

MISSION MONTH BOOKLET

A collection of reflections to enrich daily liturgies throughout the Mission Month of October.

1

*We Cannot Remain Silent – 'we cannot
but speak about what we have seen and heard' Acts 4:20*

**WORLD
MISSION
SUNDAY**
**24th October
2021**

In another age, 'mission' was understood as going abroad to countries where the Church was not yet strong, or to places where people suffered from poverty and conflict. Others saw mission as a task, a job entrusted to some but not to themselves. While mission always had outreach to the other at its core, both personally and communally, the Holy Spirit has led the Church to appreciate and make present other vital dimensions to the life of faith. Every baptised person is called to remember: 'I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptised man and woman is a mission.' These words of Pope Francis are challenging but true. He sums them up as an urgent need to call forth missionary disciples ready to evangelise the world and to enter dialogue with contemporary culture.

Mission is at the heart of the Christian life, and the Church from the outset is indelibly marked for mission. Jesus' final words to his disciples were 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19).' The role of the Holy Spirit in this commissioning is very significant (see Jn 14:16-17; 16:7 and 20:22). Earlier this year, Pope Francis reminded the Pontifical Mission Societies that mission 'is the work of the Holy Spirit and not the consequence of our ideas and projects.' The Spirit poured out by the risen Jesus empowers and directs the outward mission and all its journeys, but there is also an inner journey to the heart, which every believer makes. In *The Go-Between God*, the late Bishop John V. Taylor said, 'to engage in the mission of God, therefore, is to live the life of prayer; prayer without ceasing, as St Paul puts it, that is to say, sustaining a life that is focussed on God. This is indeed to engage in the mission of the Holy Spirit by being rather than doing. To realise that the heart of mission is communion with God in the midst of the world's life will save us from the demented activism of these days.'

The focus on mission during the month of October reminds us of our responsibility to witness the life of Christ, with its good news and its hope, to the peoples of the world. Witness, as effective proclamation of the Gospel can only be 'verbis et exemplo and entails the building up of the entire ecclesial community in fraternal unity and missionary discipleship (Pope Francis, 24th May 2021).' For ourselves, we cannot have encountered Jesus and remain concerned only with our own issues. In solidarity we must have concern for the younger, poorer churches until they are able to be self-sufficient. As Pope Benedict XVI underlined, 'in no way can the Church restrict her pastoral work to the "ordinary maintenance" of those who already know the Gospel of Christ. Missionary outreach is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community (*Verbum Domini*, 95).' There are profound reasons for this.

Addressing the Amazon Synod Pope Francis said, 'the Church is always on the move, always going out and never withdrawn into itself. Jesus did not come to bring a gentle evening breeze, but to light a fire on the earth.'

Mission Month and World Mission Sunday presents us with an opportunity to express our gratitude for the contribution we, as Irish people, have made to the mission of the Church to spread the Gospel of Christ in different parts of the globe. We remember and give thanks for the courage, the enthusiasm, and the generosity of so many people who have given their lives to the spread of the Gospel. They help bring the message of Christ to the peoples of the world.

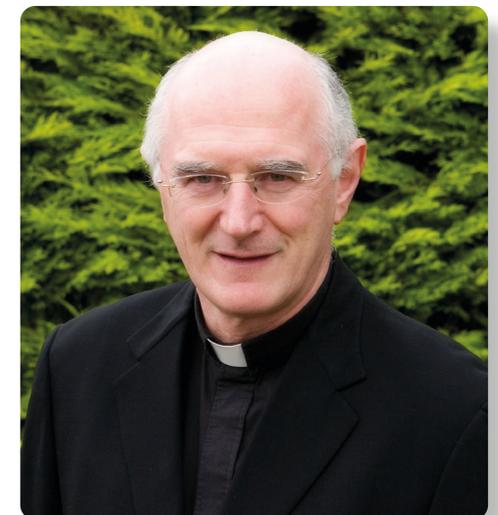
As Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle shared that in Africa alone, with a population of 1.3 billion people across 54 countries, 'more than 74,000 religious sisters and over 46,000 priests are operating 7,274 hospitals and clinics, staffing 2,346 homes for the elderly and vulnerable and educating over 19 million children in 45,088 primary schools.' In many rural areas they are the only providers of healthcare and education. Although 19.4% of Africans are Catholic, the Church reaches out to all people in need across the continent, not just Church members. Likewise in Asia, a continent with a population of 4.6 billion people, of whom 3.3% are Catholic, the Church provides healthcare, charity assistance, and education to people of all faiths and none.

The Scriptures introduce us to the heart of God, that 'God is love' (Jn 1:4-8). Other words for love are compassion, concern, and solidarity, which are hallmarks of the Christian life. I hope the reflections in this booklet for Mission Month 2021 will be rewarding in assisting all of us to deepen our relationship with God as love, and our understanding of what it means to be called as missionary disciples today.

Saint Thérèse, Patroness of the Missions, pray for us.



Archbishop Dermot Farrell
Archbishop of Dublin



Friday, 1 October 2021

St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Patroness of the Missions

Today is the memorial of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, more popularly known as the 'Little Flower.' She lost her mother at the age of four. As a child, she was affected by a serious nervous disorder. Suffering was no stranger to her. Soon after she entered the convent at the age of 16, her father began to suffer from a painful and humiliating mental illness. Having led a very simple and hidden life, Thérèse died at the age of 24. After her death, with the publication of her writings, she quickly became one of the best known and loved saints. She has never stopped helping the simplest souls, the little, the poor, the ordinary, and the suffering who pray to her.

In today's Gospel text we see a flip side of Jesus lamenting over the people of Bethsaida and Chorazin because they rejected the Good News despite all the good things he did for them. Closer to our own day, we can think of the tens of millions of people who personally saw Pope Saint John Paul II in his many public appearances. How many of those people changed their lives after the encounter?

It might be no harm then for each of us today to hear those warnings of Jesus and address them to ourselves. How well have we really responded to the call of Jesus in the Gospel? How committed are we to accepting, living and sharing the Gospel with others? It is out of love that Jesus reminds us to amend our ways. There is no need to keep procrastinating because no one knows the hour when his/her own death will come. Therefore, the best time to live a life that is pleasing to God is now. May St Thérèse, patroness of all foreign missions, pray for us.

Fr Peter Okpetu

Saturday, 2 October 2021

Feast of the Guardian Angels

What is behind the disciples' question to Jesus *who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* Just before this in the Gospel, the disciples have failed to heal a demon-possessed young boy. They have also heard Jesus predict his

own death and are filled with grief. Somehow the path they had imagined for themselves when following the charismatic Jesus is not leading to the success and glory they had hoped for.

It seems that there is a default setting in us humans that seeks to establish an order of the better and the best. High on the disciples' priority list is who is the greatest in God's kingdom. We compare people and experiences, finding something lacking, or deeming someone not good enough, and, of course, if someone is the greatest, then it can make everyone else feel that little bit less acceptable, a little less worthwhile! Because there is only one winner, one person on the top of the pile.

Jesus confounds their thinking. By choosing a child, Jesus chooses one who is least in the reckoning. In so doing, Jesus invites them to think about what it means to be great in God's eyes. God's face shines on the littleness of the child, its awareness of its dependence on others, its trust in the care of others and its realisation of its value given, not earned. Greatness in the kingdom of God is not achieved but received! Like the child in the Gospel, we are, each of us, invited to realise our dependence on God. Our value is not based on what we do or achieve, but given us by God. In creating us, God shows us our importance and value. Sending an angel to be with us is a reminder for us of God's ever-presence with us, around us and within us.

Frances Rowland

Sunday, 3 October 2021

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our culture hesitates before long-term commitments such as life-long marriage. And yet, there is freedom in commitment. It is possible to walk the quay sides considering various options for the journey. At that moment, you have freedom of choice. However, if you want to get anywhere, one ship will have to be selected. That is the freedom of choosing, choosing not to remain in the paralysis of not choosing. Once made, commitment opens up to another, different level of freedom, that is of living and loving and being loved in return.

The book of Genesis and the Gospel of Mark offer a kind of prophetic alternative for today. Both passages call for careful exploration and courageous exposition. There will almost certainly be people 'in second relationships' in the congregation and this should temper any insensitive pronouncements. Still, life-long commitment remains the Christian ideal.

Specifically on Genesis, the reading clearly comes from a patriarchal culture which gives primacy to males. The woman being born from the man—an arresting image—goes against the common experience (!). The first creation story (a later account) gives a much more equal place to men and women in the image of God. Perhaps seeds of later equality may be found in the complementarity of the sexes. Bearing in mind the cultural limits of the passage, there is a marvellous teaching on the relationship between spouses, best illustrated in the note of joy in the recognition, 'bone of my bones etc.' in v.23.

Within our Christian vision, marriage and family are foundational for love and faith, for discipleship and mission. 'Believing parents, with their daily example of life, have the most effective capacity to transmit the beauty of the Christian faith to their children.' (Directory for Catechesis (2020) §124).

Fr Kieran J. O'Mahony, OSA

Monday, 4 October 2021

'Go, and do the same yourself.'

Have people said to you some time? 'Many of the readings from the Old Testament in the lectionary make very little sense in the 21st century.' With regard to our reading from the prophet, Jonah, I find a few sentences from the Introduction to the Prophets in the Jerusalem Bible, helpful.

The book rejects a too rigid interpretation of prophecy, asserting that even the most uncompromising of threats is an expression of the merciful will of God, who pardons at the first sign of repentance... Matt 12:40 sees Jonah inside the great fish as a prefiguring of Christ in the tomb.... Jesus employs the Old Testament story as Christian preachers use the New Testament parables; the intention is the same: to teach by means of well-known illustrations, without implying any opinion as to the historical reality of the facts.

For the person listening to the proclamation of this passage from Jonah, listening skills may be tested more than will be the case tomorrow, when the shorter and more familiar passage from Jonah 3:1-10 will be read.

What can one say about the parable of the Good Samaritan that has not been said many times in the past? Recently, I met a woman from a parish where I had worked some years ago, in the company of her grandson, a young man about to start out in his new career, after completing his college education. I had met him a number of times in his grandmother's house, when he was in primary school, and she reminded me of an occasion when he put a question to me. 'Fr. O'Mahony, why do you talk, very often at Mass, about those less privileged than us?' Whatever answer I gave at that time, I was happy to say to the young man and his grandmother that I still mention that, occasionally, in the church. I do it because I believe that our society has a huge journey to travel, before we can say that we have truly responded to the invitation of Jesus in the last sentence of today's Gospel, 'Go, and do the same yourself.'

Fr Denis O'Mahony

Tuesday, 5 October 2021

'Up we go,' a refrain we often use, is a self-motivating call to action or a response to a situation that demands our active response. Jonah is impelled to get up and go on hearing the mission mandate from the Lord. Only after a day's travelling through the city does Jonah start proclaiming the word and his call to conversion eventually reaches the king, no doubt through its being carried on by others. Jonah's proclamation is simplicity itself, only nine words! What does the king do? He gets up from the throne and acts. Note that both people and God hopefully will 'relent' of their current attitudes. However, the most interesting part of the story is that we are not told if the people of Nineveh actually changed their attitude and behaviours but that their 'efforts' were seen by the Lord. God's mercy is not dependent on our efforts being fruitful, but that we have heeded the call to convert and tried our best.

No doubt Jesus was not unaware of Martha's efforts to prepare the welcoming meal. Only a few simple ingredients are needed however to

prepare a good meal, no extra frills are necessary. Mary's attitude is to sit and listen, maintain an attentive presence to their guest. Again, it's about the right kind of 'attitude'; it wasn't that Jesus didn't respect Martha's efforts. Mary displayed an open heart and mind to the word of Jesus and her efforts in the circumstances were what Jesus needed.

Richard Foran

Wednesday, 6 October 2021

The Gospel of Luke relates that Jesus prays at all significant turning points in his ministry. In contrast to Matthew's version of the Our Father, Luke focuses on the nature of the One to whom we pray. For genuine prayer expresses our complete dependence on God's mercy. We pray to God as a heavenly Father which connotes familial intimacy, to a God who delights, like any good father, to supply his children's needs. We reverence the name, or the mind and heart of such a God and will gladly put our trust in him. We pray that this God will establish his sovereignty when all people will be able to worship him as a God of compassion which is also the reason for the Church's mission to non-Christians.

This is followed by three petitions for our needs – bread, forgiveness, and deliverance. Jesus assures us that our petitions will be effective because of God's nature as a loving and compassionate Father. The prayer covers all of life: present need by asking for bread for the day; forgiveness of past sins; we pray for help in future trials that test our integrity and fidelity. We know that we can trust God not to let us be tried beyond our strength and that he will give us a way out of it and the strength to bear it (1 Cor.10:13). Christians who hope for deliverance from spiritual death can afford to forgive the injustices that life throws up at them. The hope of resurrection gives us a larger perspective on life here on earth, which too often has little room from tolerance or forgiveness.

God's mercy towards Israel's archenemy scandalizes Jonah. He is angry and depressed because he knows that God is a God of compassion who wishes to extend his mercy to all, believers and non-believers alike, when they repent and call to him. In Jonah's estimation, God's mercy has been offered to a most

unlikely and undeserving people. Jonah must learn that God's ways are not our ways (Is 55:8-9) and that mercy is first and foremost a gift freely offered. With God's question, the story of Jonah comes to an end, but the drama remains unfinished. The story of Jonah is deliberately incomplete.

Each one of us, the hearers, must now respond to the challenge of God's Word and to the direct call for forgiveness. We are all being questioned by God's mercy. God invites us to go beyond our prejudices and assumptions when we realize that the prophet's struggle is our struggle as well. We must move beyond the limits of our own concerns and see the world through the eyes of God's mercy. The message of Jonah is aptly summed up in Jesus' words: 'Be merciful as your Father is merciful. Do not judge and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon and you will be pardoned...because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back (Lk 6:36-38).'

Fr Maurice Hogan, SSC

Thursday, 7 October 2021

Our Lady of the Rosary

Great things happen when God mingles with human beings and prayer is that channel where this meeting of the Divine and the human comes alive. The story of the captivity and miraculous release of Fr Pierluigi (Gigi) Maccalli (SMA) from his abductors after two years of captivity bears testimony to the fact that great things happen when God steps into the affairs of those who trust in Him.

Fr Maccalli, while on mission in Niger, was kidnapped by an extremist group. He recounts his experience with his abductors and how he lived a simple contemplative prayer life for two years without the opportunity of celebrating the Holy Eucharist. According to him, he found strength in the 'simple morning and evening prayers that I had learnt from my mother and the rosary that my grandmother had taught me as a contemplative prayer.' It is therefore true that when all is dark and gloomy, when the road gets rough and narrow, when tempest rage and life seems unfriendly; holding firmly to the tiny beads of the Rosary in contemplative prayer can connect us to the

source of power and strength, and the Blessed Virgin Mary can step up to the occasion and say to her son (on our behalf); ‘they have no wine (Jn 2:3).’

When we feel lonely and the joy of life eludes us, a little gathering of the faithful in prayer can rekindle faith and hope. The disciples, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, at that lonely moment when their Master and Lord ascended into heaven, gathered together constantly in prayer (Acts 1:14). In these days when priests are gradually becoming scarce and the possibility of having daily Eucharistic celebration is greatly challenged, we are encouraged to strengthen the culture of community prayer and reflection on the Word of God. When Fr Maccalli asked for a copy of the Bible in his captivity, and they didn’t give him one, every Sunday, he said, ‘I meditated on a Gospel passage’; that means, he had memorised some Gospel passages. With this he kept his faith alive, his hope was rekindled, and he began to live one day at a time; he could trust God that no matter how long it takes, his freedom will come someday because, as the Angel told Mary; ‘nothing is impossible for God (Lk 1:37).’

As we begin to reflect on God’s Word and meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary, it will become clear to us that Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God who was brought into the world by Mary is with us at every step of our journey through life. So, wherever we may be; whether in the villages or in the crowded streets of the cities; whether in good times or in bad, in sickness or in health; whether on the mountain or in the valley, in the spring or in the desert; whether in the pandemic or out of the pandemic; we shall truly submit our lives to God and say like the Blessed Virgin Mary; ‘I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me (Lk 1:38).’ Then we shall know that great things happen when God mingles with human beings.

Sr Julie Doran, OLA

Friday, 8 October 2021

There can be no neutrality where Jesus is concerned; no sitting on the fence. We must make a choice. We are either for him or against him. To not choose is, in fact, still a choice. It means we are against him.

Today’s Gospel introduces the idea that neutrality is impossible. It also reminds us that there are no absolute states in the life of a disciple except faithfulness to God. It links the theme of prayer from yesterday’s Gospel to the theme of action today. In the previous passage, Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom. Today he shows us (through the casting out of demons) that the Kingdom is already coming.

In our commitment to make the Kingdom of God present, we must be on the side of Jesus in the fight against evil. But it is not enough to simply be liberated from the power of an evil spirit and then sit back and do nothing. The evil spirit will come back ‘to find the house swept and tidied’ and bring worse with it because we believe we have been freed forever.

It is easy to use the Sacrament of Reconciliation to receive forgiveness from our past sins and have a clean swept house again. True reconciliation, however, is an experience of conversion that moves a person from simply being forgiven from their past wrongdoings to becoming a missionary disciple who is concerned with the present and the future. This is a disciple who lives their Christianity – who reaches out to the margins, growing and learning, offering and accepting forgiveness and mercy, evangelising whilst constantly being evangelised.

Aristotle once said, ‘nature abhors a vacuum.’ In today’s Gospel, Jesus reminds us that the devil loves one!

Julieann Moran

Saturday, 9 October 2021

Joel is one of the least known prophets in the Old Testament and there are only four chapters in the book of Joel. The first reading, taken from the fourth chapter, highlights a declaration from the Lord that a time of decision has come for the whole valley that has suffered violence and bloodshed from strangers. This is not just stated in simple language such as ‘Thus says the Lord’ but verse 16 says ‘The Lord roars from Zion and raises his voice.’ There is no doubting who is in charge here. The judgement of the Lord is unambiguous. Those who imposed torture will be punished for their deeds.

What is promised to those who trust in the Lord is a ripe harvest, full wine presses, hills flowing with milk, water flowing freely.

The words 'The Lord roars from Zion' is echoed in the short Gospel passage from Luke 11 where a woman raises her voice in praise of what Jesus has been saying. That whole chapter in Luke is devoted to words, to giving voice, to articulating what is important. Earlier verses show Jesus teaching his disciples how to pray, what words to use, and offering a story to ensure they will remember what he is saying which is echoed in the repetitive 'Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find.' Luke then recounts how a dumb man finds his voice again. From the crowd a woman cries out in admiration of this articulate man. We hear her roar of praise and appreciation.

Advocacy today is about finding voice, articulating what must be spoken or written. It is also about supporting those who dare to speak out. The real challenge then is to always walk our talk.

Sr Liz Murphy, RSM

Sunday, 10 October 2021

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Rich Young Man

Today's Gospel tells us of the rich young man who approached Christ with an honest desire to gain eternal life. Christ encouraged his efforts and took him onto a higher level of accomplishment: the radical way. He told the man to dispose of his possessions and follow him. Christ meant: 'Do not hoard riches; detach yourself from encumbrances and you will be free to soar to God.' Christ was coherent. He did not request for the proceeds for the maintenance of his disciples. For the man, the invitation to complete detachment was too hard to accept.

Christ made it clear that hoarding was and continues to be an obstacle to entrance into the kingdom of God. The disciples, getting ready for the mission, got the message and they replied: 'If so, who then can be saved?' There are many people suffering from hunger and poverty; their efforts would not yield much fruit because of famine, war, social crises, lack of

resources, lack of education and early formation, circumstantial obstacles, family limitations, intellectual shortcomings. And here we are, hoarding our talents, our riches, our knowledge, our humane attention!

Hoarding means keeping for ourselves what we should make available to others also. Some are smart in accumulating and keeping everything for themselves. We are all stewards in this world, and no one carries these resources into the other world.

Christ is not against the acquisition and the use of material things, otherwise he would not advise the young man to give to the poor. He is not against the perfection of our talents. Hoarding creates a feeling of independence, making us negligent and indifferent. Christ wants us to be aware that hoarding, whether individual or communal, is an obstacle to spiritual growth.

Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo

Monday, 11 October 2021

St John XXIII

Today is the Feast of St John XXIII, who was affectionately known as *Il Papa Buono*, the Good Pope. Known to be a humble man who reached out to the poor, to prisoners and to those who were marginalised in both Church and society, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council to seek spiritual renewal for the Church and to help bring unity among Christians and with people of other faiths. In our Church today, renewal is also much needed. Indeed, Pope Francis, in his first Mass as Pope called for reform, calling us all to return to the essence of our being as Christians which is to believe in and to proclaim Jesus Christ.

The call to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel, which is the reason we exist as Church, is what St Paul reminds us of in today's first reading. Paul himself, like all of us who are baptised and 'belong to Jesus Christ', knew himself to be chosen to preach this Good News to all people, especially to those who have not heard it. As the psalm tells us, God has worked wonders, has shown justice, is truth and is love, and has made this known to us. I feel

sure that each of us in our lives have seen and experienced this wonder, love, and justice. But we, like the people who crowd around Jesus in the Gospel, still look for signs!

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenged the people by asking them why they were coming in large numbers to see and listen. The challenge to each one of us is to ask myself why I follow the crowd. Why am I doing what I am doing? Why am I at this Mass?

In times of sickness and of difficulty, we pray, we hope for miracles, and we believe that miracles happen. However, today's Gospel calls us to look closely at our faith, and to ask if our coming here to this Mass, our coming to God in prayer, is based on a hope for signs and miracles or is based on a true faith in God, the God who is Mystery, the God of Surprises, made known to us in Jesus. God is ever present, ever loving, all powerful, and undoubtedly can do more than we can ever imagine. Jesus lived among us as God made flesh, preached the beatitudes, spoke out against injustice, loved the poor, taught, healed, loved, died, and rose again from the dead. Jesus tells the crowds that he himself is the Sign. The person of Jesus is a more powerful 'sign' than any miracle, because Jesus is nothing less than the full revelation of God, the Father and Creator of all. As a person of faith, a baptised Christian, each one of us is called to be to others a sign and instrument of God's presence, a sign of God's love.

Lord your hand is more evident in saintliness than in extraordinary signs. Open my eyes to your work in my sisters and brothers and in nature all around me. Help me to cultivate my sense of mystery. Help me be aware of how God works in my heart. Help me to abandon in faith to God's faithful and loving activity in me and in the world around me. Like the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites, who were better able to see the truth than the holy Israelites, may I too see and follow the truth. May I grow in respect for the people of many other faiths and none who often see and live the truth so much more clearly and nearly than I myself do.

Sr Kathleen McGarvey, OLA

Tuesday, 12 October 2021

'Those who drink the water should never forget those who dug the well' (Oriental proverb). In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans St Paul directs us to a few wells that can inspire our mission.

1. Paul says that he is not 'ashamed of the gospel.' It is wisdom from God that has the capacity to inspire, enthuse and redirect lives. The conviction that he has a really good message is his starting point for mission.
2. God is present in power in his word. That presence can break through resistance. It can open hearts and minds in unexpected ways. The gospel is 'the power of God.' That belief gives confidence for mission.
3. Paul is clear on what he offers. He describes how life without God has spawned behaviour unworthy of human beings, resulting in forms of perversion and degradation. He is sure that a living relationship with God will bring a wholesome relationship with people. Jesus makes this possible. He came to guide us into the way of peace. He brings true freedom. He enabled Paul to make peace with his past and find the freedom to commit his life to service of God and his people. Paul seeks to pass on what he has received. 'Unless we give God to others we give them too little' (Pope Benedict XVI).

Bishop Martin Drennan

Wednesday, 13 October 2021

Provide Stepping Stones Not Stumbling Blocks

Jesus is the human face of God. He wants to make it easier for people to get to know God. That is why he got angry with the moneychangers that day in the Temple. They were making it more difficult for the poor to get close to God. That is why too, at his death on the cross, 'The veil of the Temple was torn right down the middle (Lk 23:44-46).' The barrier to access the Holy of Holies was taken away. The Pharisees and lawyers were putting stumbling blocks in people's way not providing them with stepping stones.

The story is told that a missionary reached a small island off the mainland. He got talking to three fishermen. They said that a long, long time ago

Christians came to their small island. However, he wasn't impressed with their knowledge of the prayers. They couldn't say the 'Our Father' and knew very little of the Creed. They said, 'When we pray we say, God, we are three, you are three, have mercy on us.' He did his best to teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and how to bless themselves.

Many years later when he was back in that part of the world, the missionary decided to check in on his fishermen friends. When his boat was nearing their island, he could see three people approaching the boat walking on the water. He was both frightened and amazed. They got to catching up on the intervening years and the fishermen admitted their difficulty in remembering the words of the prayers he had taught them. They stumbled through parts of the 'Our Father' and had forgotten most of the Creed. They wanted grinds or revision! The missionary felt humbled, 'Go back to your homes,' he said, 'and each time you pray say "God, we are three, you are three, have mercy on us."'

Fr Tom McManus

Thursday, 14 October 2021

'Since it is the same justice of God that comes through faith to everyone, Jew and pagan alike, who believes in Jesus Christ (Rm 3:22).'

An exclusionary spirit has strongly emerged in the Church these past years: the people who should be excluded include gays, the divorced, those who don't adhere to the whole package of the truth. Even the English translation of the Eucharist prayers has us declaring that Jesus poured out his blood for 'the many' – by implication, not for all – which begs the question who Jesus intended to exclude?

Paul's conviction in Romans 3:21-26 is that the radically new reality that God has initiated through Jesus' self-giving love is that all are included even those whose lifestyle and values offend our god-fearing sensibilities. Wasn't it Jesus' practice of being at table with the most unsavoury types and his apparent disregard for the rules that so riled the righteous that they conspired for his 'exclusion'!

The Spirit of the Father of Jesus Christ impels us to go out to the excluded and invite them to be part of what our prodigal Father is doing for all!

Fr John O'Donoghue, M.Afr

Friday, 15 October 2021

The Church – A Reflection

Earlier Jesus had been invited by a Pharisee to eat with him. His host had thought some disapproving thoughts when he noticed that Jesus had not washed before eating, as required by the Law. Jesus took the opportunity to point out that a clean conscience was more important than clean hands.

At this point Jesus knew that the Pharisees, stung by his condemnation, were out to get him. Now, once more, in the company of his friends, the disciples, he explains the reason for his remarks. The Pharisees were hypocrites; they always wanted to appear perfect when they knew they were not. One should be wary of this hypocrisy lest it corrupts the splendour of the Christian message.

The Gospel, Jesus tells his friends, must be announced openly and to all. They can, as a result, expect persecutions but they must not fear them. The power of the persecutors will be confined to life on this earth. It will have no effect on life after death. 'For God alone is Lord of body and soul' he alone is to be obeyed – he is the Lord of this life and of the next life. Here on earth, they have nothing to fear. Nothing can happen to the disciples, that is not allowed by God. God's providence takes care of everyone and everything. 'Even the hairs of the head have all been counted.' If God never forgets one tiny sparrow, sold for tuppence, surely he will take much more care of the disciples of Christ. The message is: 'Have no fear – you are more precious in God's eyes than several sparrows.'

Jesus reminds us that everyone is important in the eyes of God. He invites us to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because 'he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder (Pope Francis: *Laudato si*, 97).'

Cardinal Seán Brady

Saturday, 16 October 2021

Never judge a book by its cover

I have many stories from my years on mission, but one I love to tell is the one about the lorry driver and his two friends, because it tells a modern-day version of the Good Samaritan story that we are all very familiar with.

Bugisi mission in Northern Tanzania was about three hours from the main town of Shinyanga, three hours in the dry season but five in the rainy season. During the rainy season of 2000, I, along with six people from the parish council, left early one morning for the five-hour journey to attend the Christ Mass. After Mass we did a quick bit of shopping and had a bite to eat before we began the journey back, hoping to be home before dark. All was well on the journey home, till we lost the back wheel of the pickup. The roads were so bad that the bumping caused the wheel to break off the axle and all the bolts were completely shattered. To make a long story short, none of the six of us in the car had any knowledge of what to do. We sat on the road for about two hours, (no mobile phones in them days) in the rain waiting for someone to come along who might help.

After almost two hours and the sun beginning to go down, a big transit lorry came along and three guys in their mid-20s appearing very dishevelled in their dress not to mention their long afro and reggae hair styles. We were a bit nervous of them, because we had heard stories of people getting robbed on the roads from time to time. The driver asked what the problem was, and we told them our story. Before we knew it, they had set about helping us, they took five bolts from the other three tyres and put them on the rim of the one that had snapped causing us to lose the back tyre, all this took about two hours of their time. We were shocked and amazed at how they came to our rescue and more so because they had been three days on the road at that time coming from Dar es Salam. When they had finished I offered them all the Tanzanian Shillings I had in my bag, equivalent to £30. The biggest shock of the day came then. The lorry driver said 'Msaad ni Msaada' which means 'Help is Help' and when I tried to force the money on them, one of the other guys said 'last Sunday at Mass, we heard the story of the Good Samaritan and today we would like you to think of us as the modern day Good Samaritans' and with that they packed up and continued their journey

with the parting words, 'Father remember us in your prayers...'

Never judge the book by the cover, a lesson from three amazing young Tanzanian men who helped me to believe in the Gospel I had so often preached to the people of Tanzania. Our words and deeds of kindness can make the Gospel become alive even today.

Fr John Gallagher, SMA

Sunday, 17 October 2021

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Introduction

Our culture teaches us to look out for ourselves, to be proactive, and to realize our own goals. This, however, does not always work out as we might plan. Life is a good deal more complex, and a complementary attitude that is characterized by service, gratitude, and welcome is life-enriching, too.

Reflection

In so many ways life can be read as a series of disappointments. So often we do not receive what we wished for or achieve what we set out to do. Each of us could probably draw up a list of significant times in which things did not go our way or according to our plans. Of course, this is never the whole story, but it is part of everyone's journey. We aspire to so much, we wish to do so many different things, and we yearn so often to be in a different place. Not having our expectations met is not, however, necessarily, a bad thing. Very often, the most interesting things in life come as surprises, as real gifts, as totally unforeseen, and as beyond even our dreams. When we are totally preoccupied with ourselves, our needs, and our wishes, we can, curiously, miss out on seeing, acknowledging, and even enjoying the full spectrum of gifts that are in fact part of our story. We are receiving all the time if only we could see it clearly.

The disciples in our Gospel asked Jesus for honoured places in the kingdom of God, and he tells them that not only do they not appreciate the magnitude of what it is they are asking, but he himself is not even in a position to grant their request. That privilege belongs to God the Father, alone. Then,

he warns them about seeking power and privilege for themselves; it is not the way of the gospel, which is one of service, solicitude, and surprise. This capacity to welcome the unexpected in all its guises is at the heart of mission. In the west of Ireland - in the face of the difficulties, opportunities, and challenges of life - people used to say: 'Welcome be the will of God!' There is great wisdom and freedom to be had in this attitude to life.

Fr Michael A. Conway

Monday, 18 October 2021

Feast of St Luke, Evangelist

The *Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles* are key faith documents, and every passage in them provides food for missionary reflection. Today's Gospel, which focuses on the sending of 72 disciples by Jesus, highlights how our mission originates with and still involves preparing the way for him.

On this feast of St Luke, one sentence stands out: 'Cure those in it who are sick ...' That command was obviously important to Luke, a missionary companion of St Paul and also a physician, whose Gospel presents Jesus as a gentle, compassionate Saviour reaching out to the poor, sinful and broken-hearted with divine healing.

After 18 months of pandemic that has left a trail of sickness and death in its wake, the need for such healing could not be clearer. Despite scientific advances and huge medical expertise, the world has struggled to cope; huge numbers have fallen ill with the virus; millions have died and millions more have been left anxious, fearful, depressed, lonely and generally 'ill at ease.'

In responding to the crisis, the work of the full-time healing professions has been immense, but everyone's role in curbing the spread of the virus has been important. A very special role is undertaken by the Church, which Pope Francis compares to a 'field hospital' where the wounded, (and who among us does not carry some wounds?), are cared for by the 'wounded healer,' Christ himself. No one is excluded from his presence; and no one is exempt from tending the wounds of others by prayer and by acts of kindness and compassion in imitation of him. Thus, the mission he first entrusted to the 72

continues, and all of us are invited to help in preparing the way for him.

Fr Joe Egan, SMA

Tuesday, 19 October 2021

Living in this time of pandemic that has hit our entire planet is more than ever a time of vigilance. We have to do everything to protect ourselves, to protect our neighbour and thus contribute our part in protecting the world's population. There are numerous and urgent guidelines to be vigilant coming from the medical world, political leaders, and also from our closest environment.

And here we are today strongly invited by Jesus in the Gospel to be vigilant, to watch, to be like servants who await the coming of their master. These recommendations can help us live today like true disciples as we put on the apron of service. If Jesus compares himself to the expected master, he reveals himself as the servant who will serve those who have waited for his coming. So how do we put ourselves into this state of being vigilant? We do so by being servants ourselves, not passive servants, but by being at the service of people who are in need, by sharing our time, our energies for their good as we ease their suffering: Jesus is already present in them. We must be vigilant and be awake in order to know how to recognise him around us. He is closer to us than we think. Watching over the well-being of our neighbour, we will do our part in the salvation that Jesus came to bring to the world.

Entering into the understanding of what the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: 'But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Rm 5:20).' We, in our turn, will be able to say: 'where evil has multiplied, solidarity has abounded.'

Bishop Claude Rault, M.Afr

Wednesday, 20 October 2021

Have you ever been caught by surprise while doing something wrong? I am sure that it was a moment of shame and regret. Jesus wants us to prevent such experiences. He teaches his disciples that they should always act and

behave with responsibility, knowing that one day they have to give account of how they live and what they do. Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans reminds us also of this. Our bodies are instruments to be used according to the Lord's commandments and not our uncontrolled passions. It is good to be reminded that we do not simply belong to ourselves, but to God. Therefore, we have to make a choice: who do we want to follow? Do we want to be servants of God or slaves of our sinful passions? In fact, our body can be used or misused accordingly. The scripture readings of this day encourage us not to give in to evil things, but to act with our whole being to what is good and upbuilding. Am I asking myself, if I am ready to pass this day of my life as a day that belongs to God? Am I about to invest my body, my whole being for God and to live on the side of Jesus? Have I the courage not to follow the pattern of this world but to 'discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect (Rm 12:3).' It will make our lives more joyful and our fellow humans happier to 'discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.' It is also the best way, 'to stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour we do not expect.'

Bishop Paul Hinder, OFM Cap

Thursday, 21 October 2021

At the heart of Christian mission is the proclamation, and offer, of life to the full. From the Hebrew scriptures and the Gospels that fullness ensues from right relationships with our community, environment and with God. These relationships are a delicate balance between the other and self; 'love your neighbour as yourself.' So, being honest, just, generous, and faithful in these relationships is the recipe for a good life and global harmony. Pity we haven't an App for it!

Yet today's readings touch the complexity and deceptive nature of human life, what the psychologist might call conscience violation or our flawed personalities, and the Christian calls sin. Both agree it is universal and that compassion is its remedy.

It seems shocking that the narrator of Matthew's Gospel would have Jesus say in today's extract: 'I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!... Do you think that I have come to establish peace on

the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household... will be divided'. We know that the words were written in a particular historical and cultural context of conflict and persecution and for followers to be authentic to the message of Jesus would cause opposition and conflict. But the words have proved perennial, for Christians of every generation, not only in places of persecution and conflict but even in families where clashes of values can be very painful and lead to conflict in relationships that the text speaks of.

'The wages of sin is death' reminds me of billboards glaring at you as you drive past, a soundbite (today's Paul to the Romans). It distorts the liberating contrast that Paul makes 'but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.' 'Grace' is Paul's core understanding of God's life in Christ. Like the landowner in Matthew 20:1-16 'wages' are a measure of our sense of what is fair which often produces economic and social disparities. The landowner gives the same wage to all, affirming generosity and mercy.

Today's readings assert that grace is the antidote to the failure of the human condition, of being the people we want to be, and not fatalistic of our inability to overcome sin.

Fr Brendan Carr, CSSp

Friday, 22 October 2021

As I reflect on today's readings, I'm struck by the first reading and its likeness to the hymn, *Amazing Grace*.

Amazing Grace was written in 1772. The words were inspired by the experiences of John Newton. Newton a slave trader at that time and, whilst on a return voyage to England, a violent storm hit and almost sank the ship, prompting Newton to begin his spiritual conversion as he pleaded to God to save them.

Newton eventually abandoned his life as a slave trader, wholeheartedly devoting his life to God's service. He was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1764. Newton fought alongside William Wilberforce, to abolish the African slave trade. He described the horrors of the slave trade supporting the

campaign for abolition of slavery. The Slave Trade Act, outlawing slavery was passed in 1807.

Newton's life was 'graced by God.' His story is a testimony that God is involved in all lives. It is also a reminder to the importance of music in our faith. From the psalms in the Old Testament, to the wonderful cultural liturgies around our world, music is an essential element of faith and prayer. When we meditate, we allow the music to calm us, when we celebrate, we sing aloud, when we mourn, we listen anew to our hymns.

As we approach Mission Sunday, we are reminded that music, expresses the 'soul of the people.' In Vatican II documents we read that the musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value. We are also reminded in certain parts of the world, peoples who have their own musical traditions, and these play a great part in their religious and social life. So, wherever we celebrate Mission Sunday let us celebrate with the gift of music, giving thanks to God.

Ronan Barry

Saturday, 23 October 2021

I had the privilege of living and working with a particular tribe in West Africa. They had their own belief in a Creator God, but he was remote and uninterested in human affairs. He left the running of the world to lesser deities and spirits. It was to these and their ancestors that the people appealed for their ordinary needs. But in time of serious crisis such as famine, they sacrificed to the Creator God. And they shouted their prayers to gain his attention.

I saw my mission as one of sharing with them the God of the Incarnation – the God who wanted to be so close who became one of us – a God who was passionately in love with us.

At the end of today's Gospel there is a gem of a parable. It's about the unproductive fig tree which is given a second chance. It shows a God of patience who hopes in us forever. A God whom Paul tells us in today's first reading, gives us his spirit to enable us to be like him in forbearance and compassion.

Many years ago, I lived in community with a Canadian White Father who was regarded as the first missionary among these people. But he himself insisted he was not; that the first missionary was God himself. I remember with gratitude how they welcomed me among them and listened with great patience as I struggled with their language. One of their proverbs says: Patience can cook a stone. The God of patience was indeed there before me. Is not our God always offering us multiple second chances? I was blessed to both share and receive such a wonderful mystery.

Fr Charles Timoney, M.Afr

Sunday, 24 October 2021 – World Mission Sunday 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The month of October provides us with an opportunity to express our gratitude for the contribution we, as Irish people, have made to the mission of the Church to spread the Gospel of Christ in different parts of the globe. We remember and give thanks for the courage, the enthusiasm and the generosity of so many women and men.

The readings on Mission Sunday, remind us that it is always God who takes the initiative. In the First Reading from the prophet Jeremiah, the Babylonian exiles are gathered together by God (Jer 31:7-9). The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that whoever is called to serve, it is God who calls; God takes the initiative (Heb 5:1-6). The story of Bartimaeus, The Blind Man of Jericho (Mk.10,46-52), is also a 'call story.' The call of Jesus is mediated through others. Looked at through the lens of Mark's Gospel, the call of Jesus can come through his preachers and missionaries, even if their understanding is imperfect. It is God who takes the initiative in loving Bartimaeus and calling him to discipleship. His faith is a gift from God. Bartimaeus saw Jesus with the eyes of faith: 'your faith has saved you.' Bartimaeus persistently resisted both the crowd and disciples in order to receive God's healing power mediated through Jesus.

God is doing all sorts of things that we cannot see, measure, control or fully understand. But it is an informed faith that allows you to fall in love with such a God. Bartimaeus is the one who offers the rest of us hope. We hear

Bartimaeus' story who trustingly followed Jesus, not knowing where the way will lead, and realise that it is Jesus who can heal us of our blindness and let us see things as they really are.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell

Monday, 25 October 2021

Today's readings present us with an interesting dilemma and that is the fact we live under two sets of laws: human-made laws and God's laws. For the most part, there is no tension between these sets of laws. We try to be law-abiding citizens, upholding the rule of law. However, today's Gospel passage presents us with a dilemma; a dilemma that Jesus himself faced. A woman with an infirmity presents herself to Jesus believing he has the power to cure her. Jesus immediately acknowledges her belief and cures her. But the rulers of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, ignore the healing miracle and the fact the woman was freed of her infirmity. They accuse him of breaking the Sabbath by curing her on the Sabbath day. Jesus uses a simple example to show that they too do the same. 'Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water?' As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame and all the people rejoiced that the woman had been cured. There are moments in our own lives when the same dilemma presents itself to us. A clear case in point is abortion. The civil law pertaining to abortion has changed in our country, but God's law does not change. Our Church clearly and unequivocally opposes abortion, and we as believers are asked to uphold God's law. Putting it another way, God's law comes first.

Fr Seán O'Leary, M.Afr

Tuesday, 26 October 2021

Jesus often uses parables to explain a deeper meaning. He uses images to help us understand the bigger picture. When words cannot explain, stories and images can help to encourage the listener to reflect. When Jesus talks about forgiveness, the Prodigal Son comes to mind. When talking about love, he shares the story about the Good Samaritan. In today's Gospel, Jesus uses the image a mustard seed to describe the Kingdom of God.

The mustard seed as small as it is, can grow into the biggest tree in the garden. Jesus himself could be described as the mustard seed. Jesus Christ, the true Man and true God. He was an ordinary man, the son of a carpenter who died on the cross (true man). Many did not listen to him, many struggled to understand, but many felt there was more to him. He healed, he sat with those in need, he forgave, he rose from the dead (true God). Sometimes people misunderstand the kingdom of God; that it is something beyond our earthly life. But that is wrong. The kingdom of God is something that starts today, here and now. With Jesus being the mustard seed, the kingdom of God became real. The fullness of life began. Jesus, the mustard seed; all of us, the branches. The kingdom of God in its spiritual dimensions exists within the hearts of believer. Like the yeast in the dough, only a small bit is kneaded into it, and yet it will spread throughout the whole dough. It helps to let it grow from within. Like Jesus' message that started with himself and from there it grew. But it always starts from within. God loves us first. All we can do is love him back.

Which image of the kingdom of God speaks to your heart? Why? Does it start from within and grow very quickly? How can you help spread the Good News?

Christina Malone

Wednesday, 27 October 2021

Who can be saved? When the answer to this question was *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, 'there is no salvation outside the Church,' this brought about an intense missionary movement. It was felt necessary to go out to all parts of the world, however remote, to bring people into the Church. Yet when Jesus is asked: 'Will there be only a few saved?' he seems to imply that this is the wrong question. What we have to ask ourselves is: 'Am I doing the right thing in order to be saved?' Does this do away with missionary zeal? Not at all, because if friendship with Jesus is important for us, we should want others to share in what we desire, namely, to be forever in the company of Jesus. But it is a reminder to us that we are to preach by our lives more than by our words. Just belonging to the Church is not enough: we have to live our lives as true disciples of Jesus. We are to live by the Spirit. It could be said that the first duty of the missionary is to discern the presence of the Spirit, and the

Spirit works widely in the hearts of people, in the history of peoples with their different cultures and religions. Jesus indeed opens a wide perspective: people 'from east and west, from north and south, will come to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.' The missionary's task is to follow wherever the Spirit leads, serving as the Spirit's humble and discreet collaborator.

Cardinal Michael L. Fitzgerald, M.Afr

Thursday, 28 October 2021

Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles

Today the Church celebrates the feast of two apostles, Simon and Jude. Each feast of an apostle is a feast of the Church, built on the foundations of the apostles, and a feast of mission, because the Church is mission by her nature.

The Twelve chosen by Jesus came from very different backgrounds. Simon was called the Zealot, meaning most likely that he was involved in some armed resistance against the Roman occupation, while Matthew was a tax collector and thus considered as a collaborator with the Roman occupier. Almost two extremes. Nevertheless, Jesus did not hesitate to call them together and to unite them in the foundations of his Church and her mission. Still today Jesus is calling an immense variety of persons, men and women, to work together in unity in the mission of the Church all over the world and at all levels of society.

The inseparable unity between Church and mission is underlined in today's Gospel reading. After calling the twelve, 'he then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples with a great crowd.' They 'had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.' The Church built upon the apostles, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone, with all her diversity of peoples, cultures and social origins is still today called to continue the same mission, to go and meet all those who are in need or suffering.

We are all personally involved in this mission, by our action, our support or our prayer, to meet, heal and give meaning of life to those who suffer, are

abandoned and are searching for hope, in a deeply divided world.

Fr Frans Bouwen, M.Afr

Friday, 29 October 2021

In today's Gospel Jesus breaks many of the 'rules' of Jewish decorum: he heals on the Sabbath! In Jewish culture the custom on the Sabbath was to refrain from most every activity on that holy day. Sabbath was to be a day of rest, a day of 'returning' to God. The focus on the Sabbath was to be on God alone.

Jesus, however, once again breaks the rules of his culture. While he was at table in the house of a Jewish leader, a man suffering from dropsy was brought in and he was laid down in front of Jesus. Jesus did not immediately heal the man. First, he addressed the Pharisees and the learned scholars who were present. He asked them if it was proper or lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They do not reply; they remain silent. Jesus then healed the man and sets him free of his infirmity

Law is important in our world. Without it there would be chaos. However, the purpose and intent of the law is to ensure safety, security and peace for the peoples of the world. At times though, we may put the 'rules' before what is loving and healthy for an individual, family or community. True, we may be keeping the 'law' or 'rule.' However, in doing so we may be breaking the greatest commandment: 'Love your neighbour.' Jesus today is helping us be mindful to use the 'law' for the good of others and not just to 'keep the rules.' Today and every day may we follow his example!

Bishop Paul Chomnycky, OSBM

Saturday, 30 October 2021

Tread softly because you tread on my dreams

In today's world, we are so often encouraged to stand up and put ourselves forward to achieve or to occupy the place of honour above all other considerations. That's human, but as Jesus alludes to, we should not do this and leave little opportunity for the weak and for those who are not able to push themselves forward. In His culture, receiving honour was a high

priority and sees the pharisees jockeying for the best seats in the house. These guests were in the business of demanding recognition by exalting themselves. In doing so, they were possibly in the process of trampling others in order to get where they want to be. Today's Gospel (Lk 14:1, 7-11) introduces us into the paradox of the Kingdom of God. Jesus suggests that his fellow guests should do the opposite to avoid embarrassment as they may be unworthily sitting in a seat that was meant for someone else.

Two thoughts come to mind as I reflect:

The first is Jesus' capacity to place himself amongst those who are not at the top table and to listen to the unspoken desires of those who are silent and so often kept from the places of honour. Yeats described so beautifully: 'But I, being poor, have only my dreams; I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.' These, are part of my second reflection. Woe to me, if I trample another's dreams. So often it's all they have in need of hopeful recognition. These are those who have marked me by their lives, be they poor or rich: they are those whom I've seen to humble themselves in the service of others and been exalted or honoured by God. Jesus suggests that when we try to exalt ourselves, we block God's life-giving work in our lives. In his letter, St. Paul writes that Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but humbled Himself. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him (Phil. 2:6-11). As missionary disciples, we too need to engage in the spiritual process of emptying ourselves, and like Mary in her Magnificat, in humbling ourselves, for the Lord and for each other, be exalted by God for the good we do to help others achieve their potential.

In my prayer today, I wish to remember the countless and nameless faces of those whom I have known in my missionary activity and the wonderful witness they have given me as they shared their dreams: those whom I would think are at the top table. Jesus, the merciful and compassionate listener is upset by self-centredness and hypocrisy. The Pharisees did not get the message of today's Old Testament first reading: be not presumptuous or obstinate and understand that God's love is for all peoples and He wishes that all may enter and sit at the table. We as missionary disciples should encourage that.

Fr Timothy Lehane, SVD

Sunday, 31 October 2021

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's Gospel, Jesus is asked what he believes is the greatest of all the commandments. Jesus replies by quoting from a prayer called the Shema that every faithful Jew recites daily, and we read in the night prayer of the liturgy of the hours every Saturday night. To this Jesus then adds a commandment from Leviticus 19:18: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' When the scribe expresses agreement, the final words of Jesus to him - you are very close to the Kingdom of God.

St John describes God in three words, simply, God is love. Karl Barth after writing volumes about God defined Him in five simple words - the One who loves me. St Augustine when blessing himself did so in the name of the Lover, the Beloved and the Love. Thomas Aquinas delighted in describing all his works of genius as mere straw in the face of seeing the love of God in a glimpse of the love of the beatific vision revealed to him. St Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. The very last line of *Les Misérables*, poignant and apt for our scripture readings today: As Jean Valjean is crossing from death to new life, he utters: 'To love another person is to see the face of God'. As we draw Mission Month to a conclusion today, may this Mission of Love be in our hearts today and always.

Prayer

Loving God, gather us as a community, that we may remember the ties that bind us together in your love. Strengthen us by your Spirit, that we may live in love, a love that transforms our lives even as we help to transform the lives of others. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Bishop Fintan Monahan

