

MEDITATIONS FOR MISSION

**Daily Reflections for the
Extraordinary Missionary Month
October 2019**

Proclaimed by Pope Francis



**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON
MISSION IN THE WORLD**

James H. Kroeger, MM

Introduction

Pope Francis, during the Angelus Prayer on World Mission Sunday, October 22, 2017, publicly announced to the whole Church his intention to celebrate an Extraordinary Missionary Month for October 2019. One key aspect of this event is to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* which gave new impetus to the missionary work of proclaiming the Gospel. Pope Francis desires to reignite the baptismal awareness of the People of God in relation to the mission of the Church. He provided the theme for this celebration: "Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World."

With this vision in mind, the National Office of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the Philippines, under the direction of Monsignor Esteban U. Lo, LRMS, in conjunction with his collaborators, decided to prepare mission-focused reflections for each day of October 2019. These meditations for mission are now presented in this handy booklet, designed to be easily distributed and used on a daily basis. Hopefully, priests, religious, catechists, missionaries, and all the lay faithful will find these reflections to be a source of genuine renewal of their mission dedication!

These brief meditations correspond to the spiritual dimensions indicated by Pope Francis in his call for this Extraordinary Missionary Month. The Pope desires a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ alive in the Church, a reflection on the witness and lives of missionary saints and martyrs, a dedication to missionary formation and catechetics, and a renewed practice of missionary charity.

Pope Francis himself has spoken eloquently about missionary evangelization in his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). For Francis, "missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church's activity*" (15). Francis quotes the words of Saint John Paul II: "today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church" (15). Pope Francis says: "I dream of a 'missionary option' ... capable of transforming everything" (27); "throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'" (25).

Friends, as you peruse these mission reflections during October 2019 (and even beyond), may you discover anew that, in Pope Francis' words, "Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people" (268)!

- James H. Kroeger, MM

MEDITATIONS FOR MISSION

**Daily Reflections for the
Extraordinary Missionary Month
October 2019
Proclaimed by Pope Francis**

**“Baptized and Sent”
THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON
MISSION IN THE WORLD**

James H. Kroeger, MM

The “Little Way” of Loving

The “mission month” of October opens with the feast of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, patroness of mission. She was born in France on January 2, 1873. Her exemplary parents, Zélie and Louis Martin, were canonized on October 18, 2015 by Pope Francis. Thérèse died of tuberculosis on September 30, 1897, at the tender age of twenty-four.

Thérèse would have probably attracted little notice, except for her posthumously published autobiographical manuscript, *The Story of a Soul*. Essentially, the work is about the path to holiness in everyday life. Thérèse was canonized on May 17, 1925, only twenty-eight years after her death. On December 14, 1927, Pope Pius XI proclaimed her the principal patroness, equal to Saint Francis Xavier, of all missionaries, men and women, and of all the missions in the whole world. More recently on World Mission Sunday (October 19, 1997), Pope John Paul II named Thérèse a Doctor of the Church.

Saint Thérèse understood that what is important in the Christian life is great love and not great deeds. Thérèse, the saint of the “little way,” developed a spirituality of ordinariness, in which one offers each moment and every deed simply and lovingly to God. Known as “the Little Flower,” Thérèse is a source of deep hope to millions who desire to serve God through their littleness, simplicity, and love. They find in Thérèse their own vocation and spirituality, their “doable” and “livable” pathway of daily sanctification.

We listen to brief excerpts from Thérèse’s profound insights. “Merit is not to be found in doing much or in giving much, but rather in receiving and in loving much.” “Perfection consists in doing his will, in being that which He wants us to be.” Indeed, Thérèse’s “little way” is the way of hope for all desiring to be missionaries and “saints of the ordinary.”

Celebrating God's Messengers

As the Church observes the feast of the Guardian Angels, let us recall that simple, reassuring prayer we were taught as children: "Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to whom His love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen."

The word "angel" comes from the Greek word *angelos* meaning "messenger." Angels are spiritual creatures created by God; their existence is an article of our Catholic faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (328) states: "The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls 'angels' is a truth of the faith."

The Bible is filled with appearances of angels, especially at significant moments in salvation history; they act as God's messengers. An angel announces to Mary that she will conceive a son to be named Jesus (Lk 1:26-38). Joseph is advised to take Mary as his wife by an angel (Mt 1:18-25). Angels announce Jesus' birth to the shepherds (Lk 2:1-20). When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to Jesus' tomb they encounter an angel who announces that Jesus has risen (Mt 28:1-8).

Jesus himself spoke of the loving care that angels offer to each of us: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father (Mt 18:10). Indeed, our personal guardian angel is beside us always, manifesting God's caring, loving presence and leading us on the path to eternal life.

Pope Francis has spoken about guardian angels, advising us to listen to our guardian angels with meekness and respect. Our personal angel as God's "missionary" always accompanies us, protecting and advising us like an intimate friend. We are truly grateful for God's love, manifested through the beautiful gift of angels, especially our personal guardian angel!

Jesus' Guidelines for Mission

Our beautiful Gospel today narrates Jesus' choice of seventy-two followers and sends them out on mission. Thus, we should conclude that mission is for **all** of Jesus' disciples—**all** baptized Christians, not just the religious or ordained. Everyone, particularly parents and even grandparents, has a great mission to fulfill! Note that mission begins with God's initiative, with Jesus' choice. We do not engage in mission based on our decision; "You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (Jn 15:16).

Recall that "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." This was true in Jesus' time and remains true today. We must recognize the great task that faces us as Christians in the world; we turn to the Lord in prayer, asking for additional harvesters. Then, Jesus gives a brief, yet direct instruction: "Be on your way." Do *not* delay! Go, and go now!

Remember that you will face many challenges; you will be like lambs in the midst of wolves. Recognize that some people will welcome your message, while others will reject both you and your very mission. Jesus advises his missionaries to "travel light." Don't let material "stuff" weigh you down and get in the way of your ministry of preaching Jesus' Good News.

The missioner is to extend peace to everyone; in other words, the Christian message is one of "mercy and compassion" (theme of Pope Francis' 2015 visit to the Philippines). In addition, recall Pope Francis' advice to go to the margins, the peripheries, to the excluded in society. Make the announcement of Jesus' *Kingdom message* your central emphasis; proclaim that "the reign of God is near." Indeed, as Christians we **all** are to carry on the mission task that Jesus gave us; we are *joyful heralds* of Christ's Good News!

Laudato Si' of Pope Francis

On this feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, we recall that his namesake Pope Francis has written a lengthy encyclical focused on the environment: *Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home*. This document proposes that the care of the earth is a moral and spiritual concern. Francis issues an urgent call to action, pointedly asking: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (LS 160).

Recalling the beautiful canticle of creation of Francis of Assisi, the pope notes that the earth, our sister, “now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her” (2). Francis seeks to “address every person living on this planet.... I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (3). Francis of Assisi helps us see the need for “an integral ecology” (11).

We may ask: What is happening to our common home, our beautiful world? “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (21). “These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture” (22). We need to take a “frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair” (61). Although “humanity has disappointed God’s expectations” (61), there is genuine hope.

Pope Francis sees “the rich contribution which religions can make towards an integral ecology and the full development of humanity” (62). “The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time she must above all protect humanity from self-destruction” (79). Like Francis of Assisi, we must adopt “the gaze of Jesus” on the world and all creation.

Rejoicing in Mission

The seventy-two disciples that Jesus sent out on mission return to Jesus and express their joyful satisfaction that their mission proved successful. They were amazed that even the demonic powers were subject to them (in Hebrew thought, snakes and scorpions were symbols of various kinds of evils). Jesus rejoices with his disciples at the success of their missionary efforts.

Jesus then brings his disciples to a deeper understanding of their mission; they should rejoice not only that they were able to dispel the evil spirits, but that their names are written in heaven. The deepest joy of missionary-disciples is to realize that they are loved by God; they have become the chosen brothers and sisters of Jesus. In short, whether one's missionary efforts meet positive results or not, our deep joy comes from knowing that we are doing the mission for which we have been chosen and sent by Jesus.

Recall that at the beginning of this “missionary section” of Luke's Gospel, Jesus sent out the seventy-two to prepare the towns and villages that he himself was going to visit (cf. Lk 10:1). As Jesus' messengers we are to always remember that we are preparing people for acceptance of Jesus. Through our words and deeds we are readying the way for Jesus. We are like the precursor John the Baptist preparing for Jesus; “He must increase; I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). A modern translation says: “He must grow greater; I must grow smaller.”

Today's Gospel concludes with Jesus telling his disciples that they should find great joy in their mission for their own eyes have seen the great things that God is accomplishing; salvation is arriving before their very own eyes. We truly rejoice whenever God uses us to accomplish his purposes. Indeed, as missionary disciples, we are Jesus' “servants-become-friends” (cf. Jn 15:14-15)!

Exploring Mission Motivation

The final verse of today's Gospel from Saint Luke (17:10) succinctly captures how we as Christ's disciples should view ourselves and our Christian commitment; we are to simply consider ourselves as *servants*. We are not to *expect* rewards from God. We do not somehow *earn* rewards; our works do not *merit* God's benevolence. Such attitudes reflect the ancient Pelagian heresy, which Pope Francis critiques in his recent document on holiness in today's world (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 47-59).

As Pope Francis explains: "His friendship infinitely transcends us; we cannot buy it with our works; it can only be a gift born of his loving initiative" (54). "We cannot celebrate this free gift of the Lord's friendship unless we realize that our earthly life and natural abilities are his gift. We need to acknowledge jubilantly that our life is essentially a gift, and recognize that our freedom is a grace" (55). It is only "on the basis of God's gift, freely accepted and humbly received" (56), that we become truly God's missionary servants.

Yet, we may ask: Why evangelize and engage in mission? The Asian Bishops (FABC) have enunciated an insightful perspective on our service and "motivation for mission." They note five motives: "We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of **gratitude to God**.... Mission is above all else an overflow of this life from grateful hearts transformed by the grace of God.... But mission is also a **mandate**. We evangelize because we are sent into the whole world to make disciples of all nations.... We evangelize also because we **believe** in the Lord Jesus.... We evangelize also because we have been **incorporated by baptism into the Church**, which is missionary by its very nature.... And finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is **leaven** for liberation and for the transformation of society. These are authentic motives of Jesus' missionary servants!

Praying the World Mission Rosary

October, popularly known as “mission month,” includes the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Each of the twenty rosary decades is devoted to a meditation on a “mystery” centered on the life of Jesus or Mary. Here the word “mystery” refers to a truth of our faith, *not* something which is incomprehensible. Thus, when Catholics pray the rosary, they are to *meditate* on twenty particular truths of the faith found in the Bible or in Catholic doctrine. These “mysteries” are grouped into four categories: Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, and Luminous. Indeed, for numerous Catholics the rosary is truly a form of contemplative prayer, a source of profound meditation.

In February 1951 Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, during his *The Catholic Hour* radio address, inaugurated a unique approach to the rosary. He noted: “We must pray, and not for ourselves alone, but for the world. To this end, I have designed the World Mission Rosary. Each of the five decades is of a different color to represent the continents.” Praying the rosary in this manner is to aid the Pope and the entire Church fulfill its missionary mandate.

The schema that Sheen proposed (whether or not one has the colored rosary beads) is: first, **green** is for the forests and grasslands of *Africa*; second, **blue** is for the ocean surrounding the *Pacific Islands*; third, **white** is for *Europe*, the seat of the Holy Father, the Church’s shepherd; fourth, **red** recalls the fire of faith that brought missionaries to the *Americas*; and, fifth, **yellow** represents the morning light of the East and *Asia*. This approach focuses on the “mission intention” of each decade; it is easily integrated with one’s customary manner of praying the rosary. We recall that Saint John Paul II encouraged everyone to intensify the praying of the rosary “to obtain from the Lord those graces that the Church and humanity especially need.”

Living an Integrated Life in Mission

Today's Gospel, which is also used for the feast of Saint Martha, probably reflects a typical scene from the life of Jesus. He had a very close friendship relationship with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, often going to their home in Bethany to relax, enjoy their company, share some of Martha's good cooking, and simply rest from his demanding ministry activities.

Saint Luke presents Mary seated near Jesus and listening to him. Martha, being a good host, is busy with all the demands of hospitality. Understandably, she becomes upset that Mary seems to be taking it easy and leaving all the work to her. Jesus lovingly cautions Martha not to be overly concerned about all the details of serving.

Is Jesus rebuking Martha, even disregarding her concerns, when he says that Mary "has chosen the better part"? Certainly not! He is gently reminding Martha to keep everything in balance, to fulfill one's daily duties (work, cook, wash, clean) and still remain centered on Christ (time for prayer and reflection). This is captured well in the Benedictine motto: *ora et labora*, pray and work. We need both prayer and work in order to live a truly Christian life, to accomplish our mission. If we as active evangelizers were to embrace prayer without also performing the tasks inherent in our missionary calling, we would stagnate. When guided by God's Will, our labors bring us closer to Him.

Likewise, our mission work loses its meaning if it is not grounded in prayer, meditation, and reflection. Everything in our lives is *not* under our control. We cannot do anything except through the grace of God. Before we begin our missionary tasks, we must first turn to God in prayer. Rooted in God's love, we can more effectively carry out our mission. In a word, we are to be genuine "contemplatives in action."

Knowing God as Compassionate Father

Christian creeds address God as “the Father, the almighty.” God’s fatherhood is a clear hallmark of Jesus’ life and prayer. Frequently, Jesus prays to his *Abba*. He calls God “my Father” (Mt 11:26; Lk 10:21). His mission is from the Father (Jn 11:41-42). During the last supper he addresses his Father (Jn 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). Jesus turned to his *Abba* in the crisis moments of his life: Gethsemane (Mk 14:36; Mt 26:42), Calvary (Lk 23:34). His dying words are: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46).

Because Jesus the Lord taught this prayer to his disciples, it is known as the “Lord’s Prayer.” Tertullian called it “the summary of the whole Gospel,” and Saint Thomas Aquinas said it is “the most perfect of all prayers.” When we Christians in faith express our needs to our Father, we are also committing ourselves to making our prayer requests a reality. For example, praying for our daily bread means doing our part and sharing in the Church’s mission to relieve hunger and deprivation in the world.

In a unique way, Pope Francis, the “pope of mercy,” has focused the Church’s mission on the theme of mercy. Recall his document, *Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy)*, wherein he proclaimed an entire *year of mercy*. Francis says: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2).

For Pope Francis, God the Father’s mercy is central to the Church’s life and mission. “All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy” (MV 10). “Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (MV 12).

Befriending Others: A Mission Paradigm

Today's Gospel speaks of friendship, a theme relevant to our celebration of the special "mission month" proclaimed by Pope Francis. The Gospels are filled with numerous examples of Jesus approaching others in friendship. Saint Luke shows Jesus compassionately reaching out to lepers, paralytics, sinners, tax collectors, the centurion, widows, demoniacs, epileptics; Luke's list is extensive. Jesus himself is the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) and the compassionate father (Lk 15:11-32). At the Last Supper Jesus says: "One can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you" (Jn 15:13-14).

The eminent Catholic scripture scholar Rudolph Schnackenburg has written a moving book with the title *The Friend We Have in Jesus*. His insights are truly profound: "Friendship is really a comprehensive expression for our relationship with him [Jesus].... Our friend Jesus calls to us: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest'.... That is the voice of the friend who understands us and reveals his heart to us.... Each person must conclude for himself or herself that Jesus is the friend—indeed the personal friend—of every human being."

In his beautiful *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Francis notes: "The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus" (1). "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed encounter with Jesus Christ.... I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day" (3). Francis continues: "this encounter—or renewed encounter—with God's love ... blossoms into an *enriching friendship*.... Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization" (8). For Pope Francis—and each of us: "Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people" (268).

Saint John XXIII: The Joyful Pope

Today we celebrate the life and significant contribution of one of the Church's recently canonized saints: Pope John XXIII. He, along with John Paul II, was declared a saint on April 27, 2014, Divine Mercy Sunday. Over the years of his short pontificate (1958-1963) John XXIII became a beloved figure worldwide; he was popularly known as "Good Pope John." He is remembered for the convocation of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) with its *aggiornamento* agenda for the renewal and updating of the Church. In fact, John XXIII's annual feast day on October 11 is fixed to commemorate his opening of Vatican II on October 11, 1962. Each year as the Church celebrates this saint, we are asked to recall the pivotal role of Vatican II in renewing the life and mission of the Church.

Of the many gifts that John XXIII left to the Church one was his "Daily Decalogue." The following are some brief excerpts: **(1)** Only for today, I will seek to live the livelong day positively; **(2)** Only for today, I will not criticize anyone; **(3)** Only for today, I will be happy in the certainty that I was created to be happy; **(4)** Only for today, I will adapt to circumstances; **(5)** Only for today, I will devote ten minutes of my time to some good reading.

Pope John's Decalogue continues: **(6)** Only for today, I will do one good deed and not tell anyone about it; **(7)** Only for today, I will do at least one thing I do not like doing; **(8)** Only for today, I will make a plan for myself; **(9)** Only for today, I will firmly believe, despite appearances, that the good Providence of God cares for me; and **(10)** Only for today, I will have no fears. We marvel at John XXIII's wisdom, guiding us in fulfilling our mission!

Who Are Truly Blessed?

Today's short Gospel is only two verses; each verse contains the same word "blessed," *makarios* in Greek and *beatus* in Latin. Commonly translated into English as "blessed," this word also means: happy, blissful, joyful, fortunate, fulfilled. It refers to a state of spiritual well-being; one experiences genuine joy in one's soul. When the word refers to a person, it means that this one is held in reverence and respected. Who are such persons that deserve to be called "blessed"? Jesus' answer is clear and direct: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it." These words open a pathway for a profound reflection on our Christian missionary vocation.

Recent popes have emphasized integrating the "hearing" and "keeping" of God's Word; one must be a "listener" and a "doer"! Evangelization demands both contemplation and concrete action. Recall the challenge presented by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (41): "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." Pope John Paul II refers to this insight of Paul VI in *Redemptoris Missio* (42): "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories." Pope Francis combines "hearing" God's Word as disciples and "doing" the Word as missionaries in *Evangelii Gaudium* (120): "we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries,' but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples'."

The New Testament reveals that the first person to receive the honor of being called blessed is none other than Mary herself. Pope Francis emphasizes Mary's path of faith as an example for all Christians; we listen to his words, inspiring us to live out our mission as evangelizers. Blessed Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, strengthen our faith to truly become your Son's missionary disciples!

Authentic Missionary Service

An obvious parallel exists between today's first reading and the Gospel: the curing of victims of leprosy. The ten lepers call out: "Jesus! Master! Take pity on us." Jesus heals them and asks them to be "certified" by the Jewish priests that they have been cured. Surprisingly, only one returns to express his gratitude to Jesus. Jesus confirms the grateful Samaritan's "profound healing" by telling him: "Your faith has saved you."

These Scripture narratives invite us to recall the life of a sterling missionary who profoundly transformed people's lives. Jozef Damien de Veuster, popularly known as "Damien the Leper," was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, 2009. Born in 1840 on a small farm near Louvain in Belgium, he left for Hawaii in 1863 and arrived six months later; he was ordained in Honolulu in May 1864. Damien served for nine years on the Island of Hawaii. In early 1873, he was the first priest volunteer who offered himself to serve the lepers who were segregated on the island of Molokai, since there was no known cure for the dreaded disease which was ravaging the island archipelago.

Damien's assignment letter from Father Modeste, his religious superior, read: "You may stay as long as your devotion dictates." Damien read the letter over and over again—until his death sixteen years later at age 49. As a missionary on Molokai, Damien wrote his brother in Europe: "I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ. That is why, in preaching, I say 'we lepers,' not, 'my brethren'." Damien strove to configure himself to Christ. He died on April 15, 1889; it was Holy Week. Damien lived a transformed and transforming life. His example of service of the poor inspires us not to forget the needy right in our midst. Saint Damien, apostle of compassion, pray for us.

Paul's Dynamic Mission Principles

The apostle Paul is undoubtedly the greatest missionary of all times; his mission vocation is succinctly captured in today's first reading. This brief presentation surfaces ten "mission principles," valid for Paul of Tarsus as well as for all modern-day Pauls.

(1) Depth Awareness of Vocation. For Paul and all missionaries, *mission originates in the call of God.* **(2) Radical Commitment to Christ.** Paul's conversion experience on the Damascus road was only the starting point of a life-long relationship; *mission envisions a totally Christ-centered life.* **(3) Voluntary Acceptance of Suffering.** The Apostle Paul preached the Gospel by his life and example. *Vulnerability and acceptance of the cross authenticate mission.* **(4) Insightful Mission Methods.** Paul employed distinct methods to achieve his purposes. *Mission demands creative, inculturated, ever-renewed approaches to evangelization.* **(5) Urgent Gospel Proclamation.** Paul heralds a message from God that profoundly affects all humanity. *Mission has lost none of its urgency in the contemporary world.*

6. Deep Love of the Church. For Paul the Church is primarily the local community of baptized followers of Jesus Christ. *Mission and love of the people who constitute the Church go hand-in-hand.* **(7) Close Collaboration with Co-workers.** Paul, though a strong individual, was a team-worker in the task of evangelization. *All apostolic ministry is enhanced through collaborative efforts.* **(8) Commitment to Social Transformation.** Paul's preaching of liberation included a manifest concern for the poor and suffering. *The Gospel message of human dignity leads to social transformation.* **(9) Effective, Exemplary Life-style.** Paul was always careful to live an authentic life-style. *The witness of a Christian life is the first and often most effective proclamation of the Gospel.* **(10) Total Reliance on God's Providence.** Paul asks: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). *Mission always remains "God's project."* Pastors, missionaries, catechists, religious, laity, all ministers of the Church, imitate Paul, the joyful evangelizer!

Called to Missionary Holiness

Every Christian is called to holiness and intimacy with the Lord that characterizes the lives of saints such as Teresa of Avila, whose feast we celebrate today. This same invitation is reiterated by Pope Francis, through his 2018 apostolic exhortation *Rejoice and Be Glad (Gaudete et Exsultate)*. Francis' inviting document bears the subtitle: "On the Call to Holiness in Today's World," echoing the identical invitation found in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (39-42). As missionary-disciples of Jesus, we listen to some pivotal insights from Pope Francis.

The Pope asserts that his writing is meant to be very practical: "My modest goal is to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time" (2). The Lord "wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence" (1). Undoubtedly, there are many forms of holiness. "We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness" (11). Francis praises what he calls "the middle class of holiness" (7); this includes ordinary people such as parents, workers, the sick and elderly. Holiness is often found "in our next-door neighbors" (7).

"This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures" (16). We "need only find a more perfect way of doing what we are already doing" (17). "A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness" (19). "You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission" (23). "Life does not have a mission, but is a mission" (27). "To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world" (33). Francis affirms the challenging words of Leon Bloy: "The only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint" (34). Saint Teresa of Avila would certainly agree!

Popular Piety Serving Mission

Today the Church recalls the life and contribution of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), a French Visitation nun, who received visions of the Sacred Heart and popularized the devotion, guided by her spiritual director, Saint Claude Colombiere. Many Catholics are familiar with the “First Friday” tradition of receiving the Eucharist for nine consecutive months. Margaret Mary asserted that those keeping the First Fridays would not die in sin or without the sacraments; Christ the Sacred Heart would be their refuge at the hour of death.

How can such valid popular piety serve mission? How could a devotion, which sometimes may be limited to a personal, private practice, become more relevant today? Recall the original symbol manifested to Margaret Mary: *a heart afire with love for humanity that was surmounted by a cross*. This symbol clearly implies that devotion to the Sacred Heart is intimately connected with the paschal mystery: the mystery of Jesus’ dying and rising again. In a word, it means that the Sacred Heart calls Christians to mission and a self-sacrificing love for one’s neighbor, a committed love ready to face the challenges of genuine fraternal social service.

Our hearts must be transformed into loving replicas of the Heart of Jesus, who reached out to the lost, lonely, little, least, and last in society. Thus, in contemporary situations, devotees of the Sacred Heart are called upon to concretize their love in face of challenging social realities. Today the Church sees that serving the poor and the disadvantaged involves intelligent effort to change unjust structures in society. Linking the Sacred Heart devotion with growth in heartfelt compassion for the needy would contribute significantly to the renewal of this traditional popular devotion, making it more responsive to contemporary social realities and the need, as Pope Francis notes, to become “a Church which is poor and for the poor” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 198).

Eucharist and Mission

The feast of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr, is commemorated today. He was arrested and taken by soldiers to Rome to be thrown to lions. While on his arduous journey he managed to write seven letters to various local churches. Addressing the Christian Romans, he urges them not to seek his release. Professing his faith, Ignatius writes: “I am the wheat of God, and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.” Ignatius saw that his mission was to become the Eucharist!

Saint John Paul II in *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (28) notes: “We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.”

In his *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (20) the same pope notes that the Eucharist “increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today.” He also quotes the poignant words of Saint John Chrysostom: “Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: ‘This is my body’ is the same who said: ‘You saw me hungry and you gave me no food,’ and ‘Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me.’ ... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.” Mission means imitating the self-giving Christ in the Eucharist!

Luke, Evangelist of Mission

Saint Luke can validly be called the “evangelist of mission.” Although all four Gospel writers, each in their own way, portray the mission of Christ and the Church, Luke provides the greatest amount of detail, both in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, where one finds numerous accounts of the early Church in mission. Today’s Gospel provides several practical, concrete guidelines for mission engagement.

Luke notes that in Jesus’ public ministry he chooses seventy-two followers and sends them out on mission. We should conclude that mission is for **all** of Jesus’ disciples—**all** baptized Christians, not just the special twelve apostles. All mission and evangelization begins with God’s initiative, with Jesus’ choice. In addition, mission is not a personal or individual project; it is a community endeavor of the Church. We are asked to remember that “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” This was true in Jesus’ time and remains true today. We recognize the great task that faces us; we turn to the Lord in prayer, asking for additional harvesters.

Jesus gives several brief, yet direct, instructions: “Be on your way.” *Do not* delay! Remember that you will face many challenges; you will be like lambs in the midst of wolves. Jesus advises his missionaries to “travel light.” The missionary is to extend peace to everyone. Be humble and accept what is offered in terms of food and accommodations. Reach out to the sick and needy you encounter (recall Pope Francis’ advice to go to the margins, the peripheries, to the excluded in society). Make the announcement of Jesus’ *Kingdom message* your central emphasis; proclaim that “the reign of God near.” Indeed, as Christians we carry on the mission ministry that Jesus gave us. We appreciate Saint Luke for his beautiful panorama of authentic Christian mission; we also make it our firm commitment!

Missionary Martyrs

Witness to Faith

Today the Church commemorates six French Jesuit priests and two lay brothers who have come to be known as the “North American Martyrs.” This feast reminds us that the growth of the faith in most parts of the world began with the heroic witness of life by early missionaries—even to the point of giving their lives. These eight missionaries, who had come to North America to teach the Iroquois and Huron peoples about God, were martyred between the years 1642 and 1649 in present-day New York and Canada.

These faith-filled Gospel heralds, in general, were not welcomed by the Native Americans; they were viewed, not as men of God, but as French settlers who had often cheated them and invaded their valued hunting grounds. These missionaries first worked among the Huron tribes, achieving some acceptance as they tried to help them, nursing their sick and showing them new farming skills. They were able to begin teaching the Huron people about Jesus. Father de Brebeuf even wrote a simple catechism in the local language to teach the children. A pivotal problem was the hostilities between the Iroquois and Hurons. As the missionaries befriended the Hurons, the Iroquois viewed them as their enemies.

Over a period of eight years, these brave missionaries were brutally martyred. We know many details about their deaths and their mission experiences among the Native Americans because of the letters and journals they wrote. They were canonized by Pope Pius XI on June 29, 1930. Surely they would have meditated deeply on Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel that the Holy Spirit would accompany them in all their challenging missionary endeavors. We accept that, indeed, we are an *ecclesia martyrum*, a Church of martyrs and witnesses, both in past eras as well as in the present. We thank God for all who bravely—even heroically—witness their faith.

Pope Francis Speaks on Mission

Catholics celebrate World Mission Sunday today; we carefully explore Pope Francis' message written for the occasion. In addition, we can profitably explore numerous profound insights on mission found in *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis' first apostolic exhortation. Here Francis is proposing a profound missionary renewal of the entire Church. He asserts that we need an "evangelizing Church that comes out of herself," **not** a Church that is "self-referential" and "lives within herself, of herself, for herself" (EG 27).

Pope Francis' writes: "I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.... All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion" (EG 27).

"Missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church's activity*.... We need to move 'from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry'" (EG 15). "I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has programmatic significance and important consequences.... Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'" (EG 25).

A pivotal insight of Pope Francis is that "we are all missionary disciples" (EG 119); through baptism, "all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples" (EG 120). All Christians are "agents of evangelization." "Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries,' but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples'" (EG 120). Francis asserts: "Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor" (EG 109).

Using Material Gifts for Mission

Money is useful—even necessary—for many good works, to promote human development, to foster missionary efforts, but when it becomes the dominant thing in life it destroys us and our relationships. This is the lesson that Pope Francis draws from his reflections on today's Gospel parable about the rich man with an abundant harvest, seeking to preserve everything only for himself.

In this parable Jesus teaches us about “our relationship with wealth and money.” Of course, we should not demonize money; it can bring “many achievements to develop humanity.” But it is wrong to use it perversely. Pope Francis confirms Jesus' warning: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.” This temptation to “always want more” leads to idolatry. It leads us away from God's Kingdom and mission.

Pope Francis links his Gospel reflection to the words of Saint Paul, who said, “Jesus Christ, who was rich, became poor in order to enrich us.” This is “God's way,” the way of “humility, lowering ourselves to serve.” Since inordinate material attachments lead us away from God, Pope Francis adds that Jesus uses “strong, harsh words against attachment to money.” “You cannot serve two masters: you serve either God or money.” Jesus urges us “not to be worried because the Lord knows what we need.” Or again, he tells us to “trust in the Father, who makes the lilies of the field bloom and gives food to the birds of heaven.”

As Francis explains, when the man was wondering what to do with his abundant harvest, “he could have said: I'll give to someone else to help him.” The Pope asks us to remember that “all the goods we have are given to us by the Lord to help the world go forward, to help humanity go forward, to help others.” Here one finds the true meaning of life: service of others!

Saint John Paul II: Missionary Pope

The Catholic Church worldwide rejoiced as John Paul II, along with John XXIII, was canonized by Pope Francis on April 27, 2014 in Rome. Catholic and secular media covered the event, emphasizing the many contributions of this 264th pope of the Catholic Church whose pontificate extended over 26 years (1978-2005).

One of the major emphases of John Paul II was his focus on the renewal of the Church in her missionary identity and commitment. When his mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) was published on December 7, 1990, Cardinal Daneels of Brussels wrote: “this document best exemplifies who this pope is; it is the fruit of his mission in every continent. There is nothing better to define his pontificate than to say: he is a missionary pope.”

In RM (1) the pope described his missionary commitment: “From the beginning of my pontificate I have chosen to travel to the ends of the earth in order to show this missionary concern. My direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the *urgency of missionary activity*....” John Paul II echoed his explicit pastoral choice in his Message for World Mission Sunday in 1981: “My trips to Latin America, Asia and Africa have an eminently missionary purpose.” Everywhere he went John Paul II emphasized a central point: “I wish to invite the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*” (RM 2).

Saint John Paul II continually asserted that mission is at the heart of the Church: “the Church here on earth is missionary by her very nature” (AG 2). He was deeply convinced that “missionary activity renews the Church.... *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!*” (RM 2). Pope Francis said of John Paul II: “I think of him as ‘the great missionary of the Church’,” because he was “a man who proclaimed the Gospel everywhere.”

Joyful Evangelizers

Today's Gospel includes an interesting assertion; Jesus says: "Happy is that servant whom his master upon arrival finds him engaged in his mission" (Lk 12:43). Jesus is commending all missionaries who constantly engage in the task of evangelization; they are indeed blessed, happy, and fortunate. Jesus' words prompt us to recall that Pope Francis constantly affirms that missionary evangelization is to be a joyful undertaking; this theme echoes constantly through Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). We listen to some of Francis' insights.

"The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.... With Christ joy is constantly born anew.... I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy" (1). "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since 'no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord'" (3). Francis invites us all to "enter into this stream of joy" (5).

The Pope employs several creative expressions that challenge us to be joyful evangelizers. "An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral" (10). "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter" (6). Evangelizers are not to be "disillusioned pessimists, 'sourpusses'" (85). We must avoid a "tomb psychology ... [that can] transform Christians into mummies in a museum" (83). We do not accept the negativities of those who act like "prophets of doom" (84).

Pope Francis constantly encourages us: "Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization" (83)! Indeed, only *joyful evangelizers* are effective missionaries!

The Fire of Mission

The first verse of today's Gospel captures Jesus' focus on his mission to bring "fire" upon the earth, to accomplish his God-given task of evangelization, the proclamation of his Father's Kingdom. This verse reminds one of the classical statement by theologian Emil Brunner in 1931: *"The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning."*

Brunner eloquently asserts that every Christian who receives the Word of God "receives along with it the duty of passing this Word on.... Mission work does not arise from any arrogance in the Christian Church; mission is its cause and its life....Where there is no mission, there is no Church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith.... Mission, Gospel preaching, is the spreading out of the fire which Christ has thrown upon the earth. He who does not propagate this fire shows that he is not burning. He who burns propagates the fire."

"This 'must' is both things—an urge and a command. An urge, because living faith feels God's purpose as its own. 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel,' says Paul. Necessity is laid upon him. But also, he ought to preach; with the gift he receives the obligation: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel.' Whether Christ's command was uttered just in these words, we do not know exactly. But there can be no doubt that He had sent out His disciples with the strict order to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the world."

Jesus felt the urgency of his mission to bring "fire" upon this earth. He has shared this mission with every baptized Christian. As fire only genuinely exists when it is actually burning, we are only the Church and Jesus' authentic disciples only when we engage in mission. Are you ablaze? Have you caught Jesus' "Gospel Fire"?

Reading the “Signs of the Times”

Jesus speaks about “reading signs” in today’s Gospel, interpreting life’s events in order to discern God’s will. Indeed, to more adequately respond to God’s call to mission, we need to astutely understand the diverse challenges and demands of evangelization in the modern world. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis exhorts all Christians to an “ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times” (51). Evangelizers must be attentive to “the promptings of the Holy Spirit who helps us together to read the signs of the times” (14).

For Francis, this task of examining current realities in the light of Christian faith is “a grave responsibility” (51). He proposes using “an evangelical discernment” which is “the approach of a missionary disciple” who is guided by “the light and strength of the Holy Spirit” (50). Christian faith demands “recognizing and discerning spirits” and ultimately “choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil” (51).

Saint John XXIII, who summoned Vatican II, popularized the expression “signs of the times.” Here one finds the beginnings of a pivotal direction in theological methodology: linking the Gospel with the human family “with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses” (183). This approach is manifested in one of Francis’ quotes from Pope Paul VI: “We know that ‘evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the increasing interplay of the Gospel and of humanity’s concrete life, both social and personal’” (181).

This “signs of the times” method is found in some Council documents; the best known passage is from *Gaudium et Spes*: “The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (4). This key imperative remains a permanent task in missionary evangelization.

Mercy: Heart of Mission

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about a barren fig tree. The servant pleads with the master to be merciful and spare the tree; the master agrees. The scene reminds this writer of the words and deeds of Pope Francis, truly a "pope of mercy." His 2015 document, *Misericordiae Vultus* [MV] (*The Face of Mercy*) proclaimed an entire *year of mercy*. Francis says: "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man" (2). We listen to some additional words that express the pope's profound vision!

Scripture clearly affirms that God is "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation" (2 Cor 1:3). Our God is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4). In Jesus of Nazareth, mercy has become living and visible. Jesus' entire life and "his person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously.... The signs he works, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy" (8).

"Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers" (10). "The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel.... Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy" (12).

Mission means "living-in-mercy." Here are some suggestions to translate mercy into concrete deeds. Mercy addresses various types of human suffering; Christians are called to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Mercy is challenging; its demands are often inconvenient and unpredictable. Practicing mercy must spring from God's love in our hearts (Rm 5:5); it is not only giving things, but giving ourselves. Pray that you may imitate the same merciful love that Jesus—and Mary—consistently manifest.

Authentic Humility Serves Evangelization

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and the Publican tax collector; both went up to the temple to pray. Pharisees belonged to a Jewish sect that rigidly followed the law; they were often self-righteous and critical of others. Publicans were Jews who served the Roman authorities by collecting taxes, often enriching themselves in the process; they were considered public sinners and were treated with disdain.

Recall that Jesus told this parable to some "who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else." Jesus contrasts the attitudes of the two men. The Pharisee's prayer was a self-serving attempt to tell God how righteous he was; it reeked of pride and an inflated ego. The Publican pleaded: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner"; he recognized his guilt and his sins, begging God's forgiveness. Jesus concludes his parable, saying "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Pope Francis provides us with insights on genuine humility. "If God prefers humility it is not to debase us: humility is the necessary precondition for being lifted up again by Him, so as to experience the mercy that comes to fill our emptiness. The prayer of the arrogant does not reach God's heart, but the humility of the wretched opens it up. God has a predilection for the humble and, encountering a humble heart, He opens His own fully" (6-1-16). Again, "in Mary we see that humility is not a virtue of the weak but of the strong who do not have to treat others badly to feel important" (8-13-17).

Indeed, all evangelizers need the attitude of humble servants. Humility is a clear sign of the messenger's authenticity. Humility attracts; humility evangelizes. As Pope Francis noted in his homily at the beginning of his pontificate (3-19-13): "Let us never forget that authentic power is service"!

Celebrating the Church's Apostles

After spending the entire night in prayer to His Father, Jesus selects twelve of his disciples, calling them “apostles.” The word *apostle* comes from the Greek *apostolein*, meaning “one who is sent out.” By choosing twelve, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, Jesus indicates that he is establishing a “people,” a new People of God, the Church. Thus, the Church is “apostolic” and “missionary” right from its very origins. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the Church is “missionary by her very nature” (*Ad Gentes* 2).

In the New Testament one finds two primary usages of the word *apostle*. The first specifically refers to the twelve chosen by Jesus; they form the foundation of the Church—with Jesus as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). The second meaning refers more generically to other individuals who are sent out to be messengers, ambassadors, and missionaries of Jesus Christ. In this *general sense* we can be called “apostles.” Indeed, through our Baptism, we are called and sent as genuine apostles of the risen Jesus.

Probably, the closest term to describe an *apostle* today would be the word *missionary*, which, incidentally, derives from the Latin verb *mittere*, meaning “to send.” A missionary is a follower of Christ who is sent out with the specific mission of announcing the Gospel. To employ the words of Pope Francis, we all are “missionary disciples,” followers of Jesus by whom we have been missioned.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (120), Francis is eminently clear: “In virtue of their Baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples.... Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Jesus Christ: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries,’ but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples.’” On this feast of the Apostles Simon and Jude we joyfully celebrate our missionary identity.

Mission and Small Beginnings

Jesus was a “master-teacher.” This is shown in today’s two short “Kingdom” parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. Significant Church movements and mission initiatives often result from “the smallest of all seeds” and from “a bit of yeast.” The change begins “from within”: the seed is planted in the ground and the yeast is mixed into the flour.

Growth, change, and transformation in our lives as Christians begins with the small seed of faith, planted at our Baptism. As we cooperate with God’s grace, its transforming power and effects are seen. This fact has been verified in Church history. From a small band of ordinary disciples the Catholic Church has grown into a worldwide community of 1.6 billion people today. Beginning with one person, Saint Mother Teresa proceeded to pick up thousands of destitute people. She has expressed how God uses our littleness to achieve His mission.

Mother Teresa has said: “In this life we cannot always do great things, but we can do small things with great love.” “I am a little pencil in God’s hands. He does the thinking; he does the writing. He does everything and sometimes it is really hard, because it is a broken pencil and He has to sharpen it a little more.”

Mother Teresa’s patron saint was Therese of Lisieux. She, like many people, was attracted to “the little way” of Saint Therese, the Church’s Patroness of Mission and a Doctor of the Church. Her “spirituality” means seeking “holiness of life” in the ordinary aspects of everyday existence. This approach puts holiness within the reach of ordinary people like you and me. Both of these missionary saints are beautiful examples of how God uses “littleness” to achieve His mission. We ask ourselves: How can I live Jesus’ call to missionary discipleship in the simple, daily events of my life?

God's Marvelous Providence

Saint Paul's words found in today's first reading from Romans are among the most well-known in the Bible: "For those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom 8:28). We need to read that verse frequently: ***all things*** (both good and bad, pleasant and difficult, including every person) can contribute to fulfilling God's loving plan for humanity.

It is interesting to note that this specific verse was chosen to be the "mission motto" of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. In short, this affirmation of Saint Paul provides a profound insight into the attitude of *all missionaries*—and of all Christians. In God's design ***everything*** we meet in life (no exceptions) can contribute to the unfolding of God's Kingdom. Because of our deep love of God, we are enabled to see God's hand in everything.

Christian mission is marvelously enhanced by this faith perspective. Often, many initiatives undertaken for evangelization do not meet with immediate success. Difficult challenges and apparent failures can open us up to a deeper relationship with Jesus and a more profound configuration to Christ. Our life—and mission itself—reflects this "paschal paradigm." In our daily lives, we struggle to move through darkness to light, through captivity to freedom, through suffering and brokenness to wholeness, from loneliness to communion, from sin to grace and new life.

We, as faith-filled Christians called to share Christ's mission, struggle to follow the path traced out for us by Christ in his paschal mystery. We reflect on the "divine reversal" that happens at Easter. What appeared as death's victory on Good Friday is reversed by Christ's triumph over the grave. In his paschal mystery Christ takes humanity's pride and sinfulness and changes them into an opportunity for grace. Adam's sin that brought death is reversed by Christ's humble obedience—even unto death. Marvel at the unfathomable love of God! This is "missionary faith"!

Inseparable from God's Love

Today, as the Church completes Pope Francis' Extraordinary Missionary Month 2019, we hear Saint Paul's message to the Romans inviting us to contemplate the enduring, unfathomable love of God: "Nothing [even death or life] can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord." "If God is for us, who can be against us"? Note the profound certainty with which Paul speaks about Christ's enduring love.

Recalling God's rich love poured out on humanity ["God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all"], we are drawn into a deeper reflection on the very origin of the Church and her mission. *Ad Gentes* (2), the Vatican II document on missionary activity, asserts that the Trinitarian design of mission emerges from the "fount-like love" [*fontalis amor*] of our Trinitarian God. God is truly a "fountain of love," an "endless source of charity," flowing out through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We owe our very existence to God's "surpassing and merciful kindness." He has "graciously called us to share with Him His life and His glory," which he "does not cease to pour out still" through "His divine goodness" (AG 2). Here we find a deep theology of mission: all is rooted in God's love, nothing more and nothing less. Mission is, at heart, relishing God's love and then making God's love visible through concrete words and deeds.

Saint Paul also asserts (2 Cor 5:14) that "the love of Christ impels us" [*Caritas Christi urget nos*]. We engage in missionary evangelization, not because of external mandates; our mission motivation flows authentically out of the Trinitarian love we have received in Baptism. Mission is, at heart, an overflow of God's life of love from deep within our souls. Because we have encountered and been transformed by God's love; we become "missionaries of God's love"!

About the Author...

Father James H. Kroeger, a Maryknoll Missioner, born in Wisconsin, USA on December 4, 1945, was ordained a priest on May 17, 1975. He has served mission in Asia (Philippines and Bangladesh) since his 1970 arrival in the Orient, working in parishes and serving mostly in the education-formation apostolate of seminarians, religious, catechists, and lay leaders.

Father Kroeger holds both licentiate and doctorate degrees in Missiology (Mission Theology) from the Gregorian University in Rome. Currently he teaches Christology, Ecclesiology, Missiology, and “Asian Theology” at the Loyola School of Theology (Ateneo de Manila); he is a regular professor at the East Asian Pastoral Institute and at the Mother of Life Catechetical Center. He served as founding-president of the Philippine Association of Catholic Missiologists (PACM); he is an advisor to the FABC Office of Evangelization and the Philippine Bishops’ (CBCP) Commission on Mission. Kroeger also presents short courses and seminars to a wide variety of Catholic, ecumenical, and interfaith groups.

He has produced numerous theological-missiological-catechetical materials. His most recent books include: *Exploring the Priesthood with Pope Francis* (ST PAULS: 2017); *Asia’s Dynamic Local Churches* (Claretian and Jesuit Communications: 2014); *Becoming Missionary Disciples* (PMS – Manila: 2014); *Walking in the Light of Faith* (ST PAULS: 2014); *The Gift of Mission* (Orbis Books: 2013); *A Vatican II Journey: Fifty Milestones* (ST PAULS: 2012); *Exploring the Treasures of Vatican II* (Claretian and Jesuit Communications: 2011); and, *Once Upon a Time in Asia: Stories of Harmony and Peace* [ten translations, various publishers and dates]. He may be contacted at: jhkroeger@gmail.com

THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

The **Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS)**, known in some countries as **Missio**, is a Catholic worldwide network of missionary action and cooperation that is under the canonical jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome (the Pope). These societies include: ► *The Society for the Propagation of the Faith*, ► *The Society of the Holy Childhood Association*, ► *The Society of Saint Peter the Apostle*, ► *The Missionary Union*.

Since 1922, PMS has been the Catholic Church's official support organization for overseas mission. It raises awareness and fosters prayer and cooperation throughout the whole Catholic Church, bringing the message of Christ to the world, especially in countries where Christianity is new, young, or poor. The societies care for and support the younger Churches until they are able to be self-sufficient. PMS exists through the generosity of Catholics.

At present, Archbishop Giovanni Pietro Dal Toso is the President of the Pontifical Mission Societies.



Pontifical Mission Societies - Philippines

824 Don Quijote Street, Sampaloc, 1008 Manila

Tel #: (02) 731-3208 / 781-9518 /

CP #: 0921-349-9720 / Fax #: 740-3030

Website: www.pms-phil.org / Twitter: [pmsphilippines](https://twitter.com/pmsphilippines)

Facebook: Pontifical Mission Societies Philippines

Email: pilipinaspms@yahoo.com / pmsphilippines2011@yahoo.com