

## **Homily of Twenty Ninth-Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2020**

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 have sacrificed their resources to support God's work in the missions.

Pope Francis, in his message for World Missionary Day, 2020, draws our attention to Prophet Isaiah's response to his calling, "Here am I, send me" (Isaiah 6:8). The pope writes, "This is the ever new response to the Lord's question: 'Whom shall I send?' This invitation from God's merciful heart challenges both the Church and humanity as a whole in the current world crisis. ... God continues to look for those whom he can send forth into the world and to the nations to bear witness to his love, his deliverance from sin and death, his liberation from evil. ... The celebration of World Mission Day is also an occasion for reaffirming how prayer, reflection and the material help of your offerings are so many opportunities to participate actively in the mission of Jesus in his Church."

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 that God calls everyone and wants to use everyone to continue the mission of Jesus at various levels. Everyone is qualified! However, God gives mission graces to those who accept the call.

The mission of Jesus which the Church and all of us 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. And as 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. There is mission for everyone. Pope Francis wrote in 2019, "I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptized man and woman is a mission... Each of us is a mission to the world, for each of us is the fruit of God's love." Let us, therefore, not stifle the spirit of mission in us by refusing the invitation to mission. Let us not stifle the spirit of mission in anyone else by what we do or what we say. 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.

In the Gospel reading, the Pharisees and the Herodians were bent on stifling the spirit of mission in Jesus by persecuting him. They plotted to entrap him. In the same way, Churches and Christians are persecuted all over the world. Churches and Christians are persecuted either by targeted punitive government policies, or denial of rights and privileges, or forceful acquisition of Churches' and Christians' properties, or destruction of Churches' properties and forcing Christians to flee from their homeland, or killing of Christians and missionaries. Jesus forewarned his followers to expect persecution since he, himself, was persecuted (John 15:20). We pray for the persecuted Churches and Christians all over the world, that their faith may not fail. We pray that Christian leaders may stand up and stand firm to resist the Evil One and his agents prowling around and devouring Christians and Christianity.

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