

30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B
MISSION SUNDAY: WE ARE A CHURCH AND A PEOPLE ON A MISSION
*"Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me' ... 'What do you want Me to do for you?'
... 'Master, let me see again.' 'Your faith has saved you' ... and he followed Him on His
way." (Mark 10: 47, 51, 52)*

Today is the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time. It is the penultimate Sunday in October when we celebrate Mission Sunday every year. On this day, in 1926, Pope Pius XI, inaugurated Mission Sunday to serve as a constant reminder of the mission of Christ for His Church. This is contained in the missionary charter Christ gave to His apostles: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. "Baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit and teach them to fulfil all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). I am with you always until the end of this world" (Matthew 28: 19-20; Mark 16: 15; Luke 24: 47; Acts 1: 8)). The primary duty of the Church, therefore, is to evangelise; to teach, and to baptise. This is what Jesus calls each of us to do in our personal lives and witnessing. The theme for this year's Mission Sunday is "We cannot but talk about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4: 20). In his message, Pope Francis writes:

Once we experience the power of God's love and recognize His fatherly presence in our personal and community life, we cannot help but proclaim and share what we have seen and heard... "Go therefore to The highways and byways and invite everyone you find" (Mt 22:9). No one is excluded, no one needs to feel distant or removed from this compassionate love...As Christians, we cannot keep the Lord to ourselves: the Church's evangelizing mission finds outward fulfilment in the transformation of our world and in the care of creation.

These words capture both the reasons for our celebration and the theme of today's Readings.

The Hopeful and Joyful Spirit: The Book of Jeremiah does not give one much to celebrate or be cheerful about. The prophet himself had an exceedingly difficult life as one called by God from his youth to preach to an obstinate and impervious lot. The men of Jerusalem and Judah would not listen to him nor harken to his prophetic pronouncements. They remained in their obstinacy, witnessed the destruction of their city and all they treasured. However, we have a section (30-33) called the "Book of Consolation", where the prophet turns to the future when there will be a restoration of peace and a renewed relationship between God and His people, Israel. Our First Reading (Jer. 31: 7-9) comes from this part of the Book. "They left in tears, I will comfort them as I lead them back; I will guide them to streams of water, by a smooth path where they will not stumble (Jer. 31: 9)." This tells the Christian story, a life mixed with joys and sorrows with victory at the end. Sharing the experiences of the apostles and the early Christians, Pope Francis writes: "The first Christians began the life of faith amid hostility and hardship...those experiences impelled them to turn problems, conflicts, and difficulties into opportunities for mission ..." As Christians called to be missionaries in our secularistic world of relativism, Jesus calls us

to keep the hope alive so we can share the “joy of the Gospel.” We must never forget that “Sorrows and tears may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30: 5). The Blind Man Who Saw Beyond the Ordinary: In the Gospel (Mk. 10: 46-52), Jesus left Jericho with His “disciples and a large crowd.” Among this cacophonous crowd, there was a man, a blind man named Bartimaeus. He strategically sat by the roadside to beg for alms. A reflection of the reality of his isolation and rejection, one always on the ebb of the society, left alone in his own world. He must have heard about Jesus and His supernatural abilities to work miracles. Therefore, when he knew that Jesus was passing by, he shouted out: “Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.” The first to address Jesus by name, and saw, not by sight but by faith, one who was “Son of David” – the Messianic-King who would fulfil the promises made to the Lord’s servant, David. The crowd saw Jesus, Son of a carpenter, a social radical, a great teacher with authority; but the blind Bartimaeus saw more deeply. Each of us is in the crowd, walking the path of our earthly pilgrimages. Who do you see in this crowd? What do you hear in the noises around you? Do we recognise Jesus in the crowd? Do we know Him more than the others? Do we tell anyone about Him? Someone told the blind man that it was Jesus. That was a missionary! That is who Jesus calls to be – a missionary, one who tells others about Jesus. One who “cannot but talk about what we have seen and heard.”

Bartimaeus’ Courageous Faith: Having heard that it was Jesus, Bartimaeus, shouted out: “Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.” His faith in Jesus made him shout. This was his chance, and nothing would stop him. That is why when others scolded him and told him to be quiet, “he shouted all the louder.” His determination toughens in the face of obstacles for no legion of the army can stop a man of faith from getting what he wants. His persistence attracted Jesus, Who stopped and ordered the crowd: “Call him here.” This is faith at work, that the very people that tried to stop him are the men who now encourage him to go up to Jesus. The Lord could be asking us to call someone to Him. For there are millions of people out there in our world who still do not know and accept Him. How do you react when your faith and courage are challenged by others? Bartimaeus offers us a very profound lesson of irrepressible determination to turn every opposition into a position of advantage. “So, throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus.” This is a very spontaneous response with deep meanings. First, this symbolises leaving his former life. “Throwing off his cloak” is a metaphor for leaving his former life of blindness in readiness to embrace a new life of sight. He knew he would not meet Jesus and remain the same. This is what encountering Jesus means, or is supposed to mean. St. Paul teaches that those who encounter Christ have become new creatures; old things have passed away and the new has come (2 Cor. 5: 17). Secondly, it symbolises detachment. For every one Jesus calls and who is willing to follow Him must detach himself from all that held him down to be able to cling to the Lord. And then, he jumped up and went to Jesus, Who asked him: “What do you want Me to do for you?” Can we pause for a moment and ask ourselves: “What would I tell Jesus, if He should ask me this question right now?” We are confused, lost, or totally overwhelmed by the volumes of my needs, like the sons of Zebedee, who wanted seats on the right and left hands of Jesus (Mk. 10: 37) Bartimaeus was not. He knew what he wanted: “Master, let me see again.” The use of the word “again”

strongly infers that Bartimaeus was not born blind. There is nothing more depriving than the loss of one's sight. Bartimaeus needed restoration of his sight. Bartimaeus' request became St. Josemaria Escriva's prayer, "Domine, ut videam!" – "Lord, that I might see." We too need to adopt this prayer that the Lord may open our eyes to the things we really need to keep or to discard; the things that need restoration in our lives to the glory of God.

The Decision to Be Missionary: The Lord Jesus does not deny us anything good, how much less a man of such faith. So, Jesus said to him: "Go, your faith has saved you." This reminds us of the words Jesus spoke to the woman with the haemorrhage (Mk. 5: 34). Jesus teaches us here that the substance for miracles is faith. Where faith abounds, miracles are possible. And immediately the blind man got his sight back, "for nothing is impossible with God" (Lk. 1: 37; 18: 27; Matt. 15: 26; Mk. 10: 27). Bartimaeus demonstrates the perfect response to encountering and experiencing Jesus by following Him. He did not allow the excitement of his healing to distract him from taking the most crucial decision to follow the Lord. We too have encountered the Lord in the Words of the Gospels. We have experienced Him in the Sacraments. What decisions have we made? We, like Bartimaeus, need to throw off the cloaks that drag us down, rise immediately and follow the Lord, Who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn. 14: 6). It is only when we follow Him that we will know Him and be able to share the experience of Him with others, like the apostles and early Christians. This is what it means to be a missionary.

My dear friends, the Mission Sunday celebrations offer us a unique opportunity to support the wonderful missionary works of the Church in various parts of the world, where human needs are in excess, but access is almost non-existent. Jesus calls us to preach the Gospel, not so much by words, but by deeds, by acts of kindness and love. Not with extraordinary and gargantuan gifts but by doing simple things in the extraordinary spirit of love. Christ invites us to come to Him as He did Bartimaeus so that we can experience the power of His love and follow Him.