the violence of those who reject the proclamation into the supreme proof of love, which goes as far as the forgiveness of their own**

persecutors. This is interesting: martyrs always forgive their persecutors. Stephen, the first martyr, died as he prayed, 'Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Martyrs pray for their persecutors. Although martyrdom is asked of only a few, 'nevertheless all must be prepared to confess Christ before men. They must be prepared to make this profession of faith even in the midst of persecutions, which will never be lacking to the Church, in following the way of the cross' (ibid., 42). Today there are many persecutions of Christians throughout the world. There are more martyrs today than in the early times. Martyrs show us that every Christian is called to the witness of life, even when this does not go as far as the shedding of blood, making a gift of themselves to God and to their brothers, in imitation of Jesus" (11th catechesis).

On World Mission Day, let us answer the call of every baptized person to serve and give our life. Let us invite everyone to discover the richness of our Christian spirituality and our Eucharistic banquet, where Jesus gives his life for us, and gives us the grace to do the same for others. Let us pray for the great Universal Mission of the baptized people and let us support it concretely through our collection, given completely to the Propagation of the Faith, the Pontifical Society who helps local churches around the world. Let us stand fast in our faith, whose model is the Servant and Great Priest Jesus, who gives his life again today, in the banquet of his Eucharist. Let us go and invite everyone to this banquet of real food, the bread of Eternal Life!

Finally, even if we're tempted to stay in the banquet and stay with Jesus, there's always the call to mission. Christ says: "Go!" **However, there is no staying without going. In fact, following Christ is not an inward-looking fact: without proclamation, without service, without mission, the relationship with Jesus does not grow. We note that in the Gospel the Lord sends the disciples before having completed their preparation: shortly after having called them, he is already sending them! 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 (4th catechesis).**

Why should we invite, why should we announce this banquet to everyone? Pope Francis carried on with his catechesis: Why proclaim? The motivation lies in a few words of Jesus, which it is good for us to remember: "Freely you have received, freely give" (v. 8). They are just a few words. But 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, we feel the need to spread it; but in the same style, right? That is, in gratuitousness. In other words: we have a gift, so we are called to make a gift of ourselves; we have received a gift and our vocation is to make a gift of ourselves to others; there is in us the joy of being children of God, it must be shared with our brothers and sisters who do not know it yet! This is the reason for the proclamation. Going forth and bringing the joy of what we have received (4th catechesis).

Sunday, October 27, 2024: Reflection the Gospel of Mark 10:46 b -52

The cries of Earth, which is eager for healing, justice, sharing and peace can be heard in those of the blind man from the Gospel, who calls out all the more. In this Missionary Month, we pray for the Universal Mission of proclaiming Jesus to the world, he is the source of life and salvation for humanity. Thus, another cry can be heard, it is the one from his missionary disciples to the invitation of God: "Shout with joy!" They call to joy and

faith: “Take courage; get up, he is calling you.” The Word of Jesus is at work throughout the world wherever it is proclaimed and welcomed. It can heal and transform humanity despite the tears and suffering of all kinds. It brings together and forms people who are all saved together!

Pope Francis reminds us the reason behind the joyous proclamation requested to the missionary disciples: **And the reason? Good news, a surprise, a beautiful event? Much more, a person: Jesus! Jesus is the joy. He is the God made man who came to us. The question, dear brothers and sisters, is therefore not whether to proclaim it, but how to proclaim it, and this “how” is joy. Either we proclaim Jesus with joy, or we do not proclaim him [...] This is why a discontent Christian, a sad Christian, a dissatisfied, or worse still, resentful or rancorous Christian, is not credible. This person will talk about Jesus but no one will believe him! [...] It is essential to keep watch over our emotions. Evangelization works in gratuitousness, because it comes from fullness, not from pressure. And when one evangelizes—one would try to do this, but it does not work—on the basis of ideologies, this is not evangelizing, this is not the Gospel. The Gospel is not an ideology. The Gospel is a proclamation, a proclamation of joy. Ideologies are cold, all of them. The Gospel has the warmth of joy. Ideologies do not know how to smile. The Gospel is a smile; it makes you smile because it touches the soul with the Good News (26th catechesis on the passion for evangelization).**

In the current context of secularization and in a world wounded by wars and divisions, let us respond without delay to the invitation of the Father who sent his Son to save us: **“Go and invite everyone to the banquet!” (Mt 22:9)** We are the witnesses who met the Son who destroyed death and made life resplendent. We are fed at the banquet which offers us His Presence and His life in abundance. We are sent, at the end of each banquet, in the name of Christ: “Go!” It is with the joy of having this Presence within us that we set out to become his heralds, in a world waiting for light and hope. Pope Francis continues:

“The joy of having the risen Jesus. An encounter with Jesus always brings you joy, and if this does not happen to you, it is not a true encounter with Jesus [...]. Immersed in today’s fast-paced and confused environment, we too in fact, may find ourselves living our faith with a subtle sense of renunciation, persuaded that the Gospel is no longer heard and no longer worth striving to proclaim. We might even be tempted by the idea of letting ‘others’ go their own way. Instead, this is precisely the time to return to the Gospel to discover that Christ ‘is forever young and a constant source of newness (Evangelii gaudium, 11). Thus, like the two at Emmaus, one returns to daily life with the enthusiasm of one who has found a treasure: they were joyful, those two, because they had found Jesus, and he changed their life. And one discovers that humanity abounds with brothers and sisters waiting for a word of hope. The Gospel is awaited even today. People of today are like people of all times: they need it. Even the civilization of programmed unbelief and institutionalized secularity; indeed, especially the society that leaves the spaces of religious meaning deserted, needs Jesus. This is the right moment for the proclamation of Jesus. Therefore, I would like to say again to everyone: The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew’ (ibid., 1). Let us not forget this” (26th catechesis on the passion for evangelization).

In front of the wonders that God the Father has accomplished in our lives, may this Missionary Month, which is ending, remind us of our mission to proclaim and bear witness of Jesus. **Today let us also hear the invitation to be fishers of men: let us feel that we are called by Jesus in person to proclaim his Word, to bear witness to it in everyday life, to live it in justice and charity, called to “give it flesh” by tenderly caring for those who suffer. This is our mission: to become seekers of the lost, oppressed and discouraged, not to bring them ourselves,**

but the consolation of the Word, the disruptive proclamation of God that transforms life, to bring the joy of knowing that He is our Father and addresses each one of us, to bring the beauty of saying, “Brother, Sister, God has come close to you, listen and you will find in his Word an amazing gift!” (Pope Francis, Homily, Sunday of the Word of God, January 22, 2023)

During these last days of Missionary Month, while remembering the theme: Invite everyone, here is a clear message to all missionary disciples: **‘Christ’s missionary disciples have always had a heartfelt concern for all people, whatever their social or even moral status. The parable of the banquet tells us that, at the king’s orders, the servants gathered “all whom they found, both good and bad” (Mt 10:10). What is more, “the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame” (Lk 2:21), in a word, the least of our brothers and sisters, those marginalized by society, are the special guests of the king. The wedding feast of his Son that God has prepared always remains open to all, since his love for each of us is immense and unconditional. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have life eternal” (Jn 3:16). Everyone, every man and every woman, is invited by God to partake of his grace, which transforms and saves. One needs simply say “yes” to this gratuitous divine gift, accepting it and allowing oneself be transformed by it, putting it on like a “wedding robe” (cf. Mt 10:12) (Message for World Mission Day 2024).**

**Fr. Yoland Ouellet, o.m.i.
National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies
in Francophone Canada**

