



**Go and invite everyone to the banquet
(cf. Mt 22:9)**

**Meditations on the Biblical Readings of
the Holy Mass for the
Missionary Month of October 2024**

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Tuesday, October 1, 2024

XXVI Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Memorial of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, virgin and doctor of the Church

Jb 3:1–3,11–17,20–23; Ps 88; Lk 9:51–56

Today marks the beginning of Missionary Month, which will culminate in World Mission Day. For many years, “mission” has been a major concern of the Church, of popes, bishops, and of many movements... The good will is there among many. So why does so little happen?

Perhaps we lack a little of Jesus’ determination and steadfastness in fulfilling his mission, which we heard about in today’s Gospel: “When the days for his being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem.” And he continued the journey with persistence, but also with patience with those who did not understand or share his mission, as well as with the Samaritan villagers who refused to accept him. This is how he taught his disciples the new attitude, the new vision, the “new things” in the fulfillment of God’s mission.

Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* 22, that everything in the Church should be missionary. And what about us? We carry on with many dead structures, we do “business as usual”, even though we can see that many things are dying. How much energy do we invest in our parishes and communities in things that have no missionary power? Things that were good and fruitful 50 or 30 years ago may no longer be so today. A missionary church must also have the courage to let dying things die and dare to try something new. We recall what Jesus said to someone who wanted to follow him in the Gospel passage immediately following today’s: “Let the dead bury their dead!” (cf. Lk 9.60).

It is no coincidence that the Missionary Month of October begins with the feast of St Thérèse of Lisieux, who wanted to follow Jesus radically even as a young girl and did so out of great love until her early death. It is even less of a coincidence for us that October is not only the month of World Mission, but also the month of the Holy Rosary. For in order to accept our Lord’s invitation to a radical surrender to him and his mission, we need the prayer and intercession of the woman who said: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord! I place myself entirely at the disposal of God’s mission for this world.”

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

XXVI Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels

Ex 23:20–23; Ps 91; Mt 18:1–5,10

We spend the first 20 years of our lives learning to be adults. As we grow up, we acquire perceptions, education, knowledge and skills without which this world would not function. A world in which there were only children would be chaos and anarchy. So what Jesus means when he says: “Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3).

Jesus is referring to two attitudes. Firstly, the attitude of being little: we should not imagine anything, we should not feel better than others. In Christ’s kingdom of heaven, the last is first and the small, is actually the great. The second attitude that we must learn from children: Children allow themselves to be led. Even if they are sometimes stubborn and often want to get their own way quite soon: They know that they need help from mom and dad, help “from above.”

Today is the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels. Jesus says of the children that “their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father” (Mt 18:10). The essence of the angels is to be focussed on God. The angels’ mission towards us is to orientate us towards God. Our minds should be focussed on the heavenly, not the earthly. Our gaze should be focussed on the goal, on God, so that our lives do not get lost in the meandering lines of trivialities.

As Christians, we need the holy angels more than ever so that we can better understand our mission. The first goal of the Church must be to spread faith in Jesus Christ. This is only powerful with his grace; it is only possible if we are small and humble. And we can only make a difference in this world if we are focussed on the real and essential: on God only. Dear guardian angel, please help me to become humble and childlike. And please direct all my endeavours towards God!

Thursday, October 3, 2024

XXVI Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Jb 19:21–27; Ps 27; Lk 10:1–12

Jesus sends out the apostles, and we notice that an unusual number is mentioned here: There are not 12 apostles, but 72. Every child knows that there were 12 apostles. 12 stands for the fullness of the tribes of Israel. The number is so important that after the departure of Judas before Pentecost, Matthias is added as the twelfth. And the number even plays a role in today's Church, as the Pope makes sure that there are always around 120 cardinals who are under 80 years old, i.e., who are authorized to elect the Pope.

Luke describes the sending out of the disciples, and it is simply striking that there are 72, not just 12, but 5×12 . It may be that the learned Luke is alluding to the 72 Jewish scholars who are said to have translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek, which is why this translation is simply called the "Septuagint," meaning "seventy."

72 also simply means that it is not ONLY the 12 apostles, who are listed by name in many places in the Gospels, but more. And this has something to do with us as Christians today: it is wrong to think that ONLY the bishops, ONLY the priests, etc. are sent, there are MORE. The Church's magisterium, the popes, especially Francis, never tire of saying that EVERY baptized person already has a mission by virtue of baptism.

We are in the Missionary Month of October and the Gospel is an examination of conscience: are we aware that we have a mission? Are we aware that witnessing to the Gospel can cost us honour? That it can cost us time and money, that it can cost us overcoming? That we have to expect rejection and ridicule? Let's stop leaning back comfortably and blaming the decline of Christian faith on others:

I myself must finally do something, I have been chosen by the Lord since baptism, I am one of the 72 to whom the Lord says even today: "Go! I am sending you!"

Friday, October 4, 2024

XXVI Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Memorial of Saint Francis of Assisi

Jb 38:1,12–21; 40:3–5; Ps 139; Lk 10:13–16

It is not difficult for us Christians today to appreciate St Francis as a humble “Poverello.” Commitment to the poor, the sick and the disenfranchised are generally appreciated. Even people who are far removed from the faith and critical of the Church find it great that Christians stand up for the weak and the poor.

If we don’t just want to “admire” St Francis outwardly, then we should first look at his love for Christ. Mother Teresa, a female version of Francis, showed us this love for Jesus: In adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, looking to the Son of God, she found the strength to care for dying people lying around like stinking rubbish in the streets of Calcutta. Francis was so passionate in his love for Jesus that he even burnt his stigmata into his body. Prayer and the Eucharist are not an end in themselves; this is how we attach ourselves to Jesus and receive the strength to love as he loved.

None of us has a hormone gland that produces “selflessness” and “devotion.” When we love Jesus, a spring opens up in him that flows through us. Then he transforms us into lovers. Why? Because the fire that burns in the heart of Jesus suddenly burns in us. An identification that is brought by Jesus takes place: “Whoever listens to you, listens to me...” (Lk 10:16).

And then “mission” happens quite automatically: because if the love of Jesus burns in you, you automatically have the desire to pass on his fire. This means that those who attach themselves to Jesus and allow themselves to be wounded by his love, have a mission, a mission. St Francis felt driven to preach the Gospel and tell people about Jesus. He was so “missionary” that he went to Egypt in 1219 and preached about the Lord Jesus Christ to the Sultan Malika Al Kamil.

St Francis teaches us that our mission has its origin where we are connected to Jesus. His mission is love. And we then become part of his mission: through active charity and fearless witness.

Saturday, October 5, 2024

XXVI Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Optional Memorial of Saint Faustina Kowalska, virgin

Jb 42:1–3,5–6,12–17; Ps 119; Lk 10:17–24

Here they are again, the 72 whom the Lord sent out. Not just 12 apostles, whose names are well known to us and whom we honour as the foundations of the Church and the origin of the office of bishop and priest. No, another 60 anonymous disciples return. These unnamed and unknown are all the baptized, regardless of whether they have special responsibilities through ordination or a religious vocation or even an ecclesiastical ministry. Every baptized person is sent, as Pope Francis repeatedly emphasizes!

And the 72 have good news, because the evil powers obey them as soon as they utter the name of Jesus. If we want to become a missionary Church, then we urgently need to realize this: WE do not make the future of the Church, we are only instruments. We are only instruments. The Lord of heaven and earth is our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Where we only rely on our own strength, only wretched and weak things can happen! Humans can only produce human things, but God can produce divine things!

Jesus grants his disciples a power that does not come from them, but from his presence in us. That is why it is good to remember the saints of today: St Faustina Kowalska was only 35 years old, she was a weak woman who knew for this reason alone: I must attach myself completely to Jesus, give myself completely to him. And so, in her retreat in Warsaw, she was chosen by Jesus to become a missionary of mercy. She wanted all people, especially those far from God and sinners, to experience the rays of grace of divine mercy. She lived, worked and prayed for this; she sacrificed her young life for this.

Let us examine our conscience: Am I sufficiently “attached” to Jesus? Is it important to me that he is proclaimed? Do I want all people to experience the merciful love of God?

Sunday, October 6, 2024

XXVII Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

Gn 2:18–24; Ps 128; Heb 2:9–11; Mk 10:2-16

On this first missionary Sunday of October, let's begin by recognizing the blessings that the Lord has wanted to give us since the creation of the world! The blessing of the spouses who help each other (First Reading); the blessing of family life and the happiness of walking in the ways of the Lord (Psalm); the blessing of sanctification brought by Jesus Christ who leads us along the path of love (Second Reading); and finally, the blessing of the hearts of children who welcome the life of the Kingdom (Gospel).

In this Missionary Month, then, let us celebrate those blessed by the Lord who, in their lives consecrated to the Lord, as well as in the lives of couples and families, commit themselves in the name of their faith to building the Kingdom of justice, fraternity, mutual help, charity and solidarity. Through them, God works to unite people and to help the poorest and most needy. Together, and not alone, people learn to overcome individualism, self-centeredness and hardness of heart, and to grow in love, sharing, forgetfulness and self-giving. We're used to seeing priests and religious communities committed to the cause of the Kingdom of God; our times offer us the grace of missionary couples and families, and also from movements that take up the missionary challenge: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19) "Go and invite everyone to the banquet!" (Mt 22:9) (WMS 2024 theme). Commenting on the chosen theme the Holy Father said: "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 Sunday 2024)

From the 7th Catechesis of Pope Francis on the Passion for Evangelization, let's remember the following: "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. Blessed Pauline Jaricot discovered this in her life of prayer and summed it up so well: "Prayer is the Kingdom of God

within us. May our hearts be overwhelmed by the infinite love of Jesus Christ!” Mission is also a question of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, who is always close, 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 One Who is Merciful. (Catechesis 4. The passion for evangelization)

Let us pray that each person, each couple, each family may find the blessing and beauty of love’s plan for them. If we welcome the Kingdom of God within us, as children of God, our hearts will bear the fruits of love, mutual help, communion and unity, and we will see happiness, as the psalmist says. May Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus guide us in the mission of all the baptized during this Missionary Month. Pope Francis, inspired by her, tells us: “Missionaries, in fact—of whom Thérèse 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 where they are. Missionaries are those who do everything so that, through their witness, their prayer, their intercession, Jesus might pass by.

This is the apostolic zeal that, let us always remember, never works by proselytism—never—or constraint—never—but by attraction. Faith is born by attraction. One does not become Christian because they are forced by someone, but because they have been touched by love.” (Catechesis 16. The passion for evangelization).

Pope Francis presents the testimony of a Venezuelan layman who was a missionary and an instrument of God’s love wherever he went: Blessed José Gregorio Hernández Cisneros. “He was born in 1864 and learned the faith above all from his mother, as he recounted, ‘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 dialect, that is, in the language of moms, that dialect that moms use to speak with their children. And to you, moms: be mindful in passing on the faith in that maternal dialect.

Truly, 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 cared for the poor, always. To the riches of money he preferred the riches of the Gospel, spending his existence to aid the needy. José Gregorio saw Jesus in the poor, the sick, migrants and the suffering. 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.’ Beautiful names: ‘saint of the people,’ ‘apostle of the people,’ ‘missionary of hope.’” (Catechesis 20)

He’s proving that, as the Gospel proclaims this Sunday, “Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us” (1Jn 4:12)

Monday, October 7, 2024

XXVII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary

Acts 1:12–14; Lk 1:46–55; Lk 1:26–38

October is the month of world mission. And it is the month of the holy rosary. Originally, the rosary was a meditative prayer invented in monasteries to contemplate the life of Jesus. Because it is a very simple prayer in which only the basic prayers “Our Father,” “Hail Mary” and “Glory be to the Father” are repeated, it soon became very popular with lay brothers. And then the Dominicans also spread the rosary prayer among the ordinary faithful. The prayer cord that soon emerged is an aid and a reminder to pray regularly.

It is a coincidence that the theme “Rosary” and “World Mission” coincide in October. Mission is not colonization; mission is not the imperial expansion of a religious ideology that feels superior to others. Mission is the humble invitation to open ourselves to God, who wants to redeem and heal us. Mary opens herself to this invitation, which the angel Gabriel extends to her. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

In 1822, Blessed Pauline Marie Jaricot (1799–1862) founded an association called “Society for the Propagation of the Faith.” She wanted to collect donations and prayers for the missions. In 1826, she founded the “Living Rosary” and, until the end of her life, gathered over 2 million French people who prayed a decade of the rosary every day for the world mission. The work of Blessed Pauline Marie Jaricot was elevated to the “Pontifical Mission Societies” by Pius XI in 1922. It is astonishing that the Pope’s works for world missions did not originate from a Vatican strategy, but from the prayer initiative of a young woman, a laywoman!

If we want to help the world mission, then we must pray! Without prayer there is no mission, because the Holy Spirit is—as Pope Francis repeatedly says—the motor of world mission. Our rosary prayer also becomes “sparkling” when we pray it in a missionary spirit: for those who do not yet know Christ. And for us in Europe: especially for young people, that they may recognize the ultimate meaning and reason for their lives in the God to whom Mary said: “May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Tuesday, October 8, 2024

XXVII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Gal 1:13–24; Ps 139; Lk 10:38–42

Let us remind ourselves: God himself is the Lord of history, he works his salvation. He expects us to cooperate, but it is absolutely wrong if we think that WE have to redeem and save the world. Today we are all in danger of falling for the false doctrine of Pelagius, who in the 4th century thought that we only had to roll up our sleeves and then we would manage to save the world and the Church ourselves. Without grace. St Augustine, who had already experienced the superiority of grace at the time of his conversion, railed against Pelagius. And rightly so!

We can only change the world with God's help, only by trusting in his work, in his help, in his grace. The “Yes, we can!” that politicians have used as a motivational slogan in recent years urgently needs to be supplemented from a Christian perspective: “Yes, we can—with God's help!”

Yesterday, it was the Feast of the Rosary and we reminded ourselves that mission needs prayer. Once again: We are not the masters of the world, we are only co-workers in God's work. We need the God to whom the Psalms already grant dominion over the whole earth.

The Church Fathers are unanimous in saying that today's Gospel should never be interpreted as if Martha had done something wrong or even evil. Martha works out of love: she cooks, she cares, she does well for her guest, for Jesus. Mary, on the other hand, simply sits at Jesus' feet and listens to him; she is completely focussed on him, the divine Saviour. The lesson that Jesus gives to Martha is a lesson he gives to the Pelagians of today, who think we can do it and fix it ourselves.

In October (World Missionary Month) we have many ideas, many initiatives, many events to care for the future of the Church. That is fine. But it is also necessary for us to “loosen up.” It's not us who create the future for the church, but the Lord himself.

Without Marta ministries, of course, the Church will not work, but if the priority of listening to and trusting in Jesus is missing, we will not succeed.

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

XXVII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Gal 2:1–2,7–14; Ps 117; Lk 11:1–4

The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus answers immediately and gladly. And he teaches them a short prayer of supplication to God, his Father, who is also “our Father.” We should note that this is really the only prayer that Jesus personally teaches his apostles, including us.

The Jews knew many forms of prayer: thanksgiving, praise, petition, adoration, etc. The Psalms offer a broad spectrum of prayer. It is therefore all the more interesting that Jesus teaches the disciples a prayer of petition. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord’s Prayer consists of seven petitions; here in Luke we find five petitions.

In recent years, the prayer of petition has come into crisis. It is philosophically difficult to understand why a little person should ask God, who knows and can do everything anyway, for something... What sense does it make? Under the influence of Eastern religiosity, which has become increasingly popular in the last 50 years, “praying” has been understood more as subjective self-soothing. “Prayer” as something that is above all “good for me.” Through prayer, I do not move God to do something, but I change myself.

This is actually latent atheism, because we no longer trust God to do anything in this world. The prayer of supplication only has its meaning in me, in changing my attitudes, my moods. But did Jesus really only teach his disciples these great petitions of the Lord’s Prayer so that they could reassure themselves... Clearly not! Jesus expects everything from God, his Father, and he wants us to do the same. Of course God doesn’t need our prayers! But he WANTS them. That’s why Jesus says: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7).

In the Missionary Month of October, we should consciously pray the Lord’s Prayer for world mission. All the petitions of the Our Father have a missionary dimension: mission means wanting the name of God to be sanctified, that the reign of God may dawn in the hearts of people; that all may live justly and have the bread they need; that merciful forgiveness may come and that God may put an end to war, discrimination, hunger, violence and the destruction of our habitat, the earth...

Thursday, October 10, 2024

XXVII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Gal 3:1–5; Lk 1:69–75; Lk 11:5–13

There are dozens of passages in the Gospel where Jesus intensively promotes petitionary prayer. Today, Jesus motivates us not only to pray persistently, but also not to be afraid to bother God with our requests.

The lesson that Jesus is teaching us today was preceded by something: Jesus was asked by his disciples to teach them to pray. Jesus gives them a prayer, a prayer of petition: The Lord's Prayer consists only of asking. Jesus does not teach them praise, thanksgiving, worship ... no doubt he wants us to do the same, because he himself practises all forms of prayer. But primarily it teaches them to make great petitions to God! And he firmly assures us that we will be heard. That is why the Church also teaches that every one of our prayers will be answered! Of course, always in accordance with God's will, as He alone knows what is best for us.

It is important to him that our prayer is "persistent." Please note: When we ask God, we must not expect God to be a Coke machine where I insert my prayers like a 2-euro coin. And then the can of cola rolls out immediately... Perseverance means that I really have to engage in a kind of wrestling with God, that I have to put my full trust in God. This takes time, it takes patience, it takes perseverance, even stubbornness.

There is a famous example of persistent prayer that was also "missionary." St Monica's "mission" was to lead her son Augustine to Christ. She prayed and suffered for him for many years. We can modify the answer that a priest gave her: "Go in peace, a child of so many tears cannot be lost!": "Someone who is prayed for, cannot be lost."

Jesus wants to motivate us to pray so much that he even motivates us to bother God, to be pushy! This means that you can never ask too much, never pray too much! This is particularly important for World Mission because we have often written people off. We are in danger of simply resigning ourselves to the fact that so many people on this planet do not yet know Christ; and that so many who have been baptized live like pagans. No, such resignation is not Christian. Let us knock anew on the door of God our Father in heaven and ask him earnestly that all people may experience salvation.

Friday, October 11, 2024

XXVII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Gal 3:7–14; Ps 111; Lk 11:15–26

We are in the month of World Mission, the highlight of which is World Mission Day. The Church has been celebrating it since 1926, when the world and the Church found themselves in a demonic time. The demons of nationalism had led to the first great world war and with its end the demons had by no means disappeared, but were raging even more fiercely, fuelled by terrible economic crises. During this time, Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) opposed the hostilities and rivalries of the nations with the rule of Christ. His motto is programmatic and reads: “*Pax Christi in regno Christi*—The Peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ!”

One of the exorcisms of his time was the founding of the Pontifical Mission Societies in 1922, where he turned three existing French national mission societies into a universal, “papal” organization. The Church was a global player from the very beginning, transcending all racial, ethnic and political boundaries. The list of 17 (!) ethnic groups (Acts 2:9–11) that gather around Peter and the Spirit-filled disciples at Pentecost is testimony to this.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus talks about casting out demons. He says of himself: “If it is by the finger of God that [I] drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Lk 11:20). We will not make the mistake of earlier centuries, when the Church with its institutions, hierarchies and organs was virtually identified with the kingdom of God. The Church is not the kingdom of God. But it serves the kingdom of God, his reign in the hearts of all people and in the togetherness of all peoples.

Pius XI not only founded the Pontifical Mission Societies in 1922, he also introduced “World Mission Day” in October in 1926, at that time in preparation for the Feast of Christ the King, which he established in 1925 to be celebrated at that time on the last Sunday in October. It is about worldwide solidarity between Catholic Christians who pray with and for each other. It is about solidarity, about collecting financial support in all the churches of the world and creating a fair balance within the Church. World Mission Day drives the demons of “self-referentiality” (Pope Francis) out of us Catholics. It opens our hearts and opens them to global solidarity. Today in particular, World Mission Day is an important contribution to ensuring that “the peace of Christ may reign in the kingdom of Christ” (Pius XI).

Saturday, October 12, 2024

XXVII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Gal 3:22–29; Ps 105; Lk 11:27–28

What about our devotion to Mary, the Mother of God? It is a normal psychological phenomenon: if you are a “fan” of someone, then you automatically develop a devotion to their mother. In other words, when the son becomes a star, this automatically rubs off on the mother, as a glance at the family history of Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson or Elton John shows...

But our Lord and Saviour did not want to be a “Jesus Christ Superstar” à la Andrew Lloyd Webber himself, and he didn’t want that from his mother or his disciples either. Being adored on the outside was always too little for him. However, he did not reject it because he had not come to combat natural psychological phenomena, but to elevate them to the supernatural. He therefore did not defend himself against personal adoration, sympathy and “adulation” that was shown to him. He allows the crowd to greet him like a hero when he enters Jerusalem. But his motive for going to Jerusalem is not to establish a star cult around him, but so that a soldier who stabs him in the heart on the cross will be able to say: “Truly, this man was the Son of God!” (Mk 15:39) And from that point onwards, millions and billions of people will profess their faith in him.

We may, can and should love Mary with all our emotions. The feminine and maternal also play a role, because every person has a special, naturally tender relationship with their mother. That is allowed! Yes, her womb is blessed because she was allowed to carry within her that which the heavens cannot contain. Yes, her breast is blessed because she was allowed to breastfeed with her mother’s milk the one who wants to become nourishment for us all in the Eucharist. Jesus became incarnate so that he could cuddle up to this woman as a baby, whom he would then give to us as our mother on the cross. Vatican II says of him: “He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart” (*Gaudium et spes*, 22).

The natural is the prerequisite for the supernatural. If we love Jesus, we will automatically love the one who made his incarnation possible and who served him like no other human being. But an “adoration” of Mary would be too little. Jesus wants discipleship, Jesus wants imitation. St Bernard of Clairvaux (+1153) says: “Call on Mary, think of Mary. Do not let her name leave your heart. Above all, do not forget to imitate her example!”

Sunday, October 13, 2024

XXVIII Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

Wis 7:7–11; Ps 90; Heb 4:12–13; Mk 10:17–30

In this Missionary Month, Christ's call to follow him, to leave everything behind for the Gospel and eternal life, calls us. He wants people who are poor at heart, who seek only to live by the riches of his Word, who pray to receive and radiate his wisdom. Being a missionary disciple leads us to renounce the riches of this world and to choose the only riches that can satisfy our hearts: the riches of the Lord's love, as today's Psalm asks. "Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!" (Ps 90).

Pope Francis gave the example of Madeleine Delbrel as a seeker of God who lived in agnosticism until the age of twenty. Then she set out in search of God with a deep thirst and an emptiness that cried out in her anguish. Her journey of faith led her to choose a life totally dedicated to God, at the heart of the Church and 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)" (Catechesis 25. The passion for evangelization). Isn't that what this Sunday's letter to the Hebrews testifies to? The word of God is living and effective (Cf. Heb 4:12), and will be incarnated in us so that we can bear witness to it to others.

Another missionary disciple who left everything to follow Christ and be a witness to his Gospel is Brother Charles de Foucault. "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" (Catechesis 23. The passion for evangelization).

The missionary disciple has found the treasure of which Jesus speaks in today's Gospel. Continuing his catechesis on Charles de Foucault, the Pope speaks of 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.’ And very often our existence shouts worldly things, it calls out many stupid things, strange things, and he says: No, ‘all our existence 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” (Catechesis 23).

Jesus’ promise to anyone who leaves everything behind for his sake and the gospel is to enter eternal life, the kingdom! This is impossible for man, but possible with God! In this Missionary Month, let us celebrate God’s continuing call to all to follow him and give themselves for the Gospel and the Kingdom. Finally, let us allow God to make possible our desire to embrace mission wholeheartedly. This call is also reflected in the theme of next Sunday (World Mission Day): “Go and invite everyone to the banquet (cf. Mt 22:9).”

In “Come and follow me,” as in “Go and invite everyone,” there is a call to go. Let’s return 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.” It is what she calls the “spirituality of the bicycle” (cf. *Umorismo nell’Amore. Meditazioni e poesie*, Milan 2011, 56). “Only on the move, on the go, do we live in the balance of faith, which is an imbalance, but it is like that: like the bicycle. If you stop, it does not stay upright” (Catechesis 25, the Passion for Evangelization).

The rich man in the Gospel who seeks eternal life has not found joy, but the sadness of materialism. On the contrary for those who, have found true joy in giving everything and choosing Jesus, Pope Francis reminds us that today is an opportune moment to proclaim Jesus and the joy of the Gospel: “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)” (Catechesis 26).

Finally, let us join Pope Francis in giving thanks during this Missionary Month for all those who have responded to the call to leave everything behind for the proclamation of 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).

Monday, October 14, 2024

XXVIII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Gal 4:22–24,26–27,31-5:1; Ps 113; Lk 11:29–32

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks a word that is devastating: "This generation is evil..." If he said this to his listeners 2000 years ago, how much more so to ours! Wars, exploitation of nature, continuing poverty and hunger in large parts of the world, an unjust global economy ... make us sad, even depressed. And we Catholics are not in a phase of optimism either. There is so much uncertainty in the Church about how to deal with the changes. The understanding of marriage and the family, the protection of unborn life, the dignity and inviolability of the human being until natural death, and so on. What previously seemed clear has suddenly become murky.

A missionary Church must face up to reality. The world organism suffers from many diseases. Without a diagnosis, there is no cure. It is therefore our duty to contradict from the light of the Gospel when people try to sell us white as black and black as white. The values of the Gospel are clear and allow us to make a judgment: "This generation is evil!" Jesus says very clearly and apodictically.

We would also like a sign. There is a great longing in the Church for a "magic potion," like in the comic strip "Asterix and Obelix." One sip and we Christians are successful again... Some in the Church want to go back to the old ways, others want to be "modern" and adapt to the spirit of the times. Neither the one nor the other will bring us into the future.

Jesus counters the generation of 2000 years ago, which demanded earthly miraculous signs in order to be successful on earth, with an invitation to repentance. Where should the evil generation turn? To Jesus! He points to himself: Here is one who is more than Solomon! Here is one who is more than Jonah! Here is one who opens the door to the heart of the Father.

We can only change the world if we convert to Jesus and his "programme." Of course we Christians want to change, improve and heal this earthly world. Jesus did that too. But earthly success is temporary. Jesus works the fullness of redemption through his death. The real thing that Jesus wants to bring to a world that is so full of misery is love and justice. Or in his words: "My kingdom does not belong to this world" (Jn 18:36).

Tuesday, October 15, 2024

XXVIII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Memorial of Saint Teresa of Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church

Gal 5:1–6; Ps 119; Lk 11:37–41

The words addressed to the Pharisees are strong, challenging, but they must be listened to with special attention. Let us listen to these words again: “Of course, you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, but within yourselves you are filled with greed and wickedness. Foolish people! Has not the one who has made the outside also made the inside? Instead, rather give alms out of what you have, and then everything will be clean for you.” What needs to be cleansed? The inside or the outside? Within yourselves, you are filled with greed and wickedness... The problem is not the exterior, the appearance, but our heart, all the evil we can hide in it: greed, wickedness and all kinds of evil thoughts.

In effect, the Lord invites us to reflect on our hypocrisy, on our appearances, on everything we do to make ourselves look good, while our hearts do not correspond to what we present on the outside. He invites us to take care of our heart, of what makes us deep in our being. As always, the Lord invites us to a radical conversion. Here he proposes that we should give away all that we have as alms and everything will be clean for us. We will no longer want to hold on to more and more, to hoard wealth or to look good, at the risk of being self-centred.

The Lord thus invites us to cleanliness, but not just any cleanliness. It is not a question of legal formalism, repeated ablutions, careful washings or even steering clear of sinners who seem to exude uncleanness. It is not a question of avoiding tombs and casual defilement. The only cleanliness is that of the inside, Jesus explains: nothing that comes from the outside can make man unclean, because it is from within, from the hearts of men that wicked designs emerge (Mk 7:14–23). This is a new and liberating teaching that the disciples find difficult to grasp, to understand. It is doubtless easier for each of us to wash the outside than to clean the inside, our intimate thoughts, our heart and all the wickedness it can hold, all the evil we often wish on others.

What is highlighted here is the simplicity of faith and love, the direction towards which the disciples must gravitate, namely the pure heart: *blessed are the pure of heart, they will see God* (Mt 5:8). This purity is that of the centre of the person, encapsulated in the word spirit. The poor of heart is also the poor in spirit. It is the centre and the whole of the person. Let us think of Psalm 34:19 where it is written: *The Lord is near those who are heartbroken, and He saves those who are despondent in spirit*. These poor people are part of the great family of those who have been subjected to material and spiritual trials and can rely only on the Lord’s help. Each of them can confidently say: *I am poor and miserable, but the Lord is thinking of me* (Ps 40:18). The evangelization of the poor, with miracles, is the sign given by Jesus to those sent by John the Baptist, so that they may recognize that he is the awaited Messiah (Mt 11:5). The poor man awaits the Lord’s salvation and, trustingly, hopes in and carries out the

will of his Lord. His soul responds to his demands and commands. He is sure that his cry and prayer will reach the ear of the Lord who will save him according to his promise. He can already sing the praise of the Lord.

It was so that we would be free that Christ set us free, the apostle Paul explains. We are therefore invited to stand firm. *Do not put yourself under the yoke of slavery again* (Gal 5:1), the apostle explains. To see God, to present himself to him, no longer in his temple of Jerusalem, but in his Kingdom, moral *purity itself is no longer enough*. It requires the active presence of the Lord in daily life; it requires love, the presence of God-Love; then Man will be pure through and through. In fact, Jesus explains to his apostles: “*You are already purified by the word I have announced to you*” (Jn 15:3). “*He who has taken a bath need not wash himself, for he is completely pure; you too are pure*” (Jn 13:10).

Speaking of food, Peter is led to draw a threefold conclusion. There is no longer any impure food (Acts 10:15; 11:9); the uncircumcised themselves are no longer defiled (Acts 10:28); it is by faith that God now purifies the hearts of the Gentiles (Acts 15:9). Paul clarifies this question of purity by affirming that for the Christian, “*nothing is impure in itself*” (Rom 14:14). With the regime of the old Law gone, the observances of purity become “toothless prescriptions” from which Christ has freed us (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:16–23). Christ gave himself up for the Church to sanctify it through purifying it by bathing it with water (Eph 5:26). It is not a question of external purification, for the waters of baptism free us from all stain by associating us with the risen Jesus Christ (1: 3:21). We are indeed purified by our hope in God who, through Christ, has made us adopted children (1 Jn 3:3). As Christians, we must, from now on, purify ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit in order to complete the work of our sanctification (2Cor 7:1). *Everything is pure for the pure* (Ti 1:15) and now what counts before God is the deep disposition of a regenerated heart which is renewed (1 Tm 4:4). Christian charity springs from a pure heart, a good conscience and an upright faith (1 Tm 1:5). What a joy it is to serve the Lord with a pure conscience (2 Tm 1:3)! The opposite of impurity is holiness (1 Thes 4 : 7 s; Rom 6:19). In fact, we are invited to go to meet Christ, dead and risen; it is he who purifies us and delivers us from all evil.

How can we evangelize if we set ourselves apart from people we consider impure, sinful, defiled? How can we evangelize if we do not go to our contemporaries, our human sisters and brothers, whatever their religious convictions and degrees of holiness? It is up to each of us, missionary disciples, to allow to spring forth from our pure heart justice and faith, charity and peace, without forgetting missionary dynamism. The Spirit is given to us to progress on the path of holiness, love and justice. The Church offers us the sacraments and various other means to follow the Lord Jesus. You who seek justification by the Law, if you have separated yourself from Christ, you are fallen from grace if you do not rely on God’s mercy and tenderness, if you do not believe in the sanctifying Spirit. Disciples of Christ, it is through the Spirit and in faith that we must await the hoped-for righteousness and grow in holiness. For in Christ Jesus, what has value is not whether one is circumcised or not, but a faith which acts through charity.

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

XXVIII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Gal 5:18–25; Ps 1; Lk 11:42–46

In the Gospel, Jesus addresses the leaders, the animators of the religious experience of Israel. His way of speaking is prophetic, and to this end he uses “sorrows” which are oracles of misfortune and therefore point to behaviours that lead to ruin. These are warnings, just as Paul points out to the Galatians in the first reading the “works that come from the selfish disorder of man” and that keep them away from the Kingdom of God.

These vices cause us to lose the life of the Spirit and contrast with the fruits expected from a spiritual life, namely “love, joy, peace, generosity, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Let us now consider each of the behaviours and attitudes that Jesus wants to correct so that they may be redirected in harmony with the kingdom of God: “Woe to you Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and of rue and of every garden herb, but you pay no attention to judgment and to love for God.” (Lk 11:42a)

Jesus is not attacking the law itself (see Deut. 12:22; Lev. 27:30), but rather the way and the reason obedience to it is demanded. The Pharisees have put an excessive zeal into the demands and have fallen into a “detail” that causes them to lose the true meaning of what they are doing. This leads them to forget what is important: the love of God and justice towards their brothers and sisters.

In this regard, Pope Francis has reminded us of the right gradualness in the proclamation of the Gospel:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing. (EG 35)

“Woe to you Pharisees! You love the seat of honour in synagogues and greetings in marketplaces.” (Lk 11:43)

Being a religious leader confers a certain prestige, and a great danger is to seek honours or privileges. In this case, one thinks of oneself, of one’s own image, in an effort to be seen by others as pure and righteous, as good people. This attitude can make us lose the missionary way and seriously affect the proclamation of the Gospel:

Once again, Pope Francis enlightens us:

The centrality of the kerygma calls for stressing those elements which are most needed today: it has to express God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical. All this demands on the part of the evangelizer certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental. (EG 165)

“Woe to you! You are like unseen graves over which people unknowingly walk.” (Lk 11:44)

This is probably one of the most serious warnings. It echoes the requirement of purity in the cemeteries of Numbers 19:16, where touching a tomb was a cause of impurity, so they had to be made more visible with white paint. Luke's interpretation is novel: the tombs are the religious leaders who stand out (“whitened” is a reference to the visibility of which the second “woe!” speaks), and the people who constantly surround them to listen to their teachings are the ones who become impure, because in contact with them they are contaminated by their vices without realizing it. An evangelist who is not faithful to the Gospel can distort the message and lead others astray.

“Woe also to you, scholars of the law! You impose on people burdens hard to carry, but you yourselves do not lift one finger to touch them” (Lk 11:46).

The lawyers, to whom this last “woe” is addressed, were known for their rigorous interpretation of the law, to which they added some obligations that had no justification. But for their part, they cunningly managed not to do what they ordered others to do. This “woe” calls attention to the need for consistency and personal commitment to what we preach.

Let us take to heart this day the admonition of St. Paul: “If we have the life of the Spirit, let us act according to the same Spirit.”

Thursday, October 17, 2024

XXVIII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Memorial of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr

Eph 1:1–10; Ps 98; Lk 11:47–54

Today we commemorate St. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr, and the readings allow us to approach the mystery of the life of the prophet martyr, the apostle martyr. Although the Gospel is a continuation of the one we read yesterday, today the dramatic tone is greater, so much so that at the end Jesus is insidiously attacked by the scribes and Pharisees who had invited him to dinner.

Let us remember the context: Jesus had been invited to eat at a Pharisee's house, and his host seems surprised that Jesus had skipped the ritual ablutions, the washing before eating. This dinner seems to be narrated with the so-called Greek symposium in mind, that is, a solemn meal at which the guests discussed philosophical questions as they ate and drank. Luke's narrator uses this setting that is so familiar to his readers.

“Woe to you who build the memorials of the prophets whom your fathers killed.”

This accusation of persecuting and killing the prophets, who are the conscience of an entire people, runs through the Gospel of Luke from the Sermon on the Mount (Lk 6:22–23) and is taken up again in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 7:52). Jesus identifies himself as a prophet (Lk 4:24; 13:33–34).

The accusation of building tombs for the prophets is an insult that Jesus immediately clarifies by stating that the present generation is no better than the previous one and does nothing more than give continuity to the systematic killing of prophets and messengers of God. Precisely because of this continuity, the fact of building tombs, monuments and plaques in homage to the murdered prophets turns out to be a way of celebrating their violent deaths and thus of approving them.

“Therefore, the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and Apostles; some of them they will kill and persecute, in order that this generation might be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world.'”

Jesus attributes a quotation to the wisdom of God; the curious thing is that the quoted saying is not found in the Old Testament or in the other peritestaental writings. It could be seen as an invitation to identify Jesus himself as this personified wisdom.

Jesus then predicts the murder of some of his missionaries, including his own death. But these deaths, says the Lord, will not be forgotten, nor will they go unpunished; on the contrary, responsibility and the consequences of the damage done will have to be taken. As St. Ignatius of Antioch would say years later: “I am God's wheat, ground by the teeth of wild beasts and transformed into the pure bread of Christ. Divine justice, which transforms evil into good,

will reach all the acts of persecution and murder that have been committed throughout history.”

In this way, Jesus makes us see a connection between the behaviour of the people of Israel, who reject the prophets and messengers of God, and what will happen to Him in Jerusalem, and then to his apostles, and later to so many missionaries in the world until today.

“Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge.”

Jesus, in the name of God, expresses his prophetic indignation against this group of Pharisees, because their behaviour turns out to be a misinterpretation of the law, and all this in spite of the fact that their role among the people was precisely to be leaders, and yet they turned out to lead astray those who listened to them. They had “the key to the door of knowledge,” but it seems that they neither entered nor let anyone enter.

We missionaries cannot keep what we have received because, as we hear in the Letter to the Ephesians: “In accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will.”

“When Jesus left, the scribes and Pharisees began to act with hostility towards him and to interrogate him about many things, for they were plotting to catch him at something he might say.”

Everything ends in open hostility. Jesus, who is openly a friend of tax collectors and sinners, of the outcasts, of the unclean, does not refuse to eat with a man who belongs to one of the most intransigent groups in the interpretation of the law. Nevertheless, he makes them see how they have gone astray. They have built a religion of good practices, but without a liberating soul, and they take refuge in a formal and intransigent external commitment, but without mercy or compassion. In this way they have suffocated the Spirit who blows where it wills, transforming him into a scrupulous apparatus of prescriptions. They have lost the basis of their mission, which is to explain and interpret the Scriptures. They have shown themselves to be bad teachers, incapable of penetrating the meaning of the Scriptures themselves and incapable of transmitting to others the plan of God’s love revealed in them, much less of recognizing the One sent by the Father, Jesus of Nazareth, and they have departed from the plan projected by God, which, as St. Paul says, is “to make all things, things in heaven and things on earth, have Christ as their head.”

Friday, October 18, 2024

XXVIII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Feast of Saint Luke, evangelist

2 Tm 4:10-17b; Ps 145; Lk 10:1–9

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Luke, the Evangelist to whom is attributed the Gospel that has accompanied us almost constantly in these last days. It is important to remember that in his two books dedicated to Theophilus (theo-philos : friend of God), Luke articulates the two parts of the same work on the Ascension of Jesus (Lk 24:50–53; Heb 1:6–11). The ascension signifies both the culmination of Jesus' reign and the missionary sending of the disciples "to the ends of the earth." The writing of the Gospel (and the Acts of the Apostles) is a concrete form of mission.

On the basis of today's Gospel text, we will highlight the series of seven imperatives of a missionary (in fact, we would have ten if we added the three that appear in verses 10–12, which we are not reading today). In this way we will understand the missionary a little better, and we will also understand ourselves as missionary disciples. Let us see:

—Pray! (10:2).

The missionary is above all a praying person. As has been the case since Pentecost, and is confirmed in Acts 13:1–3, the mission begins with a community that prays and is clothed with the Spirit in order to send out those whom the Lord chooses among them. However, the 72 realized that although they were apparently many, in reality they were not enough: "The labourers are few."

—Go on your way! (10:3).

The attitude is always to be "on the way." The missionary is aware that he is entering a world full of dangers, that his life will always be threatened: "like lambs among wolves." The missionary will not subjugate others, he/she is a person of peace. As Pope Francis recalls in his message for this year's World Mission Day: "In proclaiming to the world 'the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 36), missionary disciples should do so with joy, magnanimity and benevolence that are the fruits of the Holy Spirit within them (cf. *Gal* 5:22). Not by pressuring, coercing or proselytizing, but with closeness, compassion and tenderness, and in this way reflecting God's own way of being and acting."

—Do not carry (10:4a).

The missionary travels detached from everything. There are four things that are necessary for a journey, and he detaches himself from them: money, a backpack for a snack and a change of clothes, sandals for long walks on rocky terrain. This does not mean that he stays "in the air," his security is in his faith in God who does not abandon him and who, as his Father, provides for his needs. This is so real that when Jesus asked them, "When I sent you forth

without a money bag or a sack or sandals, were you in need of anything?” “No, nothing,” they replied (Lk 22:35).

A certainty that was also felt by Paul and that is mentioned in today’s first reading: “But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it” (2 Tm 4:10).

—“and greet no one along the way” (10:4b),

It indicates that the missionary travels detached from everyone, nothing and no one distracts him from responding to the urgency of the mission.

—“Say!” (10:5).

The proclamation of the Gospel begins with the greeting of peace: “Shalom leká” (cf. Jn 6:23; Lk 24:36). It is not an empty formalism, but a gift that can be accepted or rejected.

This gift, which “peace-loving people” know how to welcome, is linked to the coming of salvation. This peace is the paschal gift of Christ (Luke 24:36; see also 2:14, 29; 7:42; Acts 10:36). A gift is received only by those who are open to it.

“The Gospel message always begins with a greeting of peace, and peace at all times crowns and confirms the relations between the disciples. Peace is possible because the Lord has overcome the world and its constant conflict ‘by making peace through the blood of his cross’ (Col 1:20).” (EG 229).

—“Stay!” (10:7).

The missionary does not go looking for comforts, so he is advised not to go from house to house, but to “stay” (10:7) and “eat and drink what is offered to you” (10:8b).

To “stay” means to enter deeply into the reality and the relational fabric of the home being evangelized, so that the Kingdom of God may break in from within (as Jesus did with the disciples of Emmaus): “Stay with us! ... So he went in to stay with them,” Lk 24:29; or like Paul in the house of Lydia (Acts 16:15). The missionary must know how to accept hospitality, which is a sign of the love of a God who provides. We must know not only how to give, but also how to receive.

—“Cure!” (10:9a).

Action precedes discourse. The missionary expresses himself first with actions and then with words that help understand what has happened. In Luke’s Gospel there are many healings that made the kingdom visible (see 11:20). The coming of the Messiah could be seen in them. Jesus now places this task in the hands of his missionaries.

—“Say!” (10:9b).

Just as the travelling Jesus proclaims everywhere the “good news of the kingdom” (4:43), the missionary is a proclaimer and witness of the definitive entry of God into history. The silent mission of works also needs the word, as St John Paul II said: “There can be no true

evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord” and without “the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelization work” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 19).

Let us remember that the Gospel is the greatest gift we Christians have. Therefore, we must share it with all men and women who are in search of a reason to live.

Let us bless the Lord through the Evangelist Luke.

“This is the new covenant that God made with Luke (cf. Jer 31:31),

He put into his heart the living and eternal Word (Jer 31:33).

He set him apart from the Greeks

so that he might go and bear fruit (cf. Jn 15:16).

Luke, the beloved physician (cf. Col 4:14),

the brother praised by all the Churches

for his proclamation of the Gospel (cf. 2 Cor 8:18).

Jew or Greek, there is no longer any difference,

For the Scripture says: “Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

He himself is Lord of all, generous to those who call on him.

He came to seek and to save what was lost (cf. Lk 19:10).

They will come to him from the east and from the west

from the north and from the south,

to partake of the banquet in the kingdom of heaven (cf. Lk 13:29)”.

(Prepared by the Apostolic Monastery of Piedra Blanca)

Saturday, October 19, 2024

XXVIII Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Memorial of Saints Jean de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, Priests, and Companions, Martyrs

Eph 1:15–23; Ps 8; Lk 12:8–12

After the discourse against the Pharisees and Rabbis, Luke gives us an instruction on the righteous behaviour of the disciples in the world.

It is useful to put ourselves in context in order to better understand today's gospel. The disciples, known as the "friends of Jesus," will soon be persecuted. But they should fear nothing, neither their enemies nor martyrdom, apart from God: "Do not be afraid ... but be afraid of..." (12:4–5), "not one of them has escaped the notice of God" (see 12:6).

"Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God."

God will not abandon his disciples in the face of persecution. This conviction is underlined in the passage we read today:

1. The Father Creator will sustain them, just as he watches over the lives of his little birds (12:6–7);
2. The Son will sustain them at the hour of final judgment (12:8–9);
3. The Holy Spirit will assist them by putting on their lips the words they need at the moment of interrogation before the tribunal (12:11–12).

There is only one "but": If God is committed to the persecuted disciple, then the disciple must also be committed enough not to back out: he must "acknowledge" and not "deny" that he is a friend of Jesus (12:8–9).

On the other hand, whoever sees in the earthly Jesus only a man and in him offends the "Son of Man" (= Messiah) can be forgiven: "Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven" (12:10a); see, for example, the account of the Passion: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do"; (23:34).

The serious problem is that the one who closes himself definitively to the action of the Holy Spirit manifested in Jesus and the disciples will be lost forever: "the one who blasphemes against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven." (12:10b).

Through the disciples' profession of faith, the Holy Spirit will always bear witness to the risen Jesus, lifted up by the Father from the depths of death, and will lead each person to salvation. It is the Holy Spirit who gives everyone the possibility of repentance and forgiveness (see Acts 2:32–41; 3:12–26 and 5:30–32).

Let us look at the consequence for the persecutor: precisely because the Holy Spirit works through the apostolic proclamation of Jesus, the one who rejects the "testimony" of the

disciples cannot be forgiven, because he has despised the possibility of forgiveness. This is “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,” which makes him an “adversary of God” (Acts 5:39).

We should pray, as St. Paul does, that the proclamation will be received for what it is, and that all “May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe.”

Sunday, October 20, 2024

XXIX Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

World Mission Sunday

Is 53:10–11; Ps 33; Heb 4:14–16; Mk 10:35–45

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for World Mission Day is: “Go and invite everyone to the banquet” (Mt 22:9). The banquet is that of the wedding feast of the Son, of the One who comes to marry all humanity and therefore wants to invite everyone to the wedding feast. He says, “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 to be immersed in our humanity from birth to his passion and death, when he will give his life for the many? The Bridegroom has been tested in every way and offers us a love of compassion, mercy and deliverance (Psalm of the day). More than that, he offers us his life in return—what a greater grace, what a greater gift! We are invited to a sublime, wonderful, merciful wedding (2nd reading)!

The Bridegroom speaks of serving us, which is not our wedding custom. He is the servant who was crushed by suffering and who will vindicate the multitude of his brothers and sisters in humanity (First Reading). Thus, on the menu of the banquet, he offers to serve us salvation, nothing less. His sacrifice, offered in the Holy Eucharist, is a healing grace for our wounded humanity. Yes, we expect our new life from him, sings the Psalm, may his love be upon us, our hope is in him. Let us invite everyone to the banquet of the Eucharist, to the wedding feast of the Lamb: this is our universal mission, *ad gentes*, to all peoples. In his message for today, Pope Francis tells us: “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’s look at the life of a baptized woman to see what it means to be given the grace to serve our loved ones, even to the point of drinking the cup of suffering and sacrifice. Pope Francis gives us the example of Josephine Bakhita from Sudan: “Born in Darfur—battered 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. [...] 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, who had never owned anything, treasured it jealously. Looking at it, she experienced inner liberation, because *she felt she was understood and loved* and therefore *capable of understanding and loving*: this was the beginning. [...] 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. And this is the work that 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 23:34) [...]. We can say that St 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. And this is very important: 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 (Catechesis 22, the passion for evangelization).

Finally, the call to drink the cup and lay down one's life can invite missionary disciples to lay down their lives for Christ. They are nourished at the banquet of the Eucharist and called to conform their lives to this mystery of nuptial love. Since Jesus gave his life for us, they can give their lives out of love for him and for their loved ones. Here's how Pope Francis explains it, inspired by the martyrdom of St. Lawrence: "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 for 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 the brethren" (1 Jn 3:16). Saint Lawrence understood this, my brethren, 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." (Catechesis 11, 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). But, were these persecutions something of those times? No, no: today. Today there are persecutions of Christians throughout the world, many, many. 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 brethren, in imitation of Jesus.” (Catechesis 11).

On this World Mission Day, let us respond to the call of all the baptized to serve and to give our lives. 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 and support it concretely through our financial offerings dedicated entirely to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the pontifical work that helps young Churches. Let us stand firm in the affirmation of our faith, which has as its model the Servant and High Priest Jesus, who gives his life anew today in the banquet of his Eucharist. Let’s go and invite everyone to this banquet of true food, the bread of eternal life!

Finally, even if we’re tempted to stay at the banquet, to stay with Jesus, there’s always the call to mission. Go, says Christ. “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.” (Catechesis 4).

Why invite, why announce this banquet to everyone? Pope Francis continues: “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 yet know it! This is the reason for the proclamation. Going forth and bringing the joy of what we have received. (Catechesis 4, the passion for evangelization)

Monday, October 21, 2024

XXIX Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Eph 2:1–10; Ps 100; Lk 12:13–21

This is the Missionary Week and the teachings of Jesus continue to illuminate our being and actions as missionary disciples. Today's texts, from the First Reading, invite us to abandon "the criteria of this world," which are moved by "the instincts, desires and thoughts of our disorder and selfishness," and invite us to welcome Christ and "immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us." The Gospel passage is an excellent opportunity for Jesus to redirect us according to the criteria that emanate from the mercy and love manifested by God in Christ.

A person in the street approaches Jesus to ask him to mediate in a family conflict. It is about the younger brother who claims the rightful inheritance from his older brother who seems to have taken it (12:13).

Jesus refuses to intervene in the dispute (12:14). With his words he implies that he has not been given judicial power to settle the matter, but above all he has another argument that had already appeared in the debate with the Pharisees: "Take care to guard against all greed" (12:15; see 11:39) Greed is an indicator of living according to "the standards of this world." Moreover, as St. Paul says, "the love of money is the root of all evils" (1 Tim 6:10).

Greed, the love of money, is expressed in the desire, sometimes compulsive, to fill oneself with things, to live in abundance of possessions (12:15b). This is where the theme of "life" comes in. What is it that "assures" life, that is, what gives it content, joy, fullness, what sustains it here and what guarantees it at the end of biological life?

The foolish rich man in the parable is a man who ardently desires to "live," but who in fact goes in the opposite direction of his own intentions: he goes towards ruin.

The rich man thinks he is doing an intelligent exercise when he thinks about what he is going to do to preserve his harvest and have a secure life for the future: he is going to tear down, build up, store all that he has, and live a good life, secure in the knowledge that he has good reserves. This is an exercise in sustainable business planning. But the man who thought he was being intelligent in managing his resources ended up doing something foolish; he forgot that his life is a gift and that the "good life" is a gift that comes from God and not from accumulated goods.

God's criteria are different:

—Goods are not for one person alone, but to be shared. It is necessary to overcome "greed."

—Material goods do not "secure" life; only God can give and preserve it.

—Earthly life is limited and finite, therefore God has “raised us up with Christ and in Christ, and with Him has reserved for us a place in heaven. The most intelligent planning we can do is to plan for our future in God’s eternity.

The good disciple is the one who makes himself rich in the sight of God (12:21), recognizing material goods as necessary but relative to the final destiny of life. Everything is a gift from God. Therefore, we become rich by “giving,” even “giving out of our poverty,” and by “doing the good that God has disposed us to do.” In this way, our heart becomes like God’s, with whom we want to live in eternal communion.

Tuesday, October 22, 2024

XXIX Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Eph 2:12–22; Ps 85; Lk 12:35–38

Until the last days of his earthly life, St. John Paul II never ceased to proclaim with zeal and determination the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ, fully convinced that Christ “came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

The inaugural words of St. John Paul II continue to resonate within us: **“Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ.”** Even in the face of death, he prayed to God that “his Passover” would be useful to the *“important cause I seek to serve: the salvation of men and women, the preservation of the human family and, within it, all the nations and peoples [...], useful for the people that He has specially entrusted to me, for the matter of the Church and for the glory of God Himself.”*

We could affirm that in the person of St. John Paul II we can contemplate those “Blessed servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival.”

The good disciple has his eyes set on the goal. With his heart set on God (Lk 12:22–32) and in the exercise of charity (Lk 12:33–34), he walks towards fullness with his “tunic on” and “light his lamps” (12:35) in the present.

The parable of the “vigilant servants” that we read today presents the disciple as a “servant” who knows how to wait for his “master” to come. This parable presents two moments.

From the servants to their master

According to the first part of the parable (12:35–36), waiting for the Lord is done with “the tunic on (gird your loins)” and “the lamps lighted.”

—The **“tunic on (gird your loins)”**. Normally, people walked into the house with the tunic loose, without a belt; it is the equivalent of wearing comfortable clothes. On the other hand, “to be girded” was appropriate for one who was ready for work or travel, as in Ex 12:11; let us also remember that Jesus “girded himself” to serve at the Last Supper.

—The **“lighted lamps.”** The lamps in the house were extinguished when the family went to bed. Therefore, “lamps burning” is a sign of activity in the house. For Mt 5:16, these lamps are the “good works” and their evangelizing radiation.

With these two images Jesus teaches that the disciple who knows how to live “waiting” is the one who knows how to “watch.” Vigilance is the opposite of falling asleep or entering into a situation of rest. The Gospel does not allow carelessness, it leaves no room for laziness, it has no rest. To “watch” is always to be ready for action, it is always to be in shape to live the demands of the Gospel (“girded garments”) and to radiate them to the other brothers and sisters (“lighted lamps”).

From the Lord to His Servants

The second part of the parable (12:37–38) refers to the reward for those who are “**vigilant**” (12:37) and “**prepared**” (12:38). Their reward is described with the highest qualification given in the Gospel: “**Blessed!**” This means that in their attitude of waiting, of openness to God’s future, each person lives his or her true happiness. And this qualification, which ennoble the present, is followed by an even greater gift in the future: Jesus will be for him a servant, that is, he will offer us all the gifts of his service throughout his ministry.

The reference to the different moments of the night reminds us of the importance of perseverance. It is easy and common to become tired on this journey, therefore: blessed is the one “**whom his master on arrival finds doing so.**”

Wednesday, October 23, 2024

XXIX Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Eph: 3:2–12; Is 12:-6; Lk 12:39–48

This last sentence of today’s Gospel may catch our attention: “To whom much has been given, much will be asked; to whom much has been entrusted, more will be demanded.” What do we have without having received it from the Lord? We have nothing. Everything comes from the Lord: our parents, our life, what we have acquired during our life, education, training, material, and spiritual goods and, of course, what each of us has become. The question is: what have we done with all that we have received?

Jesus asks us not to imitate the servant who does not care about the return of his Lord. Let us listen once more: “If the servant says to himself, ‘My master is late in coming,’ and begins to beat the servants, eat, drink and get drunk, then when the master comes, on the day when his servant does not expect it and at the hour when he does not know it, he will cast him aside and make him share the fate of the unfaithful.” Of course, we can think about the end of the world, but it seems to me that it is every day that the Lord comes to us, that he challenges us and asks us if we are still in service. Are we at the service of God, the Church, our brothers, and sisters?

In the Gospel accounts and speeches, we do not find any invitation to work or instructions regarding work. But it is said that Jesus was a “craftsman” (Mt 6:3), the son of a craftsman (Mt 13:55). His first disciples were fishermen (Mt 1:16–20), one was a tax collector (Mt 2:14). There will be a passage from a profession learned from the father, and whose function is to ensure the subsistence of the family, to an office aroused by a charismatic “vocation,” promoted by God or by one of his spokesmen, to create a new activity for the good of the multitude, a bit like Moses, David, and other guides of Israel. Let us think of Elisha and Amos, farmers, or stock breeders, who became prophets. The apostles, for example, changed their professional lives because of their encounter with Jesus, the Christ. This is not a kind of promotion, according to human parameters. Rather, it is a call to become “servants” of the Lord for a work of a spiritual nature, which will involve persecutions (Mt 5:11–12), humiliations (Mt 23:11–12) and even the gift of life (Mt 4:25; 23:34–35).

In the parables, various kinds of work are mentioned: the sower (Mt 13:3), the farm worker (Mt 20:1), the pearl merchant (Mt 13:45), the porter (Mt 24:45), the manager (Lk 16:1), but also the housewife kneading flour (Mt 13:33). There is encouragement to love diligence at work, together with attention and wisdom, qualities that make the servant reliable (Mt 8:9; 24:45; 25:21). Also encouraged is a sense of confidence in a sure outcome, the result of work well done (Mt 7:24–25; 24:46; 25:29). There is no merit in being worthy of God, for everyone should consider himself a “useless servant,” content simply to have done his duty (Lk 17:10).

Do we need to talk about the teaching and healing ministries that the disciples are to carry out in following Jesus? (Mt 9:37–38; Jn 5:17; 9:4) Should we compare this work to that of the

ploughman, the sower, the harvester, the shepherd, or the sinner? This work produces fruits, or a salary is expected, a reward for the service rendered (Mt 10:10; 20:2; Lk 10:7). But surely this is a metaphor? Commitments of a spiritual nature are valued. The Master directs the desire towards lasting heavenly rewards that fill with supreme happiness. We must go beyond Qohelet's criticism of the vanity of human activity. "If anyone does not want to work, let him not eat either" (2 Thes 3:10). This is the advice of Paul the Apostle. He who steals, let him steal no more; rather, let him take the trouble to work honestly with his hands, so that he may have something to share with those in need (Eph 4:28). We must not only provide for ourselves, but also share with others, especially those who are disadvantaged. In this area, Paul presents himself as an example to be emulated. In fact, the work of Christ and the disciples imitates that of God himself (Jn 4:34; 5:17; 17:4). It becomes an inspiring model for every sector and modality of human work, introducing the principle of "service" (Lk 22:26–27; Jn 13:13–17), of "gratuitousness" (Mt 10:8; 2Cor 11:7), but also of the renunciation of the accumulation of goods (Mt 10:10). Generosity is strongly desired, because it allows others to benefit from the fruit of one's own labour (Mt 19:21). Is this sharing, not a clear sign of love?

Work that is taken on as "service" (*diakonia*) and ordered by the Lord bears fruit for all (1 Cor 9:22). It is therefore important to have collaborators, good collaborators in the precious task of proclaiming the Gospel, who are ultimately "collaborators with God" (1 Cor 3:9; Mk 16:20). Missionary work can be compared to agricultural (1Cor 3:5–9) and/or construction work (1 Cor 3:10.14). But it must be recognized that it is only God who makes the plant grow (1 Cor 3:7). Christ alone is the solid foundation of the building that is the Church (1 Cor 3:11).

It is therefore important to give thanks to the Lord when what we do succeeds: "Give thanks to the Lord, proclaim his name, proclaim among the peoples his great deeds! Say it again: "Sublime is his name! God chooses us to cooperate in his mission, in the *Missio Dei*, even though we are fragile, sinful, and small. Listen to Paul: "I have become a minister of this Gospel by the gift of the grace that God has given me through the energy of his power. To me, who am truly the least of all the faithful, grace has been given to proclaim to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ. Let us give thanks and may the Lord continue to fill us with his gifts, with his Spirit who will make us extraordinary workers and missionaries in the footsteps of Paul, Peter, St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Pope Francis and all the witnesses of Christ Jesus.

Thursday, October 24, 2024

XXIX Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Optional Memorial: St. Anthony Mary Claret

Eph: 3:14–21; Ps 33; Lk 12:49–53

Paul, the missionary to the Gentile world, prayed endlessly from his place of confinement for the missions. He is of the strong conviction, and rightly so, that prayer is a *conditio sine qua non* for the works of the missions to come to fruition. That is why the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) always ask, apart from material gifts, that prayers should also and always be offered for the missions.

We should therefore learn from the example of St. Anthony Mary Claret, “spiritual father of Cuba.” Before embarking upon his missionary journey, he made three separate pilgrimages to Our Lady of the Pillar, Patroness of Spain; to the Virgin of Montserrat, Patroness of Catalonia and Our Lady of Fussimanya near his village. In so doing, he was preparing “to set the earth on fire” with the love of God.

Let us therefore, following his footsteps continue to entrust the missions, through the intercession of Mary our Mother, to the Lord. Amen.

Friday, October 25, 2024

XXIX Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Eph: 4:1–6; Ps 24; Lk 12:54–59

Mission continues ad infinitum. In fact, non-existence of the missions is tantamount to the non-existence of the Church, since the Church by its very essence is missionary (cf AG № 2).

This assertion is clearly demonstrated by the witness of the early Apostles. Even from the dungeon of his prison, St. Paul urges the people of Ephesus to remain committed “to the call they have received.” This commitment is necessitated by the fact that even today, as echo in the responsorial psalm, there are still some people that want to see the face of the Lord.

However, the need to decipher the signs of the time, as cautioned by the Lord in the Gospel, cannot be neglected. We pray therefore that the Holy Spirit will guide us in “new ways” in the spread of the Good News. Amen!

Saturday, October 26, 2024

XXIX Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Eph 4:7–16; Ps 122; Lk 13:1–9

The image of the Church as a mosaic or an orchestra in which each person is playing different instruments but producing a harmonious melody is always fascinating. This shows the diverse approaches to the one mission. Repeatedly, St. Paul in his missionary works, emphasized this reality.

In the 1st reading of today, he reminds us that some are Apostles, other prophets, evangelists, other pastors and teachers but all are called to build up the Body of Christ—the Church.

This mosaic (Church) is made up of both the good and bad; sinners and righteous. However, it undergoes continual purification through repentance. God who revealed Himself as “compassionate and gracious” (Cf. Ex 34:6) always invite us as the Lord says in the Gospel, to repentance and purification or to fine-tune the orchestra so as to produce more melodious songs. In so doing, the Church moves from bad to good; from good to better and from better to the best.

May Mary, Queen of the missions continue to intercede for us all, amen!

Sunday, October 27, 2024

XXX Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Jer 31:7–9; Ps 126; Heb 5:1–6; Mk 10:46-52

The cries of the earth, thirsting for healing, justice, sharing and peace, are heard in the cry of the blind man of the Gospel, who calls out all the more. In this Missionary Month, we pray for the universal mission of proclaiming Jesus to the world, the source of life and salvation for humanity. Then, at God's invitation, we hear another cry from his missionary disciples: "Cry out for joy!" They call for joy and faith: "Rise up with confidence, 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 in the midst of tears and suffering of every kind. It brings together and forms people who are all saved together!

Pope Francis reminds us of the reason for the joyful proclamation required of 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 (Catechesis 26, the passion for evangelization).

In the present context of secularization and in a world so 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 have met the Son who has destroyed death and made life shine. We are fed at the banquet that offers us his presence and his life in abundance. At the end of every banquet we are sent out in Christ's name: "Go!" With the joy of having this presence within us, we set out to be his heralds in this 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" (Evangeli 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 (Catechesis 26, the passion for evangelization).

In the face of the wonders that God the Father has accomplished in our lives, may this Missionary Month, as it draws to a close, remind us of our mission to proclaim and witness to 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, 22 January 2023).

In these last days of Missionary Month, 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 22:10). What is more, “the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame” (Lk 14:21), 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 22:12).

Monday, October 28, 2024

Feasts of Sts. Simon and Jude, Apostles

Eph 2:19–22; Ps 19; Lk 6:12–19

“Their message goes out through all the Earth” encapsulates the heroic deeds of the Apostles and early Christians in their missionary endeavours. We celebrate two of these great men today; St. Simon and St. Jude, who both gave their lives for the proclamation of the Gospel.

To this great missionary enterprise, the Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul tells us that “you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). It is a call to “communion, participation and mission” as underlined by the synodal journey that the Church is going through now. It is also a reminiscence of the missionary theme of baptized and sent, in which all the baptized, are called by name individually by the Lord and sent to work in his vineyard. We cannot therefore sit on the fence or be inactive in this great endeavour.

Through the intercession of Saints Simon and Jude, may we continuously say “yes” to the call of the Lord in spreading the Good News to the ends of the earth, through our words, but especially through our works. Amen!

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

30th Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Eph 5:21–33; Ps 128; Lk 13:18–21

The parable of the mustard seed and yeast are two parables that show how the mission (kingdom) progresses slowly but surely under the providence of God. It re-echoes the famous saying of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta: “to do small things with great love.”

At times, our efforts of evangelization may appear minute or insignificant but they are the mustard seed and yeast needed that will germinate or rise later to bear fruits. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the great missionaries who worked, sometimes in very difficult and challenging situations, to make sure that the Gospel is heard. The onus is now on us today, to uphold and continue to build on their efforts. We can do this by using as one of the means, the paradigm that St. Paul gives us today in the 1st reading; making ourselves docile and submissive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and loving the Church—the Body of Christ unconditionally. May the Lord help us now and always! Amen.

Wednesday, October 30, 2024

30th Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Eph 6:1–9; Ps 145; Lk 13:22–30

The image of Jesus as an itinerant preacher, making his journey through towns and villages, depicts from the very onset the missionary journey of the Church. The mission is never stagnant but rather dynamic.

It is also made clear by the Lord that the mission is not a safari, nor a tourist journey. Rather, it entails challenges and difficulties. It is striving to pass through the narrow door.

At the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem, the evangelist Luke tells us the Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem (Lk 9:51). Even when he was denied passage through a Samaritan village, he took another route and continued. This is a clear indication that there are and there will always be challenges associated with the mission. However, the remedy is not to quit but rather to find the courage to discover new avenues to continue. May the Lord grant fortitude and courage to all missionaries. Amen!

Thursday, October 31, 2024

30th Week in Ordinary Time—Year B

Eph 6:10–20; Ps 144; Lk 13:31–35

In his closing message, St. Paul reminds the faithful of Ephesus to draw their strength from the Lord and from his power (Cf. Eph 6:10). In other words, the disciples should be anchored in the Lord in order to be able to overcome the obstacles associated with their missionary endeavours. The words of the Lord himself in the Gospel of John come to mind: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). So, not only do we overcome the “foxes” of today but we also yield much fruit.

The mission belongs to the Lord. Therefore, there is need to draw strength from him through the celebration of His Word and the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. In the midst of challenges, prayers (Masses) should be offered for the mission. We have the responsibility of requesting Masses for those on the field of the mission. May the Lord continue to guide, bless and keep all missionaries under his protection. Amen!