

Homily of Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 33:3-5, 18-18, 20, 22; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45

Today is World Mission Sunday. Pope Pius XI instituted World Mission Sunday in 1926 to be an annual day of prayer and expression of support for the Catholic Church's missionary vision and character. It is a Sunday that is set aside for Catholics all over the world to recommit themselves to the Church's missionary activities through prayer and offering. We are invited, constantly, to pray for the success of the Church's missionary activities in every part of the world. We pray for missionaries and missionary institutions and pray that the Lord of the harvest sends more laborers for his harvest (Matthew 9:37-38).

We pray for seminaries and religious houses formators, seminarians, novices, and candidates. We also pray for men and women of goodwill who sacrifice their talents and resources to support God's work in the missions. 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.

Pope Francis' theme of reflection for this year's World Mission Sunday is, "Go and invite everyone to the banquet" (cf. Matthew 22:9). The pope says, "The Church, for her part, in fidelity to the mission she has received from the Lord, will continue to go to the ends of the earth, to set out over and over again, without ever growing weary or losing heart in the face of difficulties and obstacles." He adds, "The mission for all requires the commitment of all."

The pope prays, "May all of us, the baptized, be ready to set out anew, each according to our state in life, to inaugurate a new missionary movement, as at the dawn of Christianity!"

In the first reading, Isaiah prophesied Jesus' mission. The Messiah was going to suffer, and be crushed (crucified), and give his life. By doing so, the will of the Lord shall be accomplished, many shall be justified, and their guilt he shall bear. From the apostles and the early Church until our time, the Church has followed in the footsteps of Christ for the sake of the Kingdom. The Church has continued to suffer persecution and martyrdom. That is why the Church on earth is called "Church Militant." Pope Francis requests that everyone's involvement and commitment are needed. Persecuted Christians and difficult missions need our support.

Only a few persons give up houses or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or land to go on mission in faraway places for the sake of the Gospel. Therefore, another level of mission is to be a missionary in the environment one finds him/herself. That is, to make disciples in the power of the Spirit right wherever we live, worship, work, study, eat, refresh, play, and so on. Witnessing Christ in one's environment is a very important missionary activity. The words of Moses to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 30:11-14 is very relevant to many people who are on mission in their environment. "For this command which I am giving you today is not too wondrous or remote for you. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'Who will go up to the heavens to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may do it?' Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may do it?' No, it is something very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it."

In a broader sense, mission means aim or intention or motive. This meaning helps us to understand the interaction between Jesus and the sons of Zebedee. They requested from Jesus, "Grant that in your glory we sit one at your right and the other at your left." The disciples of Jesus believed that Jesus was a political messiah. James and John, like the other disciples, believed that Jesus was to carry out a revolution, overthrow the Romans, and restore the kingdom and the glory of Israel. They were, surely, not thinking about the heavenly glory of Jesus. Their discipleship at that time was out of ulterior motive. They lobbied to occupy the highest positions when Jesus overthrows the Romans. We all know the adverse results of people who, with deceptive motives, bulldoze their way into positions of power and authority. Wrong aim, wrong motive, bad mission! Jesus says, "... whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all" (Mark 10:44).

Finally, mission means task and goal. God gives each of us a task (mission) at every stage of our lives. Anyone who is unable to identify his/her mission must pray for the grace to do so and the grace to accept it and carry it out. God who gives the mission (task) gives the grace. Our young ones must have a vision of their God assigned goal (mission) as early as possible and work towards achieving it. A builder cannot make a headway if he/she has no drawing (vision) to work with. Mission is impossible without a vision. It is only when someone has a destination in mind that he/she can figure out the way to reach it.

For the Church's mission and our personal mission, the second reading encourages us to "confidently approach" Jesus Christ, the High Priest, who is on "the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace for timely help" (Hebrews 4:16). For without him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

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