

1

MISSION MONTH BOOKLET

A collection of reflections for the daily Liturgy
for the Extraordinary Month of Mission 2019

This year, 2019, marks the one-hundredth anniversary since the publication by Pope Benedict XV of his mission document titled *Maximum Illud*. It was the first major mission document of the twentieth century. The document signalled the beginning of a new journey to understand more fully that ‘momentous call’ of the Lord to ‘go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation’ (Mk 16:15). To mark the occasion, Pope Francis has called for an Extraordinary Month of Mission, to be celebrated during Mission Month 2019.



In the year 1919, in the wake of the tragic global conflict that the Pope had called a ‘useless slaughter’, Benedict XV recognised the need for a more evangelical approach to missionary work in the world, so that it would be purified of any colonial overtones and kept far away from the nationalistic and expansionistic aims that had proved so disastrous. ‘The Church of God is universal; she is not alien to any people,’ he wrote.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the modern missionary movement was already well under way with the foundation of different missionary congregations of men and women. Many of these congregations had established houses in Ireland and actively recruited here. A great tradition of involvement in the modern missionary movement of the Church grew up in Ireland throughout the first half of the twentieth century. From every parish in Ireland, men and women literally travelled to the ends of the earth as missionaries. Through the new missionary institutes and through family networks, our missionaries have contributed enormously to the mission entrusted to the Church by the Lord. It is an involvement that we can all be rightly proud of.

Pope Francis hopes, in our time, to re-awaken the commitment of the entire Church to *missio ad gentes* – a commitment to evangelisation that will bring the Gospel to all peoples and, also, to ‘taking up again with renewed fervour the missionary transformation of the Church’s life and pastoral activity’. This task is an ‘essential task’ as Vatican II stressed – the Church is missionary by her very nature.

Although a century has gone by, ‘there still remains an enormous missionary task for the Church to accomplish.’ Citing Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope Francis writes that the ‘mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion’; indeed, ‘an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.’

Pope Francis in his letter calling for the Extraordinary Month of Mission to be celebrated throughout the Church, notes that missionary activity ‘renews the Church, revitalises faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others! It is in commitment to the Church’s universal mission that the new evangelisation of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support.’

This is one of the main points of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which Pope Francis stresses that ‘missionary outreach is central for all the Church’s activity.’ In fact, “‘Mere administration” can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be “permanently in a state of mission”.’

We are urged not to be afraid to undertake, with trust in God and great courage, ‘a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation’.

Francis has asked us to be open to the joyful newness of the Gospel: ‘May the approaching centenary of that Letter serve as an incentive to combat the recurring temptation lurking beneath every form of ecclesial introversion, self-referential retreat into comfort zones, pastoral pessimism and sterile nostalgia for the past. Instead, may we be open to the joyful newness of the Gospel.’

I thank Fr Martin Kelly and the contributors for their work in producing these reflections. May they enable us to rekindle the Holy Spirit in our own lives and within our communities to take up the challenge of being missionary disciples.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads '+ Kieran O'Reilly'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

**Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly SMA
Chair, National Mission Council, IEC**



1 October – St Thérèse of Lisieux, Patroness of the Missions

St Thérèse of Lisieux, patroness of the missions, was born in 1873, entered the Carmelite community at fifteen and died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four. She was canonised in 1925 and was declared a doctor of the Church and patroness of the missions by Pope St John Paul II. What made St Thérèse so special was her ‘little way’ of loving God in all the insignificant events of her short life, which she saw as opportunities of loving and serving God in spreading the Good News by offering her quiet, unspectacular, hidden life for the missions.

FIRST READING (ZEC 8:20-23): The prophet Zechariah attests to God’s promise that many peoples from pagan lands will seek the Lord which the Responsorial Psalm also echoes. This promise is still being fulfilled by the Church’s missionary outreach to all.

GOSPEL (LK 9:51-56): Jesus sends messengers ahead of him to prepare the way but a Samaritan village refuses to accept them, and they continue their way to another village. This reminds us of the nature of the Church’s mission according to Pope St John Paul II: *‘The Church proposes, she does not impose anything.’*

REFLECTION: The prophecy of Zechariah was realised by Jesus when he suffered, died and rose in the city of Jerusalem. As risen Lord, he now works to promote and accompany missionaries in their task of converting all nations to the one true God.

Jesus involved in his mission first the twelve apostles, then the Church, which he established to carry on his mission of evangelisation. The Church today continues Jesus’ mission despite rejection, hostility and persecution just as Jesus and the apostles experienced in the Samaritan village and experienced by many of Jesus’s followers today.

The Gospel also reminds us of the nature of the Church’s mission. The times and ways of the conversion of the nations are the *Lord’s* work. While missionaries preach the Good News, the task of opening doors and moving hearts belongs to the Lord, who often works in mysterious ways. The mission to the Samaritans is fulfilled in a different way when a



Samaritan becomes the model of helping those in need (Lk 10:25-37) and when the Samaritans welcome Philip and accept his message (Acts 8:4-8).

Maurice Hogan SSC

2 October 2019 – Feast of the Guardian Angels

Today we celebrate the feast of the Guardian Angels. A long tradition in the Church tells us that God has assigned an angel to every human being, to be a guardian and a guide on the journey of our lives. This is not one of the central truths of our faith, but it does point towards something that is at the core of the Gospel message – namely that each one of us is uniquely important to God, and valued and cared for by him. God's love for each and every individual is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus. The Church exists to communicate this message to all times and to all people. That is why the Church is missionary – it is sent into the world to proclaim the truth of the everlasting, unconditional and limitless love of God for every human being.

Devotion to guardian angels is particularly associated with children, though obviously not confined to them. Children have their own part to play in the missionary work of the Church. There is a society called the Society of Missionary Children that tries to raise awareness among children of the needs of other children in places that are poorer than we are and encourages them to help and pray for them. There is a Day of Prayer for Missionary Children which is held in some parishes or schools, usually on the second Friday of October. One of the prayers that might be said on that day is the well-known Prayer to the Guardian Angels:

*Angel of God, my Guardian dear,
to whom God's love entrusts me here
Ever this day be at my side,
to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.*

Perhaps we could all pray that prayer today, asking our guardian angels to help us play our part in sharing the Good News.

Aidan Ryan PP



3 October 2019

Today's Gospel is very appropriate for the month of October, which is called the Mission Month of the Church.

This Gospel about the sending of the seventy-two 'others' reminds us that to be a missionary is not exclusive to a few individuals, but the call of all those who are baptised.

All the baptised are called to be missionaries of Christ in this world.

But what does it really mean to be a missionary? In general, a missionary is someone who represents another person: in this way we are called to be representatives of Christ in this world.

But how can we do it?

It doesn't really matter how: be it through a word of comfort, a helping hand, a nice gesture, or in whatever situation in life we may find ourselves; be it at home, work, school, church or wherever we may be. What really matters is that we ought to be faithful to whom we are representing.

When Jesus sent the disciples, he didn't send them randomly. He told them where to go, what to do and what to say. He gave them a definite task. Regardless of being welcome or not, the disciples should keep faithful to their mission of announcing the kingdom of God.

In today's world, in a culture which becomes more and more materialist and to a certain point even anti-God, this is not an easy task. *'I am sending you like lambs among wolves'* (Lk 10:3). I suppose the best chance to succeed is to stay true to the word of God, for as we can see in today's readings: it is not by our own doing but is the word of the Lord that revives the soul and gladdens the hearts.

Deacon Wando Araujo



4 October 2019 – St Francis of Assisi

There is good reason why St Francis is a popular saint and appeals to all people. It is easy to identify with him because in his early life he was so engrossed in all that was earthy, was rowdy and self-absorbed. However, he encountered the harsh reality of life when he became sick and was held a prisoner of war for a year. This experience caused him to re-evaluate his life and, gradually, he began to lose his taste for the worldly and started to spend time in quiet places asking God to enlighten him. He had a mystical experience of Christ that changed him completely. In his experience of the union of the human and divine, he discovered, beyond doubt, the complementarity of humanity and divinity. In this personal union with the divine, everything human, all creation, found meaning and connectedness. Having encountered the mystery of God, he discovered the eternal within himself and all creation. Having received so much in his experience of God, and the inner transformation this engendered, he was capable of understanding deeply and giving much in return. From this point on, his life and actions are a validation of the power, beauty and efficacy of a faith which gives life in abundance. His life points to what God can do in and through each one of us. He reveals in his own journey what we are capable of in and through relationship with God. In this, he is a model of what we can be and do.

Although he did not write the Prayer of St Francis, the sentiments provide us with a fundamental insight into Christianity and to the everyday imitation of Christ. It is about being inwardly transformed so as to reflect the divine, to become a channel of peace, love, pardon, hope, light and faith. *'Make me a channel of your peace'* is a prayer, a manifesto and strategy for all on mission. Being a missionary means being like Francis and, firstly, being able to share one's interiority, share what one has received about the reality, power, and transformative love of God. This is the true foundation and rationale for preaching the Word. We share more by who we are than by what we say or do. As Francis said: Proclaim the Gospel and, if necessary,



use words. ‘Make me a channel of your peace’ is the perfect mission prayer – it calls us to serve, to share and to be for others, giving of what we have received, sharing our personal knowledge of God, our faith and love of a God beyond compare.

Denis Robinson CSSp

The Prayer of St Francis

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord
And where there’s doubt, true faith in you
Make me a channel of your peace
Where there’s despair in life, let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there’s sadness, ever joy

Oh master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul
Make me a channel of your peace
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving to all men let we receive
And in dying that we’re born to eternal life.



Paidir Naomh Proinsias

Déan gléas chun síochána
díom id' láimh, a Thiarna.
San áit a bhfuil fuath
go gcuire mé an grá.
San áit a bhfuil ciontacht
go gcuire mé pardún.
San áit a bhfuil amhras
go gcuire mé creideamh.
In áit na éadóchais
go gcuire mé an dóchas.
In áit na dorchachta
go gcuire mé soilsiú.
San áit in a bhfuil brón
go gcuire mé lúcháir.

A Thiarna, deonaigh dom
sólás a thabhairt
seachas sólás a fháil,
dul i dtuiscint ar dhaoine
seachas go dtuigfí mé féin,
grá a roinnt ar dhaoine
seachas grá a fháil uathu.
Mar is le linn dúinn tabhairt
a fhaighimid.
Is le linn dúinn pardún a
thabhairt a mhaithtear dúinn.
Is le linn dúinn bás a fháil
a théimid i seilbh na beatha síoraí.



5 October 2019

‘Forgetting’ in biblical terms is not just forgetfulness or absent-mindedness, neither is it a mental lapse, but rather an *activity* that is described as straying from God, of taking the wrong path, a turning away from where our well-being resides. To be ignored, to not being ‘present’ in the company of others, leads to aloneness. The consequence is loss of joy, a suffering of loneliness as the widow Israel expresses it in the first reading. Turning back to and searching for God leads to the company that brings us joy.

In the Gospel, the seventy-two came back to Jesus rejoicing that their mission has been successful, mainly because of the power they exercised over demons in Jesus’s name. They experienced the power to liberate people from their demons, something Jesus shared with them, and they exulted in it. Jesus shares their joy, yet he reminds the disciples where their ‘eternal joy’ is – namely that their names are written in heaven. In other words, they will never be forgotten. And that is the source and foundation of mission – permanent remembrance. Permanent remembrance of who God is, and who we are in relation to God and never forgetting this ultimate reality.

In a world where everything is relative, where the absolute and ultimate are ignored, the danger is that the urgency of our mission mandate will be relativised or indeed forgotten. We cannot forget that we are sent to be a constant reminder to all. Remembrance remains at the heart of Eucharist, which is the source of our mission. It is impossible to ‘remember’ Jesus in the Eucharist and then forget his mission mandate.

Richard Foran

6 October 2018 – 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

FIRST READING (HAB 1:2-3, 2:2-4): This is one of the shortest books in the Bible but what it tells us about finding God in the midst of suffering and loss is of great significance for people of faith today. The prophet



was writing at a time when Jerusalem and its people were under serious threat from the rampaging Babylonian army and he pours out his heart to God who doesn't seem to care. Our reading gives us the beginning of his prayer to God from Chapter 1 and the beginning of God's answer from Chapter 2. The answer highlights the need for faith, that is, trust in the goodness of God even when the evidence suggests otherwise.

SECOND READING (2 Tm 1:6-8, 13-14): The letters to Timothy and Titus are known as the pastoral letters because, unlike the other writings attributed to Paul, they are not written to communities in general, but to their pastors, who are charged with the care of the young churches. The words to Timothy have added weight if we consider that they were written towards the end of Paul's life when he was under house arrest in Rome. He wants young Timothy to rely on the gift of the Spirit that has been given to him for his mission – only in this way can he be true to it.

GOSPEL (Lk 17:5-10): The Gospel for today is made up of two apparently unrelated sayings of Jesus, one dealing with the gift of faith and the other a very stark and challenging reminder to the apostles of the call to service they have received as people sent by God to share in Jesus' mission of proclaiming the Good News. We might be tempted to skip over such 'hard sayings' but we are asked to be present to them with listening hearts because the Gospel always liberates us from false ideas about ourselves and God and that can only be a good thing.

REFLECTION: When the apostles in today's Gospel asked Jesus to increase their faith, what were they looking for? Did they want Jesus to give them confidence in their own future as apostles, that everything would turn out well? Did they want to be certain that when they prayed for a miracle they would get it? For many of us, that's what we might think about when we talk about having faith, but, in the Scriptures, something else is going on. The Bible is an ancient book, or rather an ancient small library, and its stories come from different



people living in different times. So what holds the whole thing together?

It's the idea that in the midst of our human lives as we struggle to do our best or to make sense of what is going around us, God wants us to know that he is there. However, this is not the presence of a casual observer nor that of a wizard or a magician, a fixer to be called on when we can't do it ourselves. No, God is the source of all that is, and his desire is that we would come to know that our lives matter, that we have choices to make and, by those choices, we can either make the world a better place or not.

Everything in Scripture is a call to engage with this God, to trust him and to share in his mission to fix what is wrong with the world. When Jesus calls us to follow him, this is what he is asking us to do – to share in the mission of God. He is putting a challenge to us to be like the slave in today's parable. Give yourself to the task in hand and don't be worrying about what's in it for you! There is great freedom and joy in that!

Sean Goan

7 October – Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary

FIRST READING (ACTS 1:12-14): The apostles, brothers and Mary were together in the Upper Room in Jerusalem – awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. They gathered in prayer so that they would be open to the Holy Spirit. The inclusion of Mary is an indication that Jesus makes clear that women will continue to play a significant role in the Church's mission to the end of the earth. They joined together constantly in prayer, as we are today for our Eucharist.

GOSPEL (LK 10:25-37): The parable of the Good Samaritan is famous and easy to imagine, but today's Gospel begins with the announcement that a scholar of the law is approaching to put Jesus to the test. Just like in Jesus' day so today, there are those who try to put Christianity to the test. Yet it is all about goodness, God's goodness and what his wish is for the good of all people and the



world. What Jesus is telling is that ‘only love evangelises effectively’. Our mission is – bringing humanity ever closer to God’s saving goodness through faith in Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION: Earlier this summer I went on our diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. The theme was *‘Blessed are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven’*. When we think of the apparitions of Our Lady and all those to whom she appeared, they had one thing in common. They were praying the Rosary and she prayed with them. At Fatima (1917), Knock (1879), Lourdes (1858), Medjugorje (1981) and the other places where she appeared, her message always was ‘prayer and penance’: be poor in spirit, turn to God and you will be blessed. Our parents heard that message and responded to it. We as a nation have great devotion to Mary – a devotion that has diminished over the past years, unfortunately. As a result of this feast today, let us make a pledge to encourage family members to pray the Rosary in the family, at home, in the car, etc.

How can we bring about the change that Jesus would like? We must look for divine help, becoming poor in spirit. On this feast, let us turn to the mediatrix of all graces, Mary our Mother, and ask her help through the Rosary.

‘It is all God’s work.’ Let us work with him by becoming ‘poor in spirit’; and if we do we shall be blessed and the missionary work of the Church will prosper.

Paddy Cushen PP

8 October 2019

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (Evangelii Gaudium, 120).

Today we meet Jonah, a reluctant missionary/prophet whose world is turned upside down. In the previous chapter, he runs away from both God and his mission but in today’s reading he gets a second chance. His encounter with the people of Nineveh, non-Israelites, ‘the other’



who repent and change their ways, force him to see God differently. In the Gospel reading, we wonder what is the conflict between Mary and Martha. To be missionary disciples, we need to both hear and act on the Word. Therefore, the actions of both Mary and Martha demonstrate discipleship.

FIRST READING (JON 3:1-10): Jonah gets a second call: ‘*Up, go and preach,*’ and he obeys. The only words of prophecy in the text are: ‘Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed’ (3:4).

The King and the people of Nineveh respond and their repentance is genuine and they change their ways. They reduce their consumption, becoming aware of the earth’s scant resources and decided not to exploit them.

The King recognises that God has the power to show mercy as well as justice (3:9).

Jonah would appear not to believe that God will show mercy, but God does change his mind (3:10).

The people of Nineveh were the ‘other’, the non-Israelites.

Often it is our encounter with ‘the other’ on mission that changes us and transforms us. They enable us to see the relationship between justice and mercy, just as the people of Nineveh enabled Jonah.

Pope Francis will hold a Synod of Bishops for the pan-Amazon region this October. The people of the Amazon are calling on us to change our ways, to enter into a relationship of solidarity with them.

GOSPEL (LK 10:38-42): The word *diakonia* is equated with eucharistic serving, proclamation and ecclesial leadership. The verb *diakonein* and noun *diakonia* together appear nineteen times from Luke to Acts.

In this text, Luke distinguishes Martha’s *diakonia* to Mary’s listening role.

Was Luke reflecting a contemporary debate about the role of women in the emerging house churches, using Jesus to answer the questions about women’s role in ministry?



Women in mission and ministry today still face the same challenges in the Church and in society. Is our role to listen or also proclamation, ecclesial leadership, etc.?

'The Church is herself a missionary disciple' (Evangelii Gaudium, 40).

Sheila Curran RSM

9 October 2019

God told Jonah to go *east* by land to Nineveh and Jonah went *west* by sea to Tarshish! All the way through this tale, Jonah is in serious resistance mode.

Not the most edifying portrayal of a missionary in this special October Month of Mission. At least not at first glance. But this remarkable story actually offers up some crucial insights about God's mission and his relationship with his missionaries.

It's not as if Jonah doesn't understand God and his message of forgiveness, tenderness and love for all human beings regardless of their worthiness – a good start for anyone on mission. But he's appalled by it.

Likewise, the reciprocal forgiveness taught by Jesus in the Gospel reading, and God's scandalous mercy spoken of often by Pope Francis, may leave some people nowadays as resentful as this reluctant prophet.

Jonah may well be 'on message' but God wants him to deliver it from his heart, not just his mouth. Unperturbed by Jonah's anger and jealousy, God patiently probes it instead. And he is mischievous and imaginative in offering him a way through it.

The subversive truth of the story is this: The missionary and those whom they serve in God's name are all equal in the eyes of God. God's abundant mercy is as much for Jonah as for the people of Nineveh.

Jonah may have something to teach the Ninevites on behalf of God, namely the life-changing power of repentance and acceptance of



God in their lives – *metanoia* – but Jonah himself needs to learn that too.

Irony of ironies, the ones who teach him are the ones he came to teach. At the end of the story, the openness of heart of the Ninevites to God’s message ensures the wholeness and joy of the entire country – even the animals. Jonah’s closed heart leaves him stuck under the withered castor-oil tree where no doubt God, and the Ninevites, will eventually convert him.

Leonard Moloney SJ

10 October 2019

In today’s Gospel (Lk 11:5-13), Jesus continues his teaching on prayer.

As elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus never asks us to do something he did not do himself. Prayer was at the heart of his mission. Before choosing his disciples and sending them out on mission, he spent the whole night in prayer (Lk 6:12). Before he asked his disciples ‘*Who do you say I am?*’ he prayed (Lk 9:18). In the garden as he faced his Passion, he prayed (Lk 22:41).

Jesus understood that prayer is not easy. And we can give up easily. In today’s Gospel he asks for perseverance. Do not give up. His listeners would understand immediately the story of the householder who received an unexpected visitor in the middle of the night. He had no bread to give his visitor, so he kept knocking on his friend’s door until he got what he wanted.

‘Ask and you will receive.’ – What do we ask for and what will we receive? We have often asked God to heal a loved one who has cancer or some other serious illness and our prayer has not been granted. A loved one has suffered and died. I know people who gave up prayer at this stage. They feel God had not listened and had done nothing to help. At the end of the passage in today’s Gospel Jesus says: *‘How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.’* After all Jesus’ own prayer in the garden asking God to save him from the cross was not answered. God will not take away suffering and struggle. But he will give us the Holy Spirit to help us face whatever life brings us.



'There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too' (Ettý Hillesum, 26 August 1941). Maybe the challenge for us in this month of Mission is to visit 'this really deep well' more often.

Daithí Kenneally CSSp

11 October 2019 – Children's Day of Mission Prayer

There can be no neutrality where Jesus is concerned. We must make a choice. We are either for him or against him. To not choose is itself a choice – against him. Today's Gospel introduces the idea that neutrality is impossible. It also reminds us there are no absolute states in the life of a disciple, except faithfulness to God.

This passage links the theme of prayer from yesterday's Gospel to the theme of action today. In the previous passage, Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of the kingdom. Today, he shows the kingdom is already coming because he casts out demons.

In our commitment to make the kingdom of God present, therefore, we must make the decision to be on the side of Jesus in the fight against evil. But it is not enough to simply be liberated from the power of an evil spirit and then sit back and do nothing. The evil spirit will come back 'to find the house swept and tidied' and bring even worse spirits with it because we believe we have been freed forever.

It is easy to use the Sacrament of Reconciliation to receive forgiveness from our past sins and have a clean, swept house again. True reconciliation is an experience of conversion that moves a person from simply being forgiven for their past wrongdoings to a missionary disciple who is concerned with the present and the future, a disciple who is living their Christianity, growing, learning, offering and accepting forgiveness, evangelising whilst constantly being evangelised.

Aristotle said: *'Nature abhors a vacuum.'*

In today's Gospel, Jesus is telling us that the devil loves one!

Julieann Moran



12 October 2019

FIRST READING: (JL 4:12-21): The final chapter of Joel takes us to the Valley of Decision or Judgement, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, probably the Kidron Valley, East Jerusalem, where the enemies of God will face destruction. After the day of ‘darkness and gloom’, the Lord shall make his home in Zion.

GOSPEL (LUKE 11:27-28): Attentiveness and a positive response to God’s word is more important than a family relationship with Jesus.

Following Jesus’ exorcism of the deaf and mute man, the crowds were amazed, but some accused him of acting by the power of Beelzebul. But a woman ‘in the crowd’ praises Jesus by blessing his mother, somewhat similar to Elizabeth’s blessing of Mary at the Visitation – *‘Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.’* And it echoes Mary’s statement in the Magnificat: *‘Yes, from now on all generations will call me blessed.’* Jesus doesn’t dispute with her but uses the occasion as an opportunity to point out the basis of blessing for all disciples, as he also states in the parable of the sower: *‘And for the part of the rich soil, this is people with a noble and generous heart who have heard the word and take it to themselves and yield a harvest through their perseverance.’* Admiration is not enough, a positive response is also required – like Mary’s at the Annunciation: *‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’* After the visit of the shepherds in Bethlehem, she further internalised this attitude when she *‘treasured all these things in her heart.’* Our response to God’s grace has to be positive and proactive, as in yesterday’s reading where the expulsion of a demon was not enough in itself. We cannot be neutral – *‘Anyone who is not with me is against me.’*

Anonymous



13 October 2019 – 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading (2 Kgs 5:14-17): After Naaman, the leper, immerses himself seven times in the river Jordan as directed by the prophet Elisha he is healed. He returns to Elisha and declares: *‘There is no God in all the earth except in Israel.’*

Second Reading (2 Tm 2:8-13): Paul proclaims the Good News that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He does this despite seeing himself as a criminal in chains and experiencing many hardships. This leads him to want others to have the same faith in the one who died for us in order that we might live.

GOSPEL (LK 17:11-19): As Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem he met with ten lepers who called out to him: *‘Jesus! Master! Take pity on us.’* He said: *‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’* Only one of them, a Samaritan, came back to say Thanks. Jesus asked: *‘Were not all ten made clean? Where are the other nine?’*

REFLECTION: Statistics in Ireland today tell us that one in every three people will get cancer during their lifetime. There isn’t a family that hasn’t been affected by one or other of its many forms which causes incredible pain and suffering. There are the rituals of discovering ‘lumps’, followed by tests and scans and surgery. The dreaded chemotherapy or radium treatment follows. Life is prolonged for some while often very curtailed and shortened for others.

The same is true of other illnesses including Motor Neurone Disease (MND) for which there is currently no known cure. One of its latest victims is Dublin-born Fr Tony Coote, who was diagnosed in his early 50s. He outlines the many rituals he has endured in his memoir, *Live While You Can*.

These illnesses parallel the leprosy outlined in the readings today. Leprosy was incurable, those suffering from it were disfigured and forced to live on the margins, out of sight and out of contact because of the risk of infection. No one wanted them. Naaman was a leper and when the prophet Elisha told him to go and bathe seven times in the



river Jordan he obeyed him and he was cured. Not only was he healed of the leprosy, but he also grew strong in faith and proclaimed that the God who cured him was the only God.

The same is true of the ten lepers who encountered Jesus of Nazareth as he went towards Jerusalem. Jesus did not ignore them, he ‘saw’ them – marginalised, cut off, unwanted and isolated. He also saw something more. He listened to them call him by name: Jesus! And Master! And he had pity on them. True to the custom of the time, Jesus directed them to go and show themselves to the priests. They were cured as they followed his instructions. One came back to say thanks.

Saying thanks is a prayer. Meister Eckhart says: *‘If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is “thank you” it will be enough.’* Some of the posters displayed last year during the World Meeting of Families had three simple statements taken from Pope Francis’ *Amoris Laetitia*, one of which was the importance of saying ‘thank you’.

How can anyone caught up in the throes of cancer or MND say thank you? St Paul in his letter to Timothy offers his own experience: He was shipwrecked, he was imprisoned, he was tortured, but in the midst of it all he says that the Good News cannot be ‘chained up’ and he actually prays a blessing. He says we have a choice all based on the word ‘if’. He sees various parallels or contradictions. If we die with Christ, we will live with him; if we hold firm, we will reign with him; even if we are unfaithful, he will always be faithful. This is true prayer.

John O’Donohue in his book *Benedictus* says that when we bless someone we reach deep within, *‘down to the deeper source within, namely the soul. Blessing is from soul to soul. And the key to who you are is your soul.’* Perhaps that is how we bring healing to people today: just bless them in their soul self and send them on their way. Who knows what healing will take place as they journey on.

Liz Murphy RSM, AMRI



14 October 2019

We spend a lot of time reading signs. The world we live in today is full of them – roads signs, street signs, information signs and warning signs. For those of us who are a Post-Vatican II generation, a particular phrase, *'reading the signs of the times'*, is one that caught our imagination. This was a new invitation to the Church and the People of God to look outwards, to reflect on what was happening in the world and to respond to the needs of the wider community.

With this renewal came an understanding that our Baptism was not only an initiation into the Christian community, but the moment when we received our call to mission. From that moment, marked with that sign of faith, we are all commissioned to participate in whatever way possible in the mission of God, spreading the Good News of the Gospel in the world.

Mission Month is a great opportunity to remind ourselves of our missionary calling. It is also a chance to recognise that we are missionaries right where we are, right where we live: within our families, in our workplace and in our parish and local community. During Mission Month, we are also reminded to connect with those who are on mission overseas, living and working in places where religious intolerance and cultural differences are very challenging but who continue to reach out and be with people in their struggles. Bringing the message of God's love and hope for the future.

Reading the signs of the times today, it is clear that the work of mission and mission outreach in Ireland, like the missions overseas, taking place in parishes and communities that are now multi-religious and multi-cultural. This is a new challenge, but our faith and confidence in our missionary calling will help us to be signs of God's love and hope for the future within these new and diverse communities.

Claire Carey MSSC



15 October 2019 – St Teresa of Avila

Oh, the fools!

No one likes to be called a fool.

We usually use the term ‘fool’ for people who have done something stupid, or often for people who don’t accept our world view. This can be an arrogance on our part and an unwillingness to accept challenges to our own thinking.

Paul, in using ‘fool’, is lamenting that people are missing a gift on offer. In the text of Romans (1:16-25) today he affirms:

The Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek. For in it is revealed the righteousness of God from faith.

Paul, even though a Jew, was a Roman citizen and so had a wide perspective. He experienced Jesus, the Christ, as the Risen One who came from God for the Jews, the community of God’s revelation, and for the Greeks, the wider world. Salvation, as Paul experienced, was not by compliance to a law but through grace, his word for God’s love and favour active in human relations.

‘The one who is righteous by faith will live.’ How could anyone reject such an invitation? Or miss it because of trivial interests or misguided passions? So ‘fool’ is his conclusion.

The text from Luke’s Gospel also refers to ‘fools’ as those so concerned with appearances, especially religious pretence, that don’t even see they have missed the point and failed to grasp that *‘what is within’*, wisdom and truth, is what transforms. *‘You fools! Did not the maker of the outside also make the inside?’* (Lk 11:40).

Many who have really journeyed on the road of inner discovery, the mystics, like Teresa of Avila who we celebrate today, have appeared foolish or eccentric in their time only for the community of faith to realise later that they were mentors, teachers.



What do these readings say to our contemporary context in this month of Mission? Well the foolishness of the world is demonstrably evident – in politics, power struggles, negligence of the environment in face of ample warnings. Perhaps we can create spaces for people to experience the simple, the inner reality, rather than the incessant demands to respond and judge everything. We can lead people to discover the grace in their own lives and to pray; like Teresa of Avila for our time.

Brendan Carr CSSp

16 October 2019 – St Gall

Recent Irish priests, nuns, brothers and lay missionaries, took inspiration from earlier missionaries, like the seventh century's St Gall, today's saint, and Columbanus. Both reinvigorated Europe with the faith. St Gall is still fondly remembered in Switzerland.

REFLECTION: It's easy to talk the talk, more difficult to walk the walk. Nobody likes to be called a hypocrite, yet there's a bit of the hypocrite in most of us. We struggle to have our actions live up to our words, whether they are the words we speak to ourselves, to others, or in prayer.

Missionaries quickly learn the importance of deeds matching words. If you make a promise and don't follow through, you lose credibility. People admire those who live by what they preach. In recent years, in our Church, we have seen many painful breaches of trust, hypocritical behaviour and saying one thing while doing another. The effects are corrosive.

Jesus' criticism of hypocrisy in today's Gospel is of those who talk the talk but who neglect justice and the love of God. This raises a difficult question for us: is it hypocritical to call ourselves Christian, followers of Jesus Christ? Christianity is a belief system but it's also a practice. It's about how we live our lives every day, attentive to justice and the love of God. It's a practice that involves falling many times, picking



ourselves up and starting afresh, trying again to follow the example of Jesus. It's a tall order, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly before our God (Micah 6:8).

And judgement? The message here is clear. On one hand, no one can escape God's judgement. However, St Paul assures us that God is extremely patient, tolerant, and forgiving, holding back from summary judgment to give people a chance to repent. We live with hope as well as with faith and charity.

Gerry Jeffers

17 October 2019

FIRST READING (RM 3:21-30): St Paul reminds us that God's gift of faith is for everyone: every nation, race and peoples are all invited to partake in the abundant life in Christ. It is our mission as Christians to reach out and extend God's invitation to all humanity. During this celebration, let us pray for an increase in our faith and the generosity to share it with others.

In today's reading, Paul reminds us that we all have equal status in God's family. Our justification is not by any merit or hard work. Faith is a free gift and the grace of God does not exclude anyone. However, we have the choice to accept or reject God's invitation. Like those in today's Gospel, who not only rejected God's words, but also maltreated and killed God's messengers.

REFLECTION: Faith is a topic which often occupies the central stage in Christian discussion. The Apostles desired a greater faith and asked Jesus to increase their faith (Lk 17:5). Today, Paul reminds us that faith is the key to our redemption – we are saved through faith (Eph 2:8). However, we ought not take this gift for granted, especially the many of us who were baptised as infants. We have not made any special effort or sacrifice to receive or sustain our Christian faith. St Ignatius of Antioch, whose memorial we celebrate today, is one of those many men and women who, down through history, have paid the supreme



price for their faith. Even today, there are still many Christians in some parts of the world who face persecution and death because of their faith. Like the Apostles, we pray for greater faith in Jesus who constantly invites us to new life, and for generosity to share the gift of faith. As people called to mission, we engage in all kinds of good works, but the greatest gift we can offer to contemporary men and women is to invite them to the life of faith in Christ Jesus.

Anne Falola OLA

18 October 2019 – St Luke

Only Luke has Jesus beginning his public ministry in Nazareth. The Spirit of the Lord will drive him to ‘release’ people from all that holds them in bondage. He identifies these as ‘the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed’. The poor are the economically poor. The captives were those in debt or in prison, as well as those who were ill. Luke portrays Jesus as going to the outsiders, those living on the margins, and bringing them the hospitality of God, releasing them from their state of exclusion, self-imposed or otherwise. For Luke, this is what it means to say that *‘the kingdom of God is at hand’*. God’s kingdom comes when the excluded are included, when outsiders experience God’s lavish hospitality and when those regarded by others as dishonourable are shown honour.

First Reading (2 Tm 4:10-17): It is thought that St Paul wrote this letter from prison to his close friend Timothy. Those close to him had abandoned him in his hour of need and so the reading reflects his sense of loneliness and abandonment. Paul asked Timothy to contact Mark and bring him to see him so that he could give his last instructions regarding his mission to the gentiles. Despite his vulnerability, he was intent in making sure that his work should continue after him.

GOSPEL (Lk 10:1-9): Jesus commissions seventy-two disciples to go ahead of him on his journey towards Jerusalem. Their role was to prepare the way for Jesus in each of the villages he was to pass



through on his journey towards Jerusalem. They were forerunners, perpetuating the role of John the Baptist and ‘preparing the way of the Lord’.

REFLECTION: One of St Luke’s favourite words is ‘today’. *‘Today salvation has come to this house,’* Jesus says to Zacchaeus. It is both the time of Jesus’ ministry and the time of the Church. The promises of God to the poor are to be fulfilled today. In Ireland, what steps can ministers take today to move from a maintenance to a missionary model of Church? The harvest is still in the fields, but are the workers too tired? Maybe it is time to commission an Irish ‘seventy-two’, sending lay women and men who can play a vital role in the running and strengthening of our Christian communities.

Michael Kilkenny CSSp

19 October 2019

FIRST READING (RM 4:13, 16-18): Abraham is the father of all who believe. Our common faith, trumps all the other differences that might usually divide us: race, gender, social class and politics.

GOSPEL (LK 12:8-12): What we do here on earth has eternal consequences. If we have the courage to bear witness to our faith in Jesus today, Jesus promises to bear witness on our behalf before the Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit helps us to bear witness and to bear the cost of witnessing.

REFLECTION: This year the British Foreign Office commissioned a report into the persecution of Christians. It found that Christians are the most persecuted religious group today and that the persecution of Christians is growing and becoming increasingly vicious, in some places amounting to genocide. Christians are most at risk in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and the Philippines. Christianity may very soon be wiped out in Middle East altogether.

The Vatican reported recently that forty missionary and pastoral workers were killed in 2018, double the number killed the previous



year. Most were killed in Africa, followed by South America, Asia, and, finally, one priest was killed in Europe.

In the Gospel, Jesus foretold his followers would face persecution and intolerance from others. Things have not changed very much in the intervening two thousand years.

This Mission Month we are mindful of missionaries who put their lives on the line for Christ in those countries where being a Christian can be a death sentence. We pray for those to whom our missionaries minister; those who literally risk their lives by choosing to follow Christ. And we resolve to do what we can to raise awareness of an issue that Western governments are reluctant to address, namely, the increasing worldwide persecution of our fellow brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTION: As part of mission month, perhaps the parish council or another parish group might raise awareness of Christian persecution with our elected representatives through letters or petitions.

Rev. Ultan McGoohan

20 October 2019 – Mission Sunday

THEME: Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World.

FIRST READING (EX 17:8-13): Today's first reading brings to mind the sad fact that, for too many centuries, and indeed even today, wars are fought in God's name. There is so much conflict, violence and war in today's world and the fact that religion is seen to be central in so much of this conflict reinforces the view held by many people that religion is conflictual and destructive. Today, the Church is very much aware that it is missionary by nature and its mission is to preach, through word and action, the Good News of God's kingdom, promoting peace, justice, reconciliation and right relations with all people and with all creation. This mission is to be carried out in



humility and in dialogue, in respect for the religious freedom and the dignity of all people.

Second Reading (2 Tm 3:14-4:2): To be genuinely committed to mission is to be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit who impels us to share the love of God and seek that all people experience the fullness of life as children of God. As we hear in the second reading, we are all urged to dedicate our lives, patiently and with faith, to this mission.

GOSPEL (Lk 18:1-8): In today's Gospel, Jesus uses the parable of the persistent widow to teach about the necessity of prayer which is at the heart of all mission. He also teaches us that God is always on the side of the oppressed and we ask God for the strength to do all within our power to work for justice and for God's kingdom.

REFLECTION: Mission Sunday is a day for us to reflect on the contribution we, as Irish people, have made to this mission in the past and how we live it today.

Mission was understood as going abroad, to countries where the Church was not yet strong or to places where people suffered from poverty or conflict. This is indeed still necessary and valid today and we pray people will continue to give their lives to mission in this way.

Mission was also seen as the task primarily of priests and religious, with some few lay missionaries, and their work was very much supported by the generosity of the Irish people. Pope Francis today is encouraging all the baptised to more actively assume their responsibility as 'missionary disciples'. Many Catholics in Ireland, especially among our youth, see little relevance of the faith in their lives. Hence, a challenge for all of us as Catholics is to take the time to seriously *reflect* on our faith experience, seek to become more knowledgeable about the Scriptures and some of the teachings of the Church, ask ourselves questions about it and seek to *articulate* it meaningfully to ourselves and others, and then base our *action* on our



experience of the faith. Mission is essentially faith in action, and to this we as baptised are all called to be committed.

There are many ways in which people live mission today, both in Ireland and overseas. These include being involved in action to prevent trafficking, various kinds of social and community work with the poor and marginalised, reaching out to refugees and migrants and action to care for the earth. Some of those people who are engaged in these activities may not profess a formal Christian faith, but it is evident that their activities are inspired by Gospel values and they are promoting the reign of God.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AS WE EACH REFLECT ON OUR MISSION TODAY:

- Faith is not seen as a positive value in the secular world and for many people in Ireland today. What is the role of faith in society?
- What is the faith you are *searching* for? What is the joy you are searching for?
- What is the faith you are called to *share*? What is the joy you are called to share?
- How can we better reach out to young people in our parish and better listen to their questions and challenges?
- What can we learn from immigrants who live in our communities, especially those of other religions, and how can we build a more intercultural and interfaith community together?
- To what extent is there a fruitful exchange of experience between overseas missionaries who have come back to Ireland and our home parish/community?

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Celebrant: The love of Christ gathers us together in communion this Mission Sunday so that we might be renewed through this celebration of our faith and in our commitment to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and so we make our prayer to our loving Father:



1. On this World Mission Sunday, we pray for Christians and people of all faiths who are suffering persecution in many parts of the world. May they have their human rights, equality and religious freedom recognised. Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for Pope Francis as he continues on his new journey in life of shepherding, stewarding and renewing the flock. Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for all missionaries: for the Christian communities that sent them and for all those who received and welcomed them. We ask God to bless all our missionaries and to bless those sent to minister to us here at home. Lord, hear us.
4. We pray for our own families: we thank God for our loved ones. We remember especially those among them who are sick, troubled or in need of your solace. Lord, hear us.
5. We pray for our deceased missionaries and for all our dead. Welcome them into the light of your kingdom, Lord, and grant them eternal life. Lord, hear us.

Celebrant: Father, you sent your Son among us as a missionary to reveal your wonderful plan of salvation. Through our sharing of the gifts you give us, may we continue to grow in communion with our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Kathleen McGarvey OLA

21 October 2019

FIRST READING (RM 4:20-25): Abraham is not merely a biblical character who was *'justified by faith'*. Paul says he is *'the father of us all'*. The God revealed in Jesus is the God of Abraham. This is important for us to remember whenever we think of ourselves as special or exclusive, being guilty of a certain religious snobbery. The basis for our faith is strengthened by God raising Jesus from the dead.



GOSPEL (Lk 12:13-21): Jesus rejects the man's request because he will not participate in satisfying the greed that he senses had prompted it. Instead of helping the man to get his inheritance, he points the man to a different understanding of life. Life is not to be valued or measured in terms of wealth or possessions. One may gain the whole world and lose one's soul (Lk 9:25). On the other hand, true blessing comes to those who hear the Word of God and do it (Lk 8:21; 11:28).

REFLECTION: Closely paralleling this parable, Sirach (11:14-19) warns:

*Good things and bad, life and death,
poverty and wealth, come from the Lord.
The Lord's gift remains with the devout,
and his favour brings lasting success.
One becomes rich through diligence and self-denial,
and the reward allotted to him is this:
when he says, 'I have found rest,
and now I shall feast on my goods!'
he does not know how long it will be
until he leaves them to others and dies.*

The real problem with the rich man is not that he is rich. It is that he only talks about himself to himself, with no reference to others: *'What am I to do? This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns ... I will say to my soul: My soul ...'* He is greedy, self-centred, using the gifts of God and the fruit of his labour for himself alone. Clearly, he is the model of what we should not be. The irony is that what he hoards for himself will ultimately be given to others.

James Dunne

22 October 2019

REFLECTION ON THE STORY OF THE TEN LEPERS: 'Thank you' are two very simple words but most people find it very hard to say them. I have often wondered why only one of the ten lepers returned to thank Jesus (Lk 17:11-19).



Recently, I carried out an evaluation of an excellent AIDS programme in Kenya run by the Daughters of Charity. I met a most interesting woman who has AIDS (a modern equivalent of leprosy) and is a survivor of cervical cancer. She has been HIV positive since 2008. She also contracted TB at the same time and was bed-ridden.

When she recovered her strength, she was able to return to her business of selling fish. However, due to government taxes and levies, she had to discontinue and began to work as a daily labourer. She has five children between the ages of thirty-five and twenty-seven. Her eldest daughter has four children between the ages of twelve and four, but her daughter has abandoned them so she helps now to rear her grandchildren and pays for their school fees. In 2015, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer but was treated successfully.

As a thank you to God, she told me, she has now become active in a support group set up for survivors of cervical cancer. The group supports women who have fears over cervical cancer and encourages them to get themselves checked regularly.

As well as being active in the group, she also visits the sick and elderly at home. When I met her she was visiting thirteen sick and elderly people in their homes. She was like the thankful leper and is very good example of how to say thank you for life in a very practical manner.

Eamonn Brehony

23 October 2019

FIRST READING (RM 6:12-18): To understand the first reading, it helps to understand the status of the slave. Unlike a servant, who works certain hours and then is free, a slave's situation in Paul's time was quite different. Literally, he had no time which belonged to himself; every single moment belonged exclusively to his master. This is what is in Paul's mind when he says:

At one time you were the slave of sin. Sin had exclusive possession of you. At that time you could not talk of anything else but sinning.



But now you have taken God as your master and he has exclusive possession of you. Now you cannot even talk about sinning; you must talk about nothing but holiness.

For Paul, the Christian can have no master but God. He cannot give a part of his life to God, and another part to the world: *'You submitted yourselves without reservation to the creed you were taught.'* Just as the Jews who crossed the Red Sea into freedom would have been foolish to reverse their steps and go back to slavery in Egypt, neither should we, who in Baptism crossed from death to life, revert to the ways of sin. There should be no going back.

'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' We have been freed from the slavery to sin, but only to become slaves to Christ.

The image of total commitment also occurs in today's Gospel: *'Happy that servant if his master's arrival finds him at this employment; I tell you truly, he will place him over everything he owns.'*

Anthony Martin

24 October 2019

Gospel (Lk 12:49-53): The mention of fire brings two very contrasting images to mind. One is the warming hearth that brings comfort to the community gathered around it on a desolate wintery night; the other is the destructive power of conflagrations and infernos.

Jesus might be alluding to both of these images today when he says he has come to bring fire to the earth. As Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Worker Movement in the last century, said, *'Jesus came for two reasons: to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable.'* Dorothy carried out her mission to comfort the afflicted through establishing hospitality centres for the downtrodden right across America. But she took her mission to afflict the comfortable just as seriously.

Along with the Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan, she often engaged in creative acts of civil disobedience to rouse people from complacency



in relation to great societal evils such as war, homelessness and weapons of mass destruction. For example, in 1968, Daniel, along with his brother, who was also a priest, made national US headlines when they publicly burned Vietnam draft records. *'Better the burning of paper than of children,'* he subsequently told the judge who imprisoned him for destroying federal property.

This often radical approach to their mission did succeed in afflicting the comfortable, and provoked great division within society and within the Church – where Daniel was often referred to as 'the troublesome Jesuit'. But perhaps this is exactly what Jesus is referring to in the Gospel when he says that his mission will bring divisions. So what is our own understanding of Christian mission? Is bringing comfort to the afflicted enough? Has the time come for us to consider afflicting the comfortable to ensure that we all live in a more just, more peaceful society?

Ronan White

25 October 2019

Our mission is to share in God's mission of bringing mercy and hope into our world. All who share in this mission of Jesus have a responsibility to read the signs of the times and to respond with wisdom, generosity and sensitivity. The signs must be read in the light of the Gospel. Countless numbers of people from all walks of life who feel oppressed, dejected, excluded or are suffering from anxiety and despair are waiting for an answer from the Church.

In today's Gospel, we are urged to look outside ourselves, to evaluate the things that happen around us. How many people live in conditions of great suffering and ask the Church to be a sign of the Lord's goodness, solidarity and mercy? Our Christian mission is to reach out to them.

But how can we reach them? The ministry of Jesus provides our greatest example. Jesus bypasses the neat prescriptions of the Law to



reach out to alleviate the sufferings of oppressed women, excluded lepers, tax collectors, sinners and those weighed down by anxiety and hopelessness. His healing and life-giving actions are signs of God's kingdom, God's saving love and mercy becoming a reality in the world.

St Paul grasped this great truth. God, through Christ, offers healing, inclusion, love and mercy to all. Jesus invites us all to share his mission by being living signs of God's goodness and mercy. Let us open our hearts to the excluded, with a helping hand for the helpless, a word of faith for the confused, a sign of hope for the desolate and a word of love for all.

Patrick J. Ryan CSSp

26 October 2019

We are now two-thirds of the way through autumn and winter with its cold and bareness fast approaches. The trees, like the fig tree in the Gospel, don't bear fruit. The days are cloudy and dark, the nights long and dreary. Imagine someone lost in the woods. Without fire and sufficient clothing they are exposed to the cold and become preoccupied with warmth. Shivering and desperate, to ward off the cold, they wrap their arms around themselves.

This is something like what St Paul means, when he talks about a person who lives according to the flesh. 'Flesh' here does not mean just the human body in our normal understanding of the word. Rather, it is a person turned in on themselves and away from God and others. Sin is the expression of those who have wrapped their arms around themselves.

In contrast, is the person who lives according to the Spirit – the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. Often, the Holy Spirit is symbolised by fire, giving both light and heat. The work of the Spirit is to give us the light of wisdom and the warmth of love. With the support of the Spirit with us, we no longer need to wrap our arms around ourselves in



selfishness. Rather, we can open them in generosity, to embrace God and his people

Think of Jesus himself on the cross. Even in the moment of great suffering he opened his arms on the cross in a gesture of openness and love for his Father and all mankind. We are all called to do this – all called to be missionaries. Those we refer to as ‘foreign missionaries’ do so by going abroad, the rest of us by being open in care and support towards the people we meet, work and interact with each day.

Brian McLaughlin CSSp

27 October 2019 – 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

FIRST READING (ECCLES 35:12-14, 16-19): We need to serve God with our whole hearts: not by charitable deeds and religious practices alone, but also with humility in the depths of our hearts.

SECOND READING (2 Tm 4:6-8, 16-18): In those times of weakness, when we are vulnerable, abandoned, and isolated, Christ accompanies and empowers us through these trials, to continue in discipleship; when the time comes, Christ’s bring us home to his heavenly kingdom.

GOSPEL (Lk 18:9-14): Virtue that is superficial and causes us to have contempt for others does not lead to God. The Pharisee’s real self is exposed when he exalts himself over others because of his virtuous deeds; he has separated himself from others, and thus remains separated from God. By contrast, the tax collector recognised his sinfulness and his need for God’s mercy; he had no thought of despising others, and his real self is humble before God. Right relationship with God is inextricably bound up with right and genuine relationship with our neighbour.

REFLECTION: This Sunday’s Gospel gives us an opportunity to reflect on three things: who we are in the depths of our hearts, how we relate to God and how we relate to others. It furthermore invites us to think



about how these are interconnected. To aid our reflection, we are presented with the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector each standing in prayer before God.

The Pharisee believes the evidence of his love for God can be found in his fasting and tithing. He offers these to God as proof of his virtue, a virtue that sets him apart from *'the rest of mankind'*, for which he is grateful. He asks nothing of God in prayer, certain because of his virtuous behaviour that he is at rights with God. His self-surety makes him blind to the reality that his alleged virtue has not reached his heart. His outward religious behaviour leads him to despise others and especially the tax collector. It leads him to believe he is better than they are. It makes him believe he is self-sufficient in finding favour with God. Thus, we see, his virtue is insincere.

The tax collector, by contrast, believing himself unworthy, *'stands some distance away.'* He directs his prayer to God and asks for mercy, recognising that he is a sinner in need of forgiveness. He has no thought of despising the Pharisee or others. Rather, he approaches God in humility and sincerity. Despite his sinful behaviour up to that moment, he goes home at rights with God because he has been transformed from within.

For the most part, we may recognise that we are imperfect, sinners, in need of God's mercy, and therefore identify ourselves with the tax collector. However, the parable challenges us to see the tendencies of the Pharisee within and to ask ourselves some honest questions: how sincere are our own good deeds? Do they reflect the whisperings of our hearts? Do we examine our conscience and are we sincere in prayer before God? Do we judge others for behaviour we see as corrupt, immoral, or sinful? Do we think that we can gain God's favour by our own efforts alone? Do we seek God's grace in humility, or do we already feel justified in receiving it on the basis of what we have done and said up to this point? If we pray to God and observe all the right religious practices, does that mean we are at rights with God? Can we despise others and still claim to love God?



Pope Francis, time and again, has reminded us that all members of the people of God, because of our Baptism, are called to be ‘missionary disciples’. This means that all are called to be personally involved in going out to the whole world and proclaiming the love of God encountered in Jesus Christ. Today’s Gospel challenges each of us as missionary disciples to ensure that the words we proclaim and the loving deeds we perform during the course of our missionary discipleship are sincere and humble. Outwardly virtuous words and deeds, if they do not spring from an inwardly transformed virtuous heart, do not lead us to God. Having contempt for the sins of others, rather than showing compassion and empathy for them, will prevent us from right relationship with God. Feeling true humility in the face of God will help us to look with compassion on the lives of others, so that, in being truly merciful, we shall receive mercy.

*We pray that our Christian faith and religious practice
will not harden our hearts to others,
but rather help us to look to them with compassion and empathy,
so that we might be drawn to them in love,
and so be welcomed into the loving embrace of God.*

Aoife McGrath, St Patrick’s College, Maynooth

28 October 2019 – Ss Simon and Jude

Coming to the end of this Mission Month, we are reminded again of the great challenge of Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in which he invites all the faithful to be ‘missionary disciples.’

The theme of this Mission Month is ‘Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World.’

This theme reminds us that it is our Baptism which calls us to be missionaries and echoes Pope Francis when he says: ‘*In virtue of their Baptism, all the members of the people of God have become missionary*



disciples (cf. Mt 28:19) ... The new evangelisation calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptised.'

This phrase 'missionary disciples' is interesting. Pope Francis says: 'We no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries" but rather that we are always "missionary disciples"' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120).

We hear in today's Gospel: 'He summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them, he called them "apostles".' They were first disciples – a disciple literally means a learner – and then apostles, which means one who is sent. This is the very same order that Pope Francis uses when he says: 'A true missionary is a disciple first'. (He said this during an audience with the Missionaries of Africa on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of their foundation). We too are called first through our Baptism, called by name as Simon and Jude were, and sent out to witness and proclaim in the world what we have come to know and experience – the love of Jesus. This is not easy in today's world and we will require some of that zeal that Simon the Zealot possessed, some of that courage that each of Simon and Jude had right to the end in giving their lives for their faith.

Rev. Éamonn Fitzgibbon, Mary Immaculate College

29 October 2019

In our Gospel today, we read St Luke's version of the Parable of the Mustard Seed. In their Gospels, Matthew and Mark both refer to the mustard seed as being the smallest of the seeds and yet the mustard tree that grows from it is taller than all the other shrubs. In other words, the greatest of achievements can emerge from the smallest of beginnings.

That thought reminds me of a photograph taken in January 1928. It shows a group of four or five nuns getting into a car. They were starting out on a journey that would see them arrive at a place called Onitsha, in Nigeria. This small group of nuns were the first of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary to leave their convent in



Killeshandra and to head into, what must have been for them, the great unknown. Only four years earlier the convent had opened and accepted its first group of five postulants. Small beginnings indeed!

Yet, twenty-five years later, there were eighty-five sisters working from fifteen Holy Rosary Convents in Nigeria, South Africa and Sierra Leone. In the following decades the sisters continued to expand their mission, going to places such as the Cameroon, Zambia and Brazil.

I often think of that first group of sisters, setting out on the long journey to Onitsha, knowing very little about the place to which they were going, about its culture or about the perils and dangers that might await them there. I admire their courage. I admire their dedication. Yes, it was the smallest of beginnings, but their courage and dedication made sure that their labours would bear much fruit. In years to come, that little seed would grow into a huge shrub that would give shelter to many peoples all around the world.

Gerard Alwill PP

30 October 2019

First Reading (Rm 8:26-30): Paul reminds us that, *'The Spirit comes to us in our weakness.'* In your life now, where do you need the Spirit's help? As we each become aware of our weakness, we pray as in the responsorial psalm: *'Lord, I trust in your mercy.'*

Gospel (Lk 13: 22-30): Jesus invites us to *'enter by the narrow door'* (v. 24). This invitation reminds me of a poster I came across recently which says, *'Don't just wait for open doors, be the open door'*. Could it be that for us Christians in today, wherever we are situated, Jesus is inviting us to open the door of our hearts to celebrate the 'other' as sister or brother - be they migrants, refugees, people of different religions, cultures, races or languages? Cultivating open hearts is a key message of mission today.

Jesus announces that, *'Those who are last will be first and those who are now first will be last'* (v. 30). Hearing this, my mind goes to people like



the sixteen-year-old Nigerian school girl, Leah Sharibu, who has been held by Boko Haram since February 2018. Leah was kidnapped along with over 110 schoolgirls in Dapchi. About five of her classmates died in captivity, the others were released weeks later. Leah is still in captivity because of her refusal to renounce her Christian faith. Though young, Leah's story is an inspiration to Christians persecuted in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Recently, I met a Muslim girl from Indonesia, Dewi Maharani. In her young age, Dewi has dedicated her life to be a channel of peace between Muslim and Christian youths. She came to Rome as part of her preparation for this life-long mission of peace.

This Extraordinary Mission Month, I celebrate all the people who inspired us to live our faith. I celebrate each of you and what God is doing in families and in our world through each of you.

Sr Franca Onyibor MSHR

31 October 2019

Today is the final day of Mission Month 2019. Today's Gospel has something important to tell us about Jesus and his mission on earth. Jesus was very conscious that the mission given him by the Father had to be completed in Jerusalem and we are told in Luke 9:51 that Jesus *'resolutely took the road for Jerusalem'*. Shortly afterwards he commissioned his own disciples to proclaim that *'the kingdom of God is near'*.

As Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, he continues his ministry of bringing the 'Good News' to the poor, speaking about liberty, forgiveness and trust in his loving Father.

We hear that some well-meaning Pharisees are concerned about Jesus' safety because of Herod's desire to kill him. We get a hint of the fateful events that lie ahead. Jesus' response reflects his resolution – he is not deterred. Herod and his threats will not hinder Jesus from fulfilling his mission because Jesus is very much in charge of his own destiny.



The contrast between Herod and Jesus could not be more vivid. Herod, the cunning fox, the predator. Jesus, the mother hen, the protector, the nourisher.

There is a very important message for us in today's Gospel. We are reminded that, through our Baptism, we too are 'commissioned' to proclaim *'the kingdom of God is near'*. Jesus himself knows that this mission is not an easy one; there will be obstacles; there will be rejection. There will also be moments of happiness and joy and fulfilment.

Our strength in mission is knowing that Jesus too has made this journey and that he is with us each step of the way. Paul, in his letter to the Romans is very much aware of this. His confidence in Christ crucified was total. It is that confidence that strengthens us in our own work of mission.

Brian Starcken CSSp



Extraordinary Month of Mission Prayer

Heavenly Father,
when your only begotten Son
Jesus Christ rose from the dead,
he commissioned his followers to
'go and make disciples of all nations'
and you remind us that through
our Baptism we are made sharers
in the mission of the Church.

Empower us by the
gifts of the Holy Spirit to
be courageous and zealous
in bearing witness to the Gospel,
so that the mission
entrusted to the Church, which
is still very far from completion,
may find new and efficacious
expressions that bring life and light
to the world.

Help us make it possible for
all peoples to experience the saving love and mercy of Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever.
Amen.

Please consider praying
the Extraordinary Month
of Mission Prayer after
communion during
Mission Month



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