

Homily of Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2023

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6; Psalm 96:1, 3-5, 7-10; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5; Matthew 22:15-21

Today is World Mission Sunday. It is a Sunday set aside for Catholics worldwide to recommit themselves to the Church's missionary activities through prayer and sacrifice. We are invited to, constantly, pray for the success of the Church's missionary activities all over the world. In addition to our prayers, we are, also, invited to offer material and financial support to the Church's missionary activities. We are all missionaries, either by going to the missions or by praying for missionaries or by giving to support or sustain the missions. Also, today in a special way, we pray for men and women of goodwill who sacrifice their resources to support God's work in the missions.

For this year's World Mission Sunday, Pope Francis reflects on the theme, "Hearts on fire, feet on the move" drawn from the story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35. The Pope writes, "Those two disciples were confused and dismayed, but their encounter with Christ in the word and in the breaking of the bread sparked in them the enthusiastic desire to set out again towards Jerusalem and proclaim that the Lord had truly risen. ... *their hearts burned within them* as they heard the Scriptures explained by Jesus, *their eyes were opened* as they recognized him (in the breaking of bread), and ultimately, *their feet set out* on the way. By meditating on these three images, which reflect the journey of all missionary disciples, we can renew our zeal for evangelization in today's world."

The readings present to us individuals God sent on various missions. In the first reading is King Cyrus. Although he was a Persian pagan king, God anointed him and gave him the mission to set the people of Israel free from the Babylonian captivity. In the second reading are Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy. God gave them the mission of preaching the Good News. We recall that Paul was a persecutor of Christians, but God made him "a chosen instrument" (Acts 9:15). Silvanus and Timothy were converts to Christianity. They became Paul's co-workers and great missionaries. That God used Cyrus, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy as his chosen instruments, not minding their past and former ways of life, is an encouragement to us that God calls everyone and wants to use everyone to continue the mission of Jesus at various levels. Everyone is qualified!

The mission of Jesus which we are to continue is as in Luke 4:18, proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, bring recovery of sight to the blind, and set the oppressed free. In Matthew 10:8, "Heal the sick, cleanse those who have leprosy, and drive out demons." And as in Matthew 25:35-40, give food to the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, and visit prisoners.

The mission of Jesus is in faraway lands and within and around us. Therefore, let us pray to have the spirit of mission like Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, and other great missionaries through whose sacrifice Christianity reached the ends of the earth and has survived till our time. Let our hearts burn within us; let our eyes be opened; and let our feet set out on the way, as Pope Francis demands of us in his message. Let us proceed without delay like Mary, the mother of Jesus. When she received the message concerning her cousin, Elizabeth, the word of God says, "She set out and went with haste" to be with Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56). What a great mission! There is always an 'Elizabeth' somewhere who needs our attention and support. Each of us has a mission. Let us set out and go with haste.

There are four stages of mission: Stage one is CALL to mission from God. Stage two is ACCEPTANCE of mission from us. Stage three is GOD'S GRACE for the mission from God. Stage four is mission ACCOMPLISHMENT by God and us.

However, every mission has its tests, difficulties, and challenges. There were tests, difficulties, and challenges for Jesus, as we see in today's gospel. The Pharisees and the Herodians plotted to entrap him by putting him to test. There were tests, difficulties, and challenges for Paul and Silas. In Macedonia, they were falsely accused, beaten severely, and thrown into prison (Acts 16:16-40). Paul boasts of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 of being in prison several times, flogged severely several times, and exposed to death several times. Therefore, we are not to be discouraged by mission tests, difficulties, and challenges since we rely on God's grace and not on ourselves.

St. Paul boasts of his sufferings. What sufferings for the sake of the Good News can I boast of?

Let us pray: O Lord, by your grace, let our hearts burn within us, let our eyes be opened, and let our feet set out on the way to the mission you have given to us. Amen.

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