

Mass Missionaries: Baptized, *Com*-missioned and Sent!

29th Sunday of the Year – Cycle C – 20 October 2019

Mission Sunday

Readings: Isa 60:1-6; Rom 10:9-18; Mt 28:16-20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt)

Being ‘Mission Sunday’ in this ‘Extraordinary Missionary Month’ of October 2019, it is but fitting that we develop the theme of ‘mission’ and ‘missionaries’—especially so in the context of India where these words are grossly used and misused, nowadays. We reflect upon the special, supplementary readings for the ‘Mass for the Evangelization of Peoples’.

Three Scriptural Signposts

1. The Prophet Isaiah is trying to cheer up and instill hope in the exiled people by foretelling the glorious future of the new Jerusalem, which is yet to be rebuilt. Describing Jerusalem’s glory, he invites all peoples to congregate at this ‘city of God’s Light’. The first line of the reading: “Arise, shine; for your light has come!” coupled with words like glory, light, radiant and brightness convey end-of-the-tunnel brightness to an exiled people, wallowing in darkness, doom and despair. Seeing Jerusalem, “you will grow radiant, your heart throbbing and full!” (v.5). This divine radiance is, first and foremost, for the Chosen People; and then, it opens out as an invitation to all peoples, worldwide. All the nations—of the East and of the West—will come bringing expensive gifts to honour the God of Israel, the God of Life. Notably, this reading is also read on the feast of the Epiphany since it celebrates the manifestation or the ‘*darshan*’ of God’s Son to all peoples—symbolized by the wise ‘magi’ from the East!
2. The gospel reading is the so-called ‘Great Commission’ of Christ to his disciples, which is the climax of the gospel according to Matthew. The event described here happens some days after the resurrection. The number ‘eleven’ is the count of disciples, minus Judas. The ‘mountain’ referred to is perhaps the mount from where he delivered his ‘sermon on the mount’ highlighting the ‘beatitudes’, which are the hallmarks of those who dare to be his disciples by following him. It is there that Jesus has proclaimed his new Law and also pronounced ‘blessings’ and ‘blessedness’ for those who swim against the consumeristic currents of the world. Though they now worship Jesus as ‘Lord’, some still doubt since he appears to them with a ‘glorious, risen body’—a *pneumatikon*. This failure to recognize the crucified-risen Christ is typical of all the post-resurrection apparitions. Jesus declares: “All authority has been given to me” Here, he reveals his supreme lordship over all of creation, which was promised to the ‘Son of man’ as foretold by Daniel (7:13-14). This same supreme power and authority, Jesus now delegates to his apostles; and, through them, down to all his disciples, including you and me! Here, the command is not to go exclusively to the Jews—believed to be the ‘chosen people’—but to *all* peoples in *all* the nations.
3. It is important to stress the Trinitarian dimension of the baptism that Jesus is referring to; for, it is not some grace which *we*, the church and its ministers, dispense to all the faithful but it is the Triune God alone who is the Source of all baptisms and also the Source of all

missions and ministries in the Church. That's why we can break up the word Commission into 'com' + 'mission': a mission 'with' [God]. Our mission is not something we carry out in isolation and with our own power, but 'with' God, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit. This incorporation into the Blessed Trinity is the wellspring of our strength as missionaries. To baptize someone *in the name of* Father, Son and Spirit means to surrender ownership, belongingness and trusteeship to God, and God alone. This makes the theme of this extraordinary missionary month—namely, '*Baptized and Sent ...*' even more meaningful, powerful and personally binding on every Christian. One who is baptized is necessarily sent, and one who is sent must necessarily remind all believers of *their* baptism—their being soaked, or dipped, or dyed, with Trinitarian colour! Each baptized one is an anointed one, ready for mission! The "Remember, *I am* with you" is reminiscent of the Great '*I AM*' given to all prophets from Moses onwards (Ex 3:14).

Linking the 2nd Reading to the Mission Theme: The reading clearly speaks of the need for faith, as well as the need to preach the Gospel. Paul says succinctly (vv.13-15):

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?

We come once again to the word '*sent*' Quoting Isa 52:7, Paul says, "How beautiful [upon the mountains] are the feet of the messenger who brings Good News".

The Psalm (96) Reiterates the Theme: with the response, "Proclaim the wonders of the Lord among *all* the peoples". The gospel is good news for *all*; and *all* Christians are missionaries.

Two Contextual Concerns:

The Misunderstood '*Missionary*': While being a theologically and scripturally rich concept, the word '*mission*' and '*missionary*' is purposely being misused and abused by those in power in India to identify and label Christian priests, pastors and catechists as those who 'forcibly convert' others to Christianity by unfair and coercive means. It is vital to continue using this term within the church, but to be careful about its public nuances.

The '*Mass Mission*': The word 'Mass' comes from the Latin '*Missa*', which means sent, dismissed, go forth! There's need to make everyone aware that whoever comes to celebrate the Mass is necessarily a 'missionary': one sent! In this sense the Mass is never over, never ended. It is always a pilgrim process-in-progress where the whole anointed and baptized Body of Christ, the Church, comes in to be nourished at the Table of the Word (readings, gospel, homily) and to be fed at the Table of the Bread (offertory, consecration, communion) in order to be faithful to our call as 'Mass-missionaries'.

From Pope Francis' Message for Mission Sunday 2019: "The missionary mandate touches us personally: I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptized man and woman is a mission. People in love never stand still: they are drawn out of themselves; they are attracted and attract others in turn; they give themselves to others and build relationships that are life-giving. As far as God's love is concerned, no one is useless or insignificant. Each of us is a mission to the world, for each of us is the fruit of God's love."
