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MISSION MONTH BOOKLET

*A collection of reflections to enrich
daily liturgies during October 2020*

welcome this booklet for Mission Month 2020, produced by World Missions Ireland (WMI). I hope the booklet will be a beneficial resource for all who use it during Mission Month and beyond.

Two significant events mark our October Mission Month 2020, the first and the most immediate being the COVID-19 Pandemic which is still raging throughout our world as I write this introduction. Indeed, our world, especially the most disadvantaged areas, will be dealing with the effects of this pandemic, according to the experts, for many years to come.

Here in Ireland, many families are still grieving the loss of a beloved family member. Our medical services personnel, our frontline staff, have shown themselves to be truly heroic in their service to the sick. They have, through their unstinting commitment and professionalism, shown to our society what it means to truly care for our brothers and sisters. They are, in the words of Pope Francis, operating in one of the most critical 'field hospital' situations of our time. Their witness of care and solidarity to those who are fragile has been a powerful sign and antidote to the individualism found in modern culture.

Our thoughts go beyond our island to the families, especially in the mission countries, who have also lost loved ones. In every part of the world, the human heart is filled with sadness when a member of the family dies. It is particularly difficult for families when those who die receive only limited medical care. They are part of our prayer intentions but also, we must see how we can assist them practically through our financial offering, however little that may be.

World Missions Ireland has adopted the following theme for this year's Mission Month: 'Together we can do more: Blessed are the peacemakers.' A new world order is emerging from the global pandemic. We now live in a world that calls us to act in solidarity with our neighbours both near and far. Through WMI, it is possible to reach out to participate in the Church's mission assistance programme at this time of the pandemic.

The second significant event to be recalled this Mission Month is the publication of the document *Querida Amazonia* (Beloved Amazonia) from Pope Francis earlier this year. The document comes as the fruit of the discernment and dialogue from the work of the 2019 Synod on the Amazon. Pope Francis gathered representatives of the families and communities of the vast Amazon region comprising many countries in South America, to hear their life stories and to listen to their pleas for respect and solidarity from their brothers and sisters around the world. Tragically, we now learn that the COVID-19 pandemic is doing terrible damage to the little communities scattered throughout this

vast region. Accounts of the difficulties of those who live in this vast forest area are gradually coming into the public domain, highlighting their fragility and helplessness in the face of, not only the pandemic, but also other forces that threaten their lives and the environment they live in.

Pope Francis calls for a renewed commitment to the Gospel of hope and life in the Amazon region. This is a task that we are all asked to share and participate in, wherever we are living our commitment to the Gospel. The Holy Father spoke in front of St Peter's Basilica in Rome, on 26 March, to remind us that we are all in the same boat on this small planet of ours whether we live in Ireland or in the distant lands of the Amazon: 'We have realised that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time, important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other,' From this pandemic, Pope Francis said, we 'have realised that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.'

The renewed call to a Missionary approach in all our activities is the call that we hear this Mission month – Together we can do more.

I hope the material in this booklet for the month of Mission 2020 will be rewarding in assisting us to deepen our understanding of what it means to be called a 'Missionary Disciple'. I would like to welcome the new Director of World Missions Ireland, Fr Michael O'Sullivan, a member of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers). My thanks to him and all the staff at WMI, together with those who have prepared contributions for this booklet.

In conclusion, in this time of pandemic uncertainty, Pope Francis asks us 'to invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. To hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them, like the disciples, we will experience that with Jesus on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength turning to the good what happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.'

+ Kieran O'Reilly

Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly, SMA
Archbishop of Cashel & Emly



Thursday, 1 October 2020 **St Thérèse of Lisieux, Patroness of the Missions**

Jesus gives us the framework for missionary work right here in his instructions to these seventy newly appointed apostles. He first tells them to bring the gift of peace to those they visit. He then tells them to heal the sick, to preach the Good News that the Kingdom of God is near them. Jesus leaves them in no doubt about the challenges which will await them, how many people will not welcome them. We get a picture of the unredeemed world where peace is patchy, and love is often lacking. Do what you can, he tells them, to offer healing, comfort, peace and harmony. To spread God's kingdom, Jesus chooses to depend on the various gifts of his chosen ones. He sends us out just as we are. We carry little except our limited strengths and our frailties. The gift of peace that we can bring, to those who accept us, is more precious than any casual roadside conversation. Looking around the globe today, we see many examples of hostility, injustice and lack of love. The Gospel challenges us to be messengers of peace. Maybe by entering into the chaos of someone within your own area, you will discover that 'the kingdom of God has come near' and that you are one of the 'seventy others' bringing the Good News of the kingdom. Perhaps quietly recall one person that you know who is suffering and who needs 'the good news' of human support. Today, the Church celebrates the life of Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Thérèse prayed for missionaries and the spread of the Gospel. In the same spirit, we turn to our loving Father to pray throughout this month for all missionaries.

Fr Peter Okpetu

Friday, 2 October 2020 **Feast of the Guardian Angels**

Throughout the Old Testament, we hear of angels – messengers of God, ministering and reminding people of who God is. In Genesis, we meet Hagar, who, when cast out by Sarah, is ministered to by an angel. The presence of the angel is a presence of God, the provider, the comfort-giver. Jacob encountered angels and at the end of his life. He speaks of the guarding presence of the angel who had delivered him from harm (Gn 48:16). The angels called him to come to a new understanding of who God is.

Amidst the challenges and struggles that life inevitably brings, there is hope in God's word, trusting there is an 'angel ahead of you.' However, being led by an angel does not mean that one does not experience life in all its complexity.

The guardian angel reminds us of God's call that we might experience life to the fullest. The choice is ours. We may pay attention to the angels we meet or ignore them. The angel invites us to engage with who God is, to embrace life as we encounter it, and trust that God is there before us.

That is why Jesus names the child as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. There is a world of a difference between being childish and childlike. To be childish as an adult is not to have learned from life's experience. However, to be childlike is to retain the joy and wonder of a child, the ability to play and have the gift of humility. Our guardian angels remind us that God is present in our world, beckoning to us from around every corner, hiding beneath and within the challenges, a glimpse of an ever-greater God than we can imagine.

Frances Rowland

Saturday, 3 October 2020

Pope Francis at the inauguration of the COVID-19 Commission, May 2020 said: 'at this "Tragic Moment" of human history I want the Church to be present through the work of charity and if you do not do it, who will do it?' As we reflect together about this crisis and the things we can do together to overcome it, we really see this crisis is for us, and for all people an opportunity. To imagine a better future post COVID-19 where 'together we can do more,' creative solidarity is the cry of the moment. In this context, we could say the mission of the Church is

- To listen and to accompany people in their suffering.
- To open our doors and to offer hope, because we believe, as Jesus Christ showed us, life is stronger than death. But we have a responsibility to prioritise the common good, with respect, complementarity and inclusivity.
- To share our means, to save lives, without any discriminations, 'young and old, migrants and the poor'. We cannot forget anyone. Food crisis

causes hunger and affects our poorest.

- To encourage the diversion of funds from weapons to food.

Let us expand joint assistance projects and grant help to countries and communities in need. We can support new options to care for human beings, nature and biodiversity.

Among the many lessons the coronavirus has taught us is that we can make huge changes in our own lifestyle; we are capable of great efforts and sacrifices to protect, care for and support others. The valuable lesson is that we do not need as many things as we thought and we can travel less.

Together we can do more to build a world where human dignity is valued and respected by building bridges instead of walls, by being more hope-filled and peaceful.

Sr Julie Doran, OLA

Sunday, 4 October 2020 – 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

When the scramble for student accommodation begins in early autumn, stories circulate about the old enmity of landlords versus tenants. The landlord is usually cast as the villain and the tenant as the innocent, duped into renting a substandard place, or evicted at short notice. However, I know more stories about ungrateful tenants than uncaring landlords; tenants who absconded without paying, and others who wrecked the property before fleeing. The tension between the renter and the owner is a common theme in human affairs. In spite of the generous terms and conditions of the contract, i.e. a well-ordered, productive vineyard in return for a modest rent, the tenants in today's gospel bring about their own downfall through greed.

Mission Month is a good time to look at how we are managing the Lord's harvest, 'the Business of Heaven'. Did the lockdown last March reveal that the tenants in the vineyard had done their work in helping the people to preserve their inner life during the time of plague? Or did it reveal the painful fact that we had failed to supply the demand for spiritual security, resulting in a meltdown of the old certainties? Has the field-hospital Church, pioneered by generations of missionaries abroad and highlighted by Pope Francis, been

neglected at home? Have the people gone elsewhere because we were unable to keep the supply chain going in time of spiritual hunger? Has our clerical church concentrated on ritual rather than renewal?

Generations of Holy Rosary Sisters (Killeshandra) brought the fruit of the vineyard to the poor and they have achieved lasting success in education and healthcare by empowering the people with the precious legacy of self-sufficiency and confidence in their own abilities. In Cavan, many of the vineyard workers are ageing gracefully and, we hope, gratefully as they recall the work which they sacrificed so much for. They have a rich harvest to enjoy, these good and trustworthy tenants.

Fr Charlie O'Gorman

Monday, 5 October 2020

The coronavirus pandemic raised vital issues and conflicts around best strategies and policies on how to 'manage' the virus. In a word, different 'gospels' of understanding and handling the virus have been espoused by medical experts and policy makers. Who to believe and who to follow? Which strategies are best to ensure our safety? We trust those who tell us 'do this and life will be yours.' Eventually, the strategy was simplicity itself – social distancing and washing of hands will save your life.

Both readings today raise apparently complex issues and situations and the corresponding question of what to do? But underneath the questions lies the issue of who belongs to God's people? Who is a real disciple? What is the authentic gospel? In Jesus' case the story of the Good Samaritan comes immediately after the mission of the disciples. Were the disciples preaching a different doctrine and practice than that of the old faith? This apparently lies behind the lawyer's question. Paul is exasperated with the Galatians who have fallen away from what was originally preached to them. The same issue arises; who is preaching the authentic gospel and practising the true faith? Who really belongs to the Church? The parable of the Good Samaritan demonstrates that the 'foreigner and heretic' understood and practised true charity, the heart of the gospel. Paul makes it clear that the gospel he preached, he learned from a revelation of Jesus Christ. Any other version is false. Jesus provided the doctor of the law a simple answer to a complex

question – ‘go and do likewise.’ COVID-19 has taught us that life focuses on the most essential functions: eating, breathing and sleeping. In the complexity of the pandemic, we returned to the essence of what life is. Do this and life will be yours.

Richard Foran

Tuesday, 6 October 2020

There is a great irony in the world in which we live our lives today. Despite the many labour-saving gadgets that afford us more leisure time, we are the most driven, tension-filled and over-organised people that ever lived on the face of this earth. And we wonder how our parents and grandparents who had none of these conveniences ever had time or leisure to relax, to be quiet or even to pray.

The gospel story today is a simple, attractive story – partly because it is so human and true to life. Martha is playing the role of the perfect hostess, while Mary is paying attention to what Jesus is saying. Now, Jesus is not chiding Martha for her loving service but because she is distracted with all the serving. She is ‘anxious and worried about many things’ (Lk 10:41). She is too busy to pay attention to her guest.

Many of us, I suspect, identify with Martha for we too are busy with so many things and are constantly short of time. Perhaps our greatest challenge is finding the right balance between the tasks we must accomplish and the needs of the people we serve, including ourselves. We live in a world of constant activity and noise, so much so that home becomes just a stopping place to refuel or just to crash.

We human beings have a spiritual dimension that needs attention, for we do not live by bread alone. And we are not taking our spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside time each day to be with, to listen to and to converse with the Lord. For some, this seems a waste of time when there are so many things to be done. And we are inclined to feel guilty if we sit still because it makes us feel empty and useless. We have forgotten how to cope with stillness with the result that our lives have become shallow and superficial.

Today’s gospel reading highlights the importance of listening, of reflecting, of contemplation. Both action and contemplation are necessary, and both must be integrated into any authentic Christian life worthy of the name.

Fr Maurice Hogan, SSC

Wednesday, 7 October 2020

Called by Name

The readings today are all about people – very particular men and women who are not only named but they are chosen, they are called, they relate to others and they are on a mission. The first chapter of Acts of the Apostles it is just after the Ascension and the apostles make their way back to the ‘upper room’ where each one is now named again, echoing their call by Jesus in Chapter 6 of the Gospel of Luke. They are also named ‘two by two’: Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James and Simon. Some women are also there but Mary is the only one specifically named. In reading these names of the early Apostles, I keep wondering about them and their families. Are these names ancestral? Had Peter or John a father or grandfather with the same name? Had they brothers and sisters? Did they inherit any particular family characteristics like hair colour, facial features, birthmarks?

The Psalm brings us right into Mary’s world when she was told she was going to give birth. She bursts into a song of joy. The Message translation has her saying: ‘I’m bursting with God news ... I’m dancing the song of my Saviour God.’ Not only is Mary delighted about the birth, but the gospel gives us the name of the angel who announced the birth – Gabriel – and also tells us her cousin Elizabeth is also expecting. So names are very important; being named brings a mission with it. These readings are about being born, being called, being happy because God the Almighty did great things for them all and continues to do this for us too.

Sr Liz Murphy, RSM

Thursday, 8 October 2020

The psalm today which is the song of Zechariah when his son John the Baptist was born, praises God who is always faithful to God's promises: God has raised up a saviour who will free us from our foes so that we might serve God in holiness and justice all our lives. Today we too are asked to remember that God is always faithful, God always answers our prayer.

The sentence said by Jesus in today's gospel is very familiar: 'Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you' (Lk 11:9). I'm sure all of us here have asked for God's help on many occasions. At times in my own life, I know that my prayer has been answered. However, there have been other times when I felt that my prayer was not answered – at least not in the way I wanted it to be answered. We are asked to trust and believe that God does respond to us, maybe not giving us the answer we wanted, but undoubtedly giving us the grace we need. Today we pray for open eyes, open minds and open hearts to hear and accept God's spirit at work always within and among us.

Pope Francis speaks a lot about prayer. He invites us to pray often, dedicating time each day to sit in silence before God, so as to grow in an intimate relationship with God who loves us unconditionally. He reminds us that prayer is all-powerful and that without both prayer and mission there is no Christian life. He compares prayer and mission to the act of breathing when he said:

The spiritual life is fed, nourished, by prayer and is expressed outwardly through mission: inhaling and exhaling. When we inhale, by prayer, we receive the fresh air of the Holy Spirit. When exhaling this air, we announce Jesus Christ risen by the same Spirit.

He asks us to use prayer to bring peace, forgiveness and justice to the world. He reminds us that, 'Miracles happen. But prayer is needed! Prayer that is courageous, struggling and persevering, not prayer that is a mere formality.' And he also tells us that it is no good to pray unless we too are prepared to act: 'You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That's how prayer works.'

What would we do, if, as happened in the story in today's gospel, a friend

woke us out of a deep sleep in the middle of the night and asked us for a loaf of bread? How would you respond? If the friend continues to persist, most likely we will give them what they want so we can have some peace! During this month of mission, we are asked to remember not only our own needs, but the needs of those many people in our world who need bread, shelter, justice, peace, security, friendship and love. We are asked to remember them, to pray for them and to do whatever we can to help. Let our prayer be sincere and let each of us be moved out of our own beds, out of our comfort zones, to try to help those in need, through our prayer and through our generous and courageous action.

Sr Kathleen McGarvey, OLA

Friday, 9 October 2020

What we do not see in today's gospel is what happened just before the crowd challenges Jesus. They watched as Jesus banished an evil demon from a man who was mute. They watched this miracle as it happened, but some very human traits came to the surface: denial, doubt, and slander. Some of them denied that this good that Jesus did came from God. Others doubted and asked for a sign from heaven even though they saw him cure the man. Others simply resorted to slander and said, 'It is through Beelzebub, the prince of devils, that he casts out devils.'

Jesus throws down the gauntlet to us all in today's gospel. There can be no neutrality where Jesus is concerned. We are either for him or against him. Today's gospel introduces the idea that neutrality is impossible. There is a real sense of urgency in the gospel with a pressing invitation to take sides. Jesus is on a mission to build up God's Kingdom and there is no place for indecision. He challenges us all to say which side we belong to. Are we truly committed to building up God's Kingdom, to joining him on mission, or are we content to sit on the fence?

Aristotle once said that nature abhors a vacuum. In today's gospel, Jesus is telling us that the devil loves one! He tells us that once we have chosen to be on mission with him, we must be on our guard, because the evil spirit will come back 'to find the house swept and tidied.' It will bring even worse spirits with it, and our final condition will be worse than before.

Julieann Moran

Saturday, 10 October 2020

It was not the strong stirring words of homilies that taught me faith nor the learning of doctrine from inspiring teachers; I witnessed faith first-hand in the life and being of my grandfather. He never spoke of the atrocities he experienced at war; the death of his son and the many other family crises turned him, not away from God but towards God, believing, like the psalmist, in God's faithfulness and ability to sustain and renew. He held on to God's promises in the most challenging of times – and there were many. A co-founder of a rugby club and no stranger to the tough reality of life on a construction site, he did not hide his faith. His prayer was sincere and his actions gave testimony to what he believed.

The 'foolish' Galatians and the woman in the gospel reading missed the point. Real freedom and true happiness are not to be found in external circumstances of our lives: focusing on the differences of ethnicity, sexuality, standing in society and even the pride of achievement can and does sabotage the work of the Spirit. Today Christ, in the gospel reading, continues to challenge his sisters and brothers to be authentic and true, to develop our interior life shaped by his Word and apply it in all that life throws at us. It is when we actively listen to God's Word, and live it, that we will find personal happiness and fulfilment, and, like my grandfather, inspire faith and hope in the people around us.

Jane Ferguson

Sunday, 11 October 2020 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Guess who's not coming to dinner?

'Daddy, will you come to see me play on Saturday?' 'Sorry son, I've got to get the car washed for the weekend.' We do what we see as urgent, and we often neglect the important. Nobody at retirement will regret not having spent more time in the office but may regret not spending time with loved ones.

It was similar for those who received the king's invitation. The Gospel of Luke goes into more detail: One had bought land, another beasts of burden and another had just got married. They all had something that required their

immediate attention.

In scripture, the wedding feast represents what God has on offer in his Kingdom. In the Old Testament, the chosen people didn't accept his invitation. The prophet Isaiah is doing his best to call them to their senses. He is telling them that God wants what's best for them, what will bring them true happiness. He will provide for them, protect them and free them from guilt and shame and a reason to grieve. Then in the psalm this same God will see that "goodness and kindness shall follow his people all the days of their life." To add to that the New Testament reading says, 'There is nothing I cannot master with the help on the One who gives me strength' (Phil 4:13). We all need to hear this Good News. Imagine getting the all clear from the cancer specialist, but not being told the results of the tests!

So we come to Jesus to hear something wonderful and we have to go and tell what we have heard. God's generosity is such that all that is required to be present at the banquet is the desire to be there. Don't be satisfied with the merely urgent and neglect what's most important.

Fr Thomas McManus

Monday, 12 October 2020

The opening sentence of today's gospel from Luke 11 should grab our attention! Jesus is telling the crowd that the current generation is an evil generation. He goes on to tell them what will happen in the future. I assume Jesus' words would have been alarming and disturbing to his listeners. For us too. There is certainly important truth for us here. The Gospel is not always easy to digest, but it is always good news. The good news here is that even in the time of Jonah, people turned back to God and found grace and the same is always true for us in Christ.

At a high level, Jesus is hoping to get the crowd's attention. I think it worked! He knows that it's safer to be anonymous in a crowd, but Jesus calls us out of the crowd and into that space where we are seen, heard and loved personally. The place where we can wrestle with our faith, even with such difficult topics like evil and repentance. Jesus wants them to listen attentively to his message. What he tells them is particularly challenging. However, is Jesus sending another message also to his listeners and therefore to us? Is he

perhaps hoping that today we will step out of the crowd? To find freedom and truly be attentive to notice how he is present to us, even in our questions and struggles of faith? I think the answer is yes, because he wants us to be free in him. As our reading from Galatians 5:1 says today, 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again.'

So, may we step out of the crowd today to know the love of God in a new and fresh way and be freed from judgment and saved from evil.

Rev. Rob Jones

Tuesday, 13 October 2020

The readings for today are dangerous, critical and opportune.

The readings are dangerous. It can be tempting for believers to feel that somehow 'we' have it and others are less fortunate. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Lk 18:9-14) stealthily tricks us into judging the Pharisee, catching us in the act. Legalism has flourished in our Catholic tradition: there is no room for superiority. Instead, clear-eyed self-examination is called for.

The reading from Paul goes beyond the risk of superiority to the danger of supersessionism, the teaching that the Christian faith supersedes the Jewish faith. Supersessionism was standard teaching over two millennia until the Holocaust. The very same Paul reminds us that 'the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable' (Rm 11:29).

The readings are critical. Both readings set up strong contrasts. Jesus invites us to go beyond the external practices of faith to the heart of the matter. In teaching of Jesus (and of Judaism), the heart of the matter is love of God and love of neighbour, the practice of compassion and mercy, literally a matter of the heart (see the startling Mk 7:17-19). For Paul, there is a new freedom in Christ, beyond the ethnic boundaries of the mother faith, a new freedom available to all without distinction (Gal 3:28).

The readings are opportune. 'For freedom Christ has set us free' (NRSV), freedom from the superficiality of externals (Luke) and liberation from death and sin (Paul). The clarion call to freedom resounds even more widely in our

world of many 'un-freedoms,' inequalities and oppressions. What is holding us back? How can we make the gift of freedom a reality? Christ broke the chains of death — as we proclaim our freedom, may we live it.

Fr Kieran J. O'Mahony, OSA

Wednesday, 14 October 2020

We know that the core of Jesus' message is loving compassion, but his words, directed at religious hypocrites, are angry words. Jesus uses colourful language and memorable insults against those loaders of heavy burdens, which they do nothing to relieve.

Jesus keeps God's preference for those carrying heavy burdens, for the overlooked, for vulnerable people at the forefront of his teaching. Jesus has the kind of love that sees beyond appearances and the kind of love that pierces disguises. His love dignifies people. He asks that our love does too. Saint Matthew is calling us to face the vision of Jesus with a willing heart and a ready spirit.

Beware of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The disciples must be open and sincere, with true correspondence between 'inside' and 'out'. The reason is that one day all will be made clear. Jesus has no time for cover-ups.

Hypocrisy by definition is not a private affair; it infects other people in its conspiracy, it pollutes the whole human environment, and it cripples right judgement.

To ease the burdens of others and be compassionate to those experiencing difficulties is a challenging task. None of us can do this alone. This is why we are here, gathered in community, to pray that God will help our efforts to bring the vision of Jesus down to earth.

Let us pray for the Church, for our parish and for our religious leaders that we may all be a sign of compassion and solidarity in a world where so many people carry very heavy burdens.

Fr Brian O'Toole, CSSp

Thursday, 15 October 2020

Introduction

An essential moment to mission is welcoming the other. Sometimes it is easier to welcome the complete stranger than the person who is sitting, standing or even living beside us.

Reflection

In human dynamics, there is a powerful drive to obliterate anyone who thinks or acts differently to us. This is especially the case when it comes to matters of religion and faith. When we meet someone of a different religion or even of no religion, it is difficult not to be suspicious or wary in their presence. It means that our initial, interior reaction to difference can be quite negative, even if on the outside we appear to be calm and hospitable. Oddly enough, this dynamic is often more pronounced when it comes to others of our own religion who understand and live the life of faith differently to us. In such a situation, perhaps because we feel intimately threatened in our own identity, we can find the most extreme antipathies. Freud speaks of the narcissism of small differences as a potent source of hostility. This explains to some degree why you get severe and crude polarisations in the Church, typified by those who see themselves as traditionalists in opposition to so-called liberals and vice versa. The inability to allow others to think and act differently in matters of faith has done great damage in the history of Christianity.

Our gospel today underlines that hostility toward the other is never a sign of the Kingdom of God. When we encounter another, who thinks or acts differently to us, it is worth stepping back and being attentive not only to our own interior reaction, but also to what we might, in fact, receive from the other. The prophetic voice and action of the other may, indeed, disturb us, but it is the moment of our enrichment. It would be a pity to miss, suppress, or ignore it. An important part of mission is welcoming the other. And it is most often through the other that God acts in our lives. The French writer Victor Hugo says that 'the mind is enriched by what it receives, the heart by what it gives.'

Fr Michael Conway

Friday, 16 October 2020

'All' – this very simple word occurs repeatedly in today's liturgy to highlight, quite strikingly, the universality of God's mission that is:

- Rooted in God's awesome plan for creation, an extraordinary gift to us if only we could discern and appreciate it; God never ceases to fill 'the earth with his love,' and since 'all his works are to be trusted,' every place and moment present opportunities for encountering this God who has been coming to us and guiding 'all things' since the beginning.
- Directed towards 'all the children of men,' whom God looks upon with loving care and compassion, excluding nobody; for everyone, created in the divine image and likeness, already bears the imprint of Christ, and this becomes explicit by the seal of the Holy Spirit who is sent to enable us all reach our complete potential and share in the fullness of life.
- Undertaken with gratitude and hope – 'May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our hope in you' – and utterly reliant on divine grace which we pray will 'at all times go before us and follow after,' as God, who cradles the entire universe, stoops to count 'every hair' of our heads, lest one fall to the ground unnoticed.
- And with untiring love and committed witness in all circumstances, whether as parent and friend of the poor (St Hedwig), as monk and missionary (St Gall), as mystic and religious (St Margret Mary); for whatever trials come our way, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, whose Sacred Heart establishes the standard for Christian life and mission in every respect.

Fr Joe Egan, SMA

Saturday, 17 October 2020

Introduction to the celebration of Mass

Today we unite with our sisters and brothers around the world and especially in remote villages in Africa, Asia and South America. Today's reading calls us to deepen our faith and so we begin our Mass today with that in mind.

Introduction to the readings

In the first reading, St Paul prays for the early Christian community in Ephesus

that they will receive the gifts of wisdom and perception so that they may come to know Christ. Jesus reminds us in the Gospel of Luke today that we should not worry as the Holy Spirit will be our guide even when words fail us in difficult times.

Homily Reflection

I am sure that you have often looked into the night sky on a clear cloudless night and, if you had enough patience to wait, you would begin to see more stars appearing in the sky as your eyes became more adjusted in the darkness. You would also notice that some stars shine very brightly while others shine dimly. Words sometimes fail to capture the beauty of creation. Just as the stars shine brightly in the night sky, so does the goodness of people shine through in our everyday experiences and more especially in difficult times as we have been experiencing this year. Saint Paul, who was a missionary, shines brightly in the first reading today, as he prays for the community of Christians in Ephesus that they will receive a spirit of wisdom and perception so that they may come to know Christ. Our modern lifestyle can sometimes prevent us from really hearing God's word through the scriptures and creation around us. This can leave us feeling with a lack of fulfilment in our lives and we sometimes fail to see things clearly. God is constantly communicating with us. Try and make time to reflect on the scriptures and the beauty of creation during this October Mission Month to help you to let your light shine like the bright stars so that others may come to know Christ.

Jim Farrell

Sunday, 18 October 2020 – Mission Sunday 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

It's been one of those years that most of us will never forget. Due to the coronavirus, churches were closed and the mission of Christ looked as though it was put on hold. But thanks to Facebook and webcams, this mission continued with Mass and prayer services broadcast to people's homes. It was a new way of living one's faith.

Wherever a priest or religious is placed on mission they are workers in the vineyard, called to animate the baptised faithful in using their talents and gifts to communicate the message of Christ and his church.

As the prophet Isaiah says about those chosen: 'though you do not know me, I am you that people may know from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun that, apart from me, all is nothing' (Is 45:5-6).

Saint Paul says about missionaries: 'They give their lives because they have received power from above and the Holy Spirit is leading them.'

Jesus is praying for the success of his mission, that the world may come to know God through the efforts of every missionary. Working with the poor who have very little worldly possessions one encounters a humility that they display before God and others. I had the privilege of working in Ecuador, in South America, as a missionary for eight and a half years. The people were so welcoming and lived simple lives, without even basic facilities. Living among the poor, I came to realise that in the end the most important thing to have is faith in God. No achievements, no wealth, no honours placed upon me in this world can win me eternal life. Only one thing that matters: to know Christ Jesus and believe in him who is praying for us as we proclaim the gospel. The poor taught me that faith brings true happiness. This weekend give generously so that more missionaries will be able to work with the poorest of the poor in being there to celebrate the sacraments and preach the gospel.

Fr P.J. Hughes

Monday, 19 October 2020 Ss John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues & Companions

We reflect on the readings today as we celebrate the memorial of Saints John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, and companions. They were the first martyrs of North America and, as in so many places, a local church was born of their witness. We can spare a thought today for Christians in many parts of the globe who suffer persecution and even death for their faith. Mission often demands forbearance in the face of opposition and persecution. Essentially, mission is the witness to life, in a community that loves and cares, accompanying people in faith and developing all the gifts and resources of the community. In that, all may experience a loving God through a loving community.

Ephesians highlights what makes a mission or missioned community different from any other: 'God, who is rich in mercy, [with] the great love he

had for us...brought us to life with Christ' (Eph 2:4). Without mercy, we cannot be witnesses to others. It is core to Pope Francis' teaching and ministry. Francis sees compassion as core to the witness, which ironically draws such opposition, particularly within the Church, from those who are uncomfortable with gratuitous forgiving and compassion because it may show laxity and a loss of control.

The Ephesians reading speaks too of grace, the gift of God, the life of God in the human project. Grace too can be thwarted within the community; not recognised, not allowed to flourish. 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God'(Eph 2:8).

The gospel parable may not, at first, seem to be applicable to the dedicated work of mission. It speaks of greed. 'Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions' (Lk 12:15). Even missionaries or missionary orders, or people in Church positions or influential parishioners might believe themselves to very selfless, giving all. Yet they can be greedy, possessive of their power. They are not ready to share, even more hand over to others the works or projects they perhaps began or made flourish. Greedy for acknowledgement. 'You fool!' This day all could change!

Fr Brendan Carr, CSSp

Tuesday, 20 October 2020

In today's first reading, St Paul reminds the early Christian community of the gift of peace. Ephesus, like many modern-day cities, had a diverse population. Saint Paul's letter underlines that peace and inclusion are central tenants to the Good News that Jesus proclaimed during his earthly ministry.

Throughout our Church today, we continue to recognise the gift of peace. Many people in the missionary tradition of our Church have been instruments of peace all over the world. The SMA initiative, the Shalom Centre for conflict resolution, is a great example of building peace in the midst of conflict.

Peace is also a value that we celebrate today in our wider society. U2, the Irish band wrote "Pride (In the Name of Love)" which has become an international

anthem for peace, freedom and human rights. Inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, the song is an uplifting celebration of Martin Luther King Jr's non-violent struggle for equal rights and his dream for his nation to become a symphony of brotherhood. The song is focused around the Gospel understanding of love described in John 15:13: 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,' a love shown by Jesus on the cross and by Dr King when he paid the ultimate price in his fight for freedom. The Mass readings today invite all people to respond to the need for peace within our community. As Pope Francis reminds us, peace is both God's gift and a human achievement. As a gift of God, it is entrusted to all the baptised to attain it. Today, we pray for the gift of peace and ask God to fill our lives and our communities with this gift.

Ronan Barry

Wednesday, 21 October 2020

How intimidating it can be to have Paul and all he had been through for the sake of the Gospel abuse, abandonment, beatings, shipwreck and much more, all of which he embraced with courage, faith and perseverance – as our model for mission. Some who have embarked on foreign mission have experiences something similar to this – a sense of awe at the accomplishments of our older brothers and sisters and doubts about ourselves being able ever to speak the language as fluently as they do – to endure long stays in the midst of people, sharing their frugal means as they relished to do; to develop schools, clinics, church as they have done. What is not as immediately obvious is that many of these same missionary giants were all too mindful of their own weakness, learning through failure that any fruitfulness in their lives comes from allowing the power of God to work through them – fragile, earthenware vessels.

Paul, too, gained wisdom through weakness and learned to allow God's power to affect what purely human zeal could not accomplish. 'I shall be happy to make my weakness my special boast so that the power of God may stay over me' (2 Cor 12:9). Today's reading from Ephesians also hints at this when it attests to the power of God entrusting to Paul the grace 'of proclaiming to the pagans the infinite treasure of Christ.' Earlier in the same letter, Paul prays for our enlightenment that we can see 'how infinitely great is the power that

[God] has exercised for us believers'. It is grace that frees us to accept ourselves with all our giftedness and limitations, and to trust that God's power will give hope to others though our being humbly available to them.

Fr John O'Donoghue, M.Afr.

Thursday, 22 October 2020

First Reading (Eph 3:14-21): The writer prays that his people will experience the power of God's love in their lives. I was privileged to minister in Ghana and the Philippines. My old school pals criticise me for 'disturbing them... they have their own religion leave them alone.' So why was I there? If I had to sum it up in one sentence, I would like it to be Paul's prayer for his people: to have them experience the height and depth of God's love.

Gospel (Lk 12: 49-53): Jesus says he has come to bring fire and division. What's happened to the gentle Jesus, meek and mild? A sound spiritual principle advises us to go for the both/and rather than the either/or. It applies here: Our Jesus is indeed gentle and humble; he is also demanding and challenging. He will not allow us to be indifferent to him. His tough love insists our first loyalty be to him – beyond family and nation. That's hard. A Nigerian bishop put it well when he said 'the blood of clan and tribe is thicker than the waters of baptism.'

Yes, Jesus is divisive. He divides us from the intolerant and bigoted, from the dishonest and from those exploiting the poor and weak, from the evils that divide our world. But most of us have it easy in that we have the support of family and friends. Not so the woman I met who was from the English aristocracy and whose family strongly disapproved of her becoming a Catholic. When she became a religious sister her family cut her off completely. She has had no contact with them for years. For them, she simply does not exist. Didn't Jesus too experience that kind of 'division' when his family thought him out of his mind (Mk 3:21)?

We pray to this Lord of life and division for the grace and courage to follow him no matter the cost.

Fr Charles Timoney, M.Afr.

Friday, 23 October 2020

Jesus uses a symbol that is very well known to us when he refers to 'seeing a cloud rising in the west' or 'seeing the south wind blowing'. Here in Ireland, where the weather can change so much in one day, it is almost second nature for us to look to the sky for an indication of the coming weather and, in so doing, plan appropriately what to wear or what to do.

In the language of mission, this is often referred to as 'reading the signs of the times'. It is an important exercise as reading the signs of the times helps one to respond to the demands of mission in a more constructive, practical manner. My first mission in South Africa in the early 1980s was in a context of demonstrations, acts of violence, injury and death, torture and detention. Images of God as a just, loving and merciful Father did not correspond with the harsh reality of racism, landlessness, economic exploitation and political powerlessness. As a missionary living among the people, it was important to acknowledge this reality and in no way to ignore it with pious religious platitudes.

Ministry had to respond to a reality of death and destruction. Visiting the homes of those directly affected by the violence and praying with them, conducting funerals, visiting the injured in hospital, attending courts when people in our area were appearing, all became important ways to respond in these difficult times.

The important thing was to be present, sharing in the insecurity, the mayhem and the suffering. Being became more important than saying! It was important to read the signs of the times, and not to get it wrong.

Fr Seán O'Leary, M.Afr.

Saturday, 24 October 2020

When I went to Africa for the first time in the mid 1970s, it was as a secondary school teacher. One of the challenges I faced was to find ways to make sure the students were awake and paying attention – because it was only then that they could even begin to understand the mysteries of algebra! I quickly realised that, while some students would close their eyes (it was obvious that

they were not paying attention), others had developed the 'art' of not paying attention while keeping their eyes wide open. I must admit that there were moments when I felt a little frustrated by their lack of attention in class!

Remembering my own experiences as a teacher, I can begin to understand Jesus. He was preaching a message of the Kingdom and of the need for conversion, but often his listeners did not seem to be paying attention. It was as if they were asleep and not really engaged with what he was saying. Sometimes it was as if his message went in one ear and out the other! (Not unlike some of the boys in my mathematics class!)

In today's gospel story, the people were talking to Jesus about some tragic events which had occurred recently in Jerusalem. In his frustration, Jesus told them that worse would happen to them if they did not wake up and change their way of living. Jesus' words might surprise us by their severity, but he was trying to get his listeners to wake up, to open their eyes and ears, their hearts and minds to see and understand what was happening in their lives and in the world around them – and to take appropriate action. And he is calling on us to wake up too!

Fr Dave Sullivan, M.Afr.

Sunday, 25 October 2020
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In our second reading today, Saint Paul praises the faith of the Thessalonians 'as the news of their faith has spread everywhere'. What this reading doesn't tell us is that Paul had to make good his escape from Thessalonica as soon as he finished preaching there. (Acts 17:1–10).

Not every missionary has had to endure what St Paul endured at Thessalonica, or indeed earlier, when he was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19–20). Yet, many Irish missionaries have been killed while on mission; and others have been expelled from various jurisdictions around the world.

Fr Brian Grogan SJ in his book: Pedro Arrupe SJ: Mystic with Open Eyes (Messenger Publications, 2019) has written beautifully about the former superior general of the Jesuits and how his experience as a missionary priest prepared him so well to lead the Society of Jesus.

He quotes from a letter written by Arrupe in 1977, in response to the killing of five Jesuits within a few months of each other, in places as far apart as El Salvador, Brazil and Zimbabwe:

These are the Jesuits who the world and the Church need today, men impelled by the love of Christ who serve their brothers and sisters without distinction of race or class, men who know how to identify with those who suffer; how to live with them to the point of giving their lives to help them. Brave men who know how to defend human rights to the extreme of sacrificing their lives, if it is necessary.

Fr Grogan concludes that:

most of what Jesuits and their partners in mission do is hidden, but the legacy is also written in blood because the struggle for faith and justice is carried out under the cross and leads to conflict with dominant and powerful opponents.

These sentiments may be related to any or all of the religious orders and missionary congregations affiliated to World Missions Ireland.

Fr Hubert Martin

Monday, 26 October 2020

Jesus takes the initiative. The poor woman who has been suffering for so many years does not ask for anything. She may have come to the synagogue because she knows that Jesus, the healer, will be there, but she does not say a word; she is just present. Jesus notices her, sees her need and responds. Isn't this an example for us? Do we have to wait until people cry out before we help them? Are we not invited to respond to people's needs even if they are not expressed? We are aware of the inequality that exists in our world today, between individuals, between peoples, between nations. We do not have to wait for an explicit appeal to do something. We can find ways of helping: supporting Fairtrade, making sure that what we buy is not produced by means of slave labour, making sure that people are paid a proper wage for the services they render.

How did the woman react once she was cured? The Evangelist Luke mentions two things: 'she straightened up' and 'she glorified God'.

She straightened up: her dignity was restored; she was now able to look people in the face. She was in fact a new person, able to live a new life. We can take heart that when we help people who are suffering, allowing them to make a new start, we are helping to restore their dignity.

The woman glorified God: she must have been grateful to Jesus for curing her, but her thanks went to God. She recognised that it was through the power of God that Jesus was able to heal her. There is a lesson for us here. When we do things for people we should not expect to be thanked. We may hope for a sign of gratitude, yes, but we should not say to ourselves: 'Those people have never said thank you; I'm not going to help them again.' What we do for people is done for their benefit, not for our own. 'Not to us, Lord, but to your name give glory' (Ps 115:1).

Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald, M.Afr.

Tuesday, 27 October 2020

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast have a clear message for the Church and her mission today. Both parables show the immense contrast between the humble beginnings and the richness of growth and fruitfulness. At the same time, both the mustard seed and the yeast contain from the beginning all the energy that is needed for their amazing development, although being apparently insignificant.

When Jesus was preaching the coming of the Kingdom, many of his contemporaries were expecting a triumphant reign that would restore national independence, while Jesus' presence and message were almost the opposite. Jesus resorts to these parables to teach that the Kingdom is of a different kind: it would have a very humble beginning but would grow steadily by changing the hearts and the world from within. Nothing would be able to withstand this growth and prevent the promises from being fulfilled.

Are we not reminded of these humble beginnings when we look at the situation of many Christian communities in today's world? Christians are

becoming a small minority in many places and their presence threatens to become insignificant. Is their mission not becoming too great, impossible for them? Christians are called to rediscover that this humble reality brings them back to what Jesus himself has experienced, and that they have within themselves all that is necessary for this great mission, if they learn to build upon the Lord's promise and the power of his Holy Spirit.

On this point, Christians in Jerusalem and the Middle East offer a particular message to the worldwide Church. Everything started in Jerusalem in a very small and vulnerable way, facing opposition and persecution, but the Good News spread step by step throughout the region while reaching out to Europe and the ends of the world. For many centuries, the Holy Land and the Middle East were inhabited by a large Christian majority. However, in the course of history their numbers slowly diminished until they constitute today a 'little flock'. Some commentators even proclaim the end of the Christian presence in these regions. But the local Christians will not give up. They intend to remain living witnesses to the life, message and Resurrection of Christ, on the spot where everything started. They trust that they will be able, in the Spirit, to remain a sign of hope, 'hoping against hope' (Rm 4:18), in the worldwide Church. They rightly count on the support of their sisters and brothers in Christ.

Fr Frans Bouwen, M.Afr.

Wednesday, 28 October 2020

Before making any momentous decision regarding his earthly mission, Jesus would invariably go off by himself to pray to his Heavenly Father asking for strength and guidance. We see him do this in this reading from St Luke. Consider what was in Jesus' heart as he prayed – the hope, trust and love that he had for his disciples as he chose from among the Twelve who were closest to him and would be charged with the responsibility of carrying on his mission of the salvation of the world.

What came out of it? Each time I consider Jesus calling the disciples, I look in amazement at his choice of his closest companions. Surely, he could have done better. But these simple Jewish workmen, without any special qualifications except the knowledge and love of Jesus, and with no power or money to back

them, went out to carry his Good News to the ends of the earth. In the history of the world, there has never been a mission as far-reaching or effective as this.

But suddenly I realise, with some astonishment, that Jesus has also chosen me to be among those closest to him. I see my name mentioned among the names of the disciples. How can this be? In my weakness and many limitations, Jesus has shown a similar unwarranted trust in me and my potential. Though I do not see it myself, Jesus recognises and values what I can bring to his mission.

I ask Jesus for the grace and courage to open my heart to his call, so that I can accept, with trust and without fear, the task he has prepared for me in the spreading of his Good News in my little piece of the world.

Bishop Paul Chomnycky, OSBM

Thursday, 29 October 2020

Confronting the life-denying consequences of consumerism; the collusion of our sainted institutions in that denial; our propensity to fracture relationships; one's partiality for compromise; as well as illness and limitation; makes the Christian life an ongoing struggle.

Jesus encounters murderous hatred in unswervingly embodying the universal compassion of God. He longs to gather lovingly the scattered, disenfranchised poor. But he knows full well how that incurs unscrupulous opposition and loathing from the Herods of every generation. He continues steadfastly, aware of the consequences he embraces as his own act of redemptive love.

Christians and Christian communities, seeking to embody and celebrate in praxis and in sacrament, the limitless compassion of God's Kingdom, find themselves immersed in counter-cultural witness, resistance and transformative action. They soon realise that living out such Gospel purposefulness, is utterly beyond mere human capacity.

Such constancy is received only as gift. In prayer we discover both God as the giver of this gift and that we must never tire in begging God for it. We realise that God is never other than lovingly offering this gift and that our prayer's purpose is to train our hearts to receive it. That training readies us for this Christ-centred life of counter-cultural resistance and witness.

With the dedication of a Roman gladiator, an Olympic athlete, or an All-Ireland hurler, we prepare for spiritual combat; acquiring armour, belt, shoes, breastplate, shield and helmet. We experience exhaustion, confidence falters, confusion tempts, we haggle with compromise, we know failures, yet the transformative life of Christ continues to grow within us.

We pray unceasingly for this; to receive actively what God endlessly offers. God's constancy in Christ makes us fearless. The Holy Spirit places our spirit and our stance on an unshakeable foundation.

Fr John O'Brien, CSSp

Friday, 30 October 2020

First Reading (Introduction)

Today we begin St Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison and even though he has lost his freedom physically, he has become a 'slave of Christ Jesus', a slave whose new life is paradoxically a life of inner freedom and joy which comes from 'the glorious liberty of being a child of God'.

Gospel

In today's first reading, Paul is in prison awaiting death, but from this place of darkness, loneliness and suffering, he witnesses to the joy and peace which comes from the experience of the love of God poured into our hearts.

I have been working in prison ministry in Taiwan for fifteen years and also have had many experiences of the power of God's love and grace working in and through so many people, both the prisoners themselves and the volunteers who minister to them. One of our Catholic volunteers, Mei Li, is a mother of four children and is also a grandmother. She goes into the prison twice a week to give catechesis to those who wish to attend. One of the young people who attended the catechesis was in prison, having used and sold drugs in a gang.

This young teenager eventually got baptised in the prison and a year later she was due to be released. She had nowhere to go as she was rejected by her family and did not want to return to the life of drugs and violence in the gangs. So, Mei Li invited her to come to her home and stay, despite a lot of opposition from family and friends. They thought that inviting an ex-convict and drug addict into her home was a bridge too far. But Mei Li's values and

her decision making were informed by her own experience of God's grace and mercy, and she insisted on inviting her young friend to become a part of her family. The young woman stayed with Mei Li and her family for twelve years. Returning to high school, she graduated and got a job. Later she married and is now rearing a family of her own.

In today's gospel, Jesus heals the man on the sabbath, despite the objections and opposition of the Pharisees. One of the teachings that is new from Jesus is that the sacredness and value of each person takes precedence over any rules and regulations that block out God's grace, love and healing. Let us pray that God's love will burn away our own blindness, arrogance and narrow mindedness, and as St Augustine reminds us: 'In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone.'

Fr Seán O'Leary, CSSp

Saturday, 31 October 2020

One day during the COVID-19 lockdown, I received a panicked telephone call from a neighbour. 'Something awful has just happened,' she shrieked, and begged me to come over immediately. I raced over to her house. She was waiting for me in the garden, but I hardly recognised her. Her usual gorgeous golden hair was psychedelic green! 'O God,' she wept, 'as the salons are all closed, I tried to dye my hair and this is what happened! Can you please go get some groceries for me? I can't go out looking like this!'

A few weeks later, I bumped into a couple of friends on the street. When I asked one of them why he was looking so fantastic, he replied that during lockdown he had been spending most of his time relaxing in the garden. 'No, that's not it,' blurted out the other friend, 'it's your hair! It looks great. It's so full. What have you done with it?' 'Nothing,' he replied, beaming, 'I just haven't cut it since the lockdown began!'

So perhaps what Jesus is getting at in the gospel is that we need to relax a little, not be so uptight, so perfectionist, so worried about how we appear, or about our place in society or even among our peer group. Because the distinguished guest that arrives suddenly might not necessarily be a person. It could be an incident, an accident, or even a global pandemic.

Wouldn't it be great, when that guest arrives, to enjoy the esteem of our companions due to the things we are so relaxed and humble about, rather than feel embarrassment as a result of the things we customarily fret about? For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

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