

Homily for The Twenty Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year C) (06/10/19)

For this month of October, Pope Francis has asked the whole Church to consider, pray about, and rededicate itself to Mission. One of the defining features of his Pontificate is his belief that the Gospel is not something for us to squirrel away for our private benefit; nor is it something to be restricted to private discussion behind closed doors. The Gospel is for sharing, because it is a source of fulfillment and joy. It makes people's lives better. If you hear the Good News of Jesus Christ for the first time, then for you tomorrow will be better than today – and who doesn't want that for themselves, for the people they love, but also for the whole world?

Back in 2013 Pope Francis wrote this:

'The Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters'
(Evangelii Gaudium n. 265).

This gives us a great clue as to what Mission is, and is not, about. Every person is created (that is to say, written into their soul is this truth) for friendship with Christ and love of our brothers and sisters. Every Christian is summoned by Christ, whose friendship they now experience, to share that truth with others. In reality we cannot say that some people are called to be missionaries as a role within the Church, because all Christians are called to be missionaries; it is a part of being baptised.

A missionary is not someone who says to others: you should come to our Church – we need you to boost the numbers, or you are the sort of person who will fit in with people like us. A missionary is someone who has discovered the wonder of friendship with Christ, and it is something so extraordinary, so beautiful, that they cannot keep it to themselves. St Paul says to Timothy in today's second reading: 'You have been trusted to look after something precious', and this is what he means: a closeness, an intimacy, with the one who is Love. The missionary disciple, which is everyone of us if we are to be true to our vocation, does not encourage people to be baptised; or to become a churchgoer; or to go on a programme. The missionary may invite people to all those things, but not as ends in themselves, rather to enable them to become friends with Christ, to fall in love with the One who has loved them from the first moment of their existence. In his letter for the month of Mission Pope Francis says:

'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.'

In previous generations, the Catholic faith was passed easily from one generation to the next. Children came to Mass with their parents, perhaps without ever completely feeling deep down why they did so, but they carried on coming. Now

things have changed. People who come to Mass without really understanding why, so give up bothering. People who get it, who understand that this is the place to enter into the mystery of God's beautiful love, will travel for hours to get to Mass. To know Christ as a friend, to be known and accepted and loved by Him, is to long to be close to Him. That is the joy of the sacraments, because here that deep longing is fulfilled: but only if we have eyes to see. To be a human being fully alive, we need to live in a lively friendship with Christ. We owe it to one another to share that friendship, to 'fan into a flame' the gift that we have each been given.

The world is full of strange relationships, where people are out to get from us what they can. They want to sell us stuff, or persuade us to join something, or to vote for something, and we are unsure whether or not we can trust them. Our society has, quite understandably, become suspicious because of this. We suspect almost everyone, and trust almost no-one. For all sorts of good reasons, people are often suspicious of the Church, too. We often allow ourselves to be backed into a corner by people who, of course, have their own interests to pursue. They project the Church as against this, or opposed to that, or not approving of the other. This is a caricature that we must resist. Lets put aside all the against stuff and start where God starts. Lets start with what we are for. We are for, you. If you are not sure about faith, about God, about the Church, that's the simple place to start. We are for you, and for your deep and lasting happiness. We are at Mass because we know that God is for us, too, and in the modern world that is a rare thing to find. We are a group of people who have found a friend that we can trust completely, because always and always he is for us; he is on our side. And that is a great discovery.

So for the month of Mission we might begin from this place. Wherever we are, whoever we meet, God is on the side of the person in front of us. OK, sure, if they are a mass-murderer (how many of those do you meet) he is not for mass-murder, but he is for the person, and really mass-murder is not truly fulfilling and life-giving for anybody.

I find it so comforting to know that God is on my side. I know that because he is on my side, sometimes he encourages me to do better (as any parent does with the child they love) and that's alright; because I know he is on my side, I can trust Him. All of us long for a world where all is well, where we can trust the people around us and know that all anyone wants is our fulfillment and joy. That is a longing for Heaven, and it's a longing for friendship with Christ. The missionary is someone who helps people discover this.