

Sunday Gospel Reflections for Mission Month

Sunday, October 4, 2026 Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 5:1-7; Ps 80; Phil 4:6-9; Mt 21:33-43

According to the Gospel tradition, on the eve of His Passion, Jesus told the parable of the murderous tenants, in which He foreshadowed the dramatic event of His death. The liturgy of this Sunday presents it by highlighting one aspect of His message, namely the fundamental dogma of Israel—its identity as the chosen people. Indeed, as the first reading, the text offers a passage from Isaiah with the allegory of the vineyard, which describes God’s love for this people, who, instead of remaining faithful, rebelled against Him: a betrayal that consisted essentially of violating the laws contained in the Decalogue, which formed the basis of the covenant between God and Israel. Without the practice of justice, the covenant couldn’t endure, and Isaiah affirmed this, threatening the destruction of the vineyard.

Jesus takes up this theme, addressing, as Luke had emphasized shortly before, the chief priests and elders, that is, the guardians of the covenant. They considered themselves intermediaries between God and His people, and from this they derived honour, respect, power, and material advantage. By virtue of this prerogative, they interfered in the lives of the people, placing burdens on their shoulders that they themselves were unwilling to bear (Mt 23:4). And to secure these privileges, they allied with the Romans and participated with them in the exploitation of the people. Against this instrumentalization of religion, Jesus had protested by driving out the dove sellers and money changers from the Temple, who acted on behalf of the priests. Now, He compares them to the murderous tenants who rebel against the owner of the vineyard, announcing their ruin and the transfer of His covenant to others.

Matthew implies that Jesus was referring to the Church, which, according to Paul, represents the Israel of the last days, the bearer of the new covenant promised by the prophets. Unfortunately, over the centuries, even the leaders of the Church have often fallen into the same contradictions as the priests and elders of Israel, treating adherence to the Church as the only path to salvation and imposing on believers doctrines and practices not always in accordance with the teaching of Jesus. This is what Paul wanted to avoid when, in the passage from the Letter to the Philippians read in this Sunday’s liturgy, he urged them to treasure everything that is true, noble, just, pure, lovable, honourable—in a word, everything that is virtuous and worthy of praise, wherever it may be found.

Pope Francis alluded to this directive when, in his *Message for World Mission Sunday 2025*, he urged Christians to be “missionaries of hope among the nations” and not to confine themselves to closed or self-referential attitudes, but to proclaim the Gospel by reopening dynamics of fraternal closeness, compassion, and service. Many missionaries overcame the temptation to which the Pope refers when they found themselves among non-Christian populations, for whom being priests conferred no privilege and the structures and patterns of the ancient churches no longer applied. Their experience has certainly helped prevent us from conceiving the Church as the sole ark of salvation, but rather as a community of brothers and sisters “one in Christ, united in mission”(theme for WMS 2026), at the service of true peace and of shared, solidary progress.

(see www.missionfoi.ca/mois_missionnaire/ / message of His Holiness for the 100th World Mission Sunday)

Sunday, October 11, 2026 Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 25:6-10a; Ps 23; Phil 4:12-14,19-20; Mt 22:1-14

Today's liturgy unfolds before us like a magnificent vision of God's generosity, a vision that speaks deeply to the Church's missionary identity. At the centre of the Word of God stands a powerful and recurring image: a banquet prepared by God Himself. This isn't accidental. The Scriptures use the language of the feast to describe salvation, communion, joy, and fulfilment.

In the first reading from Isaiah, we hear one of the most consoling promises in the Bible: "On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines." This isn't merely poetic imagery; it's a theological revelation. God's plan is universal. The feast is prepared not for a select few, not for the perfect, not for the privileged, but for all peoples. Here we encounter the deepest foundation of mission. The Church didn't create her missionary vocation; she receives it from the very heart of God, who desires that all humanity be gathered into His life.

Isaiah continues with words of profound hope: God will remove the veil covering the nations, destroy death forever, and wipe away tears from every face. Salvation is described not as escape, but as healing; not as exclusion, but as restoration. Mission, therefore, is participation in God's work of life and consolation. It's the extension of divine mercy into the wounds of the world.

Psalm 23 echoes this same vision through the tender image of the shepherd: "The Lord is my shepherd... You spread the table before me." Even in the valley of darkness, there is no fear. Why? Because God's presence transforms everything. Christian life is sustained by divine generosity. Gratitude becomes the soil from which mission grows. One who has experienced God's care can't remain closed in self-concern.

When writing to the Philippians, Saint Paul reveals the interior freedom of the missionary disciple: "I know how to live in humble circumstances; I know how to live with abundance." (Phil 4:12) Paul's secret isn't personal strength but Christ-centred confidence: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." Missionary life inevitably passes through hardship and consolation, scarcity and abundance. Yet when Christ becomes the true treasure, circumstances lose their tyranny.

Paul also expresses gratitude for the solidarity of the community: "You have shared in my hardship" (Phil 4:14). Mission is never an isolated enterprise. It's sustained by prayer, generosity, sacrifice, and communion. Here we hear the constant teaching of the Popes, especially in their messages for World Mission Sunday. Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us that mission belongs to the entire Church. Some are sent, others support, but all are involved. The Gospel advances through a network of faith and charity.

Pope Francis speaks of a Church that "goes forth," a Church that refuses to remain enclosed in comfort or self-preservation. Mission, he insists, is born from an encounter with Christ and expressed through compassion. Evangelization isn't propaganda; it's the sharing of joy. It's the natural overflow of a heart touched by mercy.

Pope Leo XIV, continuing this missionary vision, calls on the Church to rediscover hope as the driving force of evangelization. Mission is sustained by the certainty that Christ is alive and active in history. We aren't spreading an abstract message but witnessing a living Lord. Hope gives courage. Hope generates perseverance. Hope makes mission possible even in a weary world.

In the Gospel, Jesus presents the parable of the wedding banquet. Once again, the image of the feast. But now we encounter a dramatic tension: those who are invited refuse to come. The tragedy isn't hostility but indifference. They're distracted, preoccupied, and absorbed in their concerns. How contemporary this sounds. Mission today often encounters not direct rejection but quiet forgetfulness, a life crowded with noise and urgency.

Yet the king doesn't cancel the feast. He widens the invitation: "Go therefore into the main roads and invite everyone you find" (Mt 22:9). This is mission in its purest form. The Gospel moves outward. Boundaries dissolve. Unexpected guests are welcome. Here we see the Church's missionary mandate: the invitation of God must reach all, especially those who never imagined they were included.

But the parable ends with a sobering reminder: the guest without the wedding garment. This isn't about external propriety but interior transformation. God's mercy is universal, but it's never superficial. To accept the invitation is to accept conversion. Mission isn't merely inclusion; it's participation in a life reshaped by grace.

Both Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV emphasize this essential balance. The Church proclaims boundless mercy and calls for genuine discipleship. The Gospel consoles, but it also transforms. Divine love welcomes us as we are, yet it never leaves us unchanged.

These readings speak directly to our lives. We're invited to the banquet. The Eucharist we celebrate is already the foretaste of Isaiah's feast. Here Christ gathers His people. Here heaven touches earth. Here gratitude becomes mission. Each Mass ends with a sending, reminding us that faith must move outward into witness.

Let us ask ourselves: Do we live as those who know they're invited? Does our faith radiate joy? Does our hope become visible to others? The world longs, often silently, for meaning, for healing, for hope. The Church is sent as a sign of God's banquet — a sign that communion is possible, that mercy is real, and that life triumphs over death. Isaiah's words become our prayer: "This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad" (Is 25:9). Mission is ultimately this rejoicing shared.

Pope Leo XIV rejoices and says his gratitude to today's joyful missionaries: I would like to express my special gratitude to today's *ad gentes* missionaries. Like Saint Francis Xavier, they have left their homeland, their families and all sense of security in order to proclaim the Gospel and bring Christ and his love to places that are often challenging, poor, conflict-ridden or culturally distant. Despite adversity and human limitations, they continue to give themselves joyfully, because they know that Christ himself, and his Gospel, are the greatest treasures we can offer.

Through their perseverance, they demonstrate that God's love transcends all barriers. The world still needs these courageous witnesses of Christ, and ecclesial communities still need new missionary vocations. We must always keep them close to our hearts and continually pray to the Father for them. May he grant us the gift of young people and adults who are willing to leave everything behind to follow Christ on the path of evangelization even to the ends of the earth! (Message for the 100th World Mission Sunday 2026)

Sunday, October 18, 2026: 100th World Mission Sunday

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time- Is 45:1,4-6; Ps 96; 1Thes 1:1-5b; Mt 22:15-21

On this World Mission Sunday, as we pray for missionaries across the globe and for all those whom they're striving to bring Jesus and his saving work, we have in the Gospel a reminder of the heart of the Gospel: that God has made us out of love in his image and likeness, that we're his, and he calls us to live with him.

These truths are revealed in Jesus' contentious conversation with the Pharisees and Herodians.

These two groups — rigourists and laxists respectively, and therefore generally opposed to each other— co-conspire to trap Jesus. Their question seems simple, but it's malevolently calculated: "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" If Jesus said yes, they knew, he risked alienating the people. If he said no, he could be accused of inciting rebellion against Rome. But Jesus didn't allow himself to be trapped. Instead, he asked for a coin and poses a deeper question: "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" When they replied, "Caesar," he responded, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Jesus' response is more than a brilliant escape from a political dilemma. He led us beyond a question about taxes to the truth of our identity. If the coin bears Caesar's image and belongs to Caesar, then what bears God's image belongs to God. As the first chapter of the Bible attests, we have been created in God's image and likeness. Through baptism, that created reality has been intensified: we have been united to Christ, made children of the Father, and temples of the Holy Spirit. We don't belong partially to God. We belong entirely to him. He claims us lovingly as his own.

This is the foundation of our Christian lives and our Christian mission.

Mission doesn't begin with what we say or do, but with whom we are. When we recognize that our life is a gift from God and ultimately belongs to him, everything changes. Our time, our relationships, our work, and our resources—all become part of a self-offering back to him with gratitude and love.

Pope Leo XIV, in his message for *World Mission Sunday 2026*, wrote that, "The more united we're in Christ, the better able we will be to carry out together the mission that he entrusts to us." From that union with God, and in him with each other, flows all missionary fruitfulness.

This is why the Gospel challenges us today. Many of us try to live divided lives. We compartmentalize. Perhaps we give something to God, or even a lot to God, but we hold things back for ourselves. Jesus, however, calls us to a total gift, to love God not just with some, or even most, of our mind, heart, soul and strength, but all. To "render to God what is God's" means to give him what he has given us — and he has given us our lives, our time, our talents, our relationships, our material resources, all that we're and have. It means treating him not just as part of our life but as its source, summit, root and centre. It likewise means living in the image of the Trinity, in a loving communion of people with our brothers and sisters. This is the heart of mission, as we and the whole Church seek to proclaim to the world in whose image they've been made and seek to bring them to have true communion with God and with us.

On this *World Mission Sunday*, we remember that God is interested in 100 out of 100, in 8.1 billion out of 8.1 billion. As Saint Paul VI wrote for this celebration *in 1971*, “If there was ever a time when Christians, more than ever in the past, are called to be a light that illuminates the world, a city on a mountain, a salt that gives flavour to the lives of men, this, undoubtedly, is our time. We, in fact, have the antidote to pessimism, dark omens, discouragement and fear, from which our time suffers. We have the Good News!”

Today, then, the Lord invites us to look again at our lives, not as something we possess or own, but as something we have received as a gift and for which we’re stewards. He asks us to return that gift to him, freely and fully, especially by the way we use the gift of life to help bring others to him.

The way we most reflect the divine image is by imitating the missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and cooperating with God the Father’s plan of saving love, so that none of his children perish but come to eternal life.

Let us make this prayer of Pope Leo XIV from his message for the 100th World Mission Sunday 2026:

Holy Father, make us one in Christ, rooted in his love that unites and renews.

May all members of the Church be united in mission, docile to the Holy Spirit, courageous in bearing witness to the Gospel, proclaiming and daily embodying your faithful love for all creatures.

Bless all missionary men and women, support them in their efforts, and watch over them in hope!

Mary, Queen of Missions, accompany our work of evangelization in every corner of the earth: make us instruments of peace, and grant that the whole world may recognize in Christ the light that saves. Amen.

Sunday, October 25, 2026, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ex 22:20-26; Ps 18; 1Thes 1:5c-10; Mt 22:34-40

A scholar of the law approaches Jesus in today's Gospel with a question that asks about the most important thing we must do in life. "Teacher," he queries, "which commandment in the law is the greatest?" This wasn't an easy question, since there are 613 precepts in the Old Testament.

Jesus' answer, however, is clear and synthetic: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Then he adds two things. "The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself." And: "the whole law and the prophets," in other words all that God commands, "depend on these two commandments."

Everything in Christian life flows from the love of God and love of neighbour, not as two separate realities, but as one interrelated movement. Jesus doesn't tell us, "Love me, as I have loved you," but "love one another, as I have loved you." Our love for Jesus will be shown in our love for our neighbour, whom he calls us to love with a unrationed mind, heart and soul.

The first reading from the Book of Exodus makes this very concrete. God speaks with urgency about the treatment of the vulnerable: the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the poor. Our care for them reveals our love for God. It shows whether our relationship with God is real. Jesus would make this abundantly clear later when he would say that the way we treat the hungry, thirsty, naked, stranger, ill or imprisoned is the way we treat him (Mt 25:31-46).

If sharing God's love of our neighbour is so essential to the Christian life, why is it sometimes so difficult? The answer is found in the second reading, when Saint Paul reminds the Christians in Thessalonika how their faith began: not simply as a teaching they received, but as an encounter that changed them. "Our Gospel didn't come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit," which helped them turn "from idols to serve the living and true God." We can't really love as Jesus commands unless we have first encountered his love for us. We're loved first, and from that love, we learn how to love. This is the foundation of the Church's missionary activity.

In his message for *World Mission Sunday 2026*, Pope Leo XIV underlined that love is the "essence" of the Church's mission. He said, "The mission of the disciples and the Church as a whole is to continue the mission of Christ in the Holy Spirit: a mission born of love, lived in love, and leading to love. ... Impelled by the love of Christ, the Apostles then went out to evangelize for Christ (2 Cor 5:14). In the same way, throughout the centuries, multitudes of Christians — martyrs, confessors and missionaries — have given their lives to make this divine love known to the world. Thus, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, the Church's evangelizing mission will continue until the end of time."

He praised the love of God and the neighbour found in missionaries past and present, who sacrifice in order to share the love of God with people who once were strangers. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, who once lamented, "Love isn't loved," he urged us, like Saint Therese of Lisieux, "to love Jesus and

make him loved.” Jesus in today’s Gospel makes it plain that loving God and neighbour — or, in Saint Therese’s words, loving him and making him loved — is the most important thing we need to do. Everything else the Church does hinges on this two-fold command, which flows from the experience of Jesus having loved us enough to give his life for us and then to become our very food in the Sacrament of Love — the efficacious sign of divine love — on the altar. Let us receive that love anew, be transformed by it even more, and then let that love overflow for the evangelization and transformation of the world.

