

FOURTH SUNDAY OF OCTOBER

DATE: October 22, 2017 (World Mission Sunday: 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time)

THEME: Promoting Mission *ad gentes* in All our Communities

READINGS: Is 45:1, 4-6 / Ps 96:1.3.4-5.7-8.9-10 / 1 Thes 1:1-5, 19-20 / Mt 22:15-21

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There are at least three areas we need to address to help promote Mission *ad gentes* in all our communities: Consciousness, Concern, and Commitment.

Consciousness. We cannot love what we do not know. It is necessary that we first make sure that our communities hear about Mission *ad gentes* and that they hear it right. What is it really all about? How may it be responded to by the general faithful who live the rest of their lives in our communities?

Mission *ad gentes* (to the nations) means clearly, but respectfully, sharing “the story of Jesus” with peoples who have not yet heard about it. Yes, after more than two thousand years, and despite the contemporary advanced communication technologies, there are still peoples and places that have not heard of “the story of Jesus,” or at least have not heard it right. I remember, one time I saw on television a random interview of some young people celebrating Christmas in China. I was sad to hear them say that it is all about “*sheng dan lao ren*” (Santa Claus)! More tragic is the fact that for some peoples in other countries, Jesus Christ and Christianity is simply intimately intertwined with colonialism.

Mission *inter gentes* (among the nations) means clearly but respectfully sharing “the story of Jesus” not in a faraway land but to one’s acquaintances or friends, neighbors or colleagues, who have come from other countries, cultural backgrounds, and religious traditions, and who may not have yet had a meaningful first hearing of “the story of Jesus.” I myself grew up with two altars at home: the Catholic altar of my mother and the Buddhist altar of my father in one and the same master bedroom. With unprecedented faster migration of larger numbers of peoples these past many decades, even the so-called Catholic countries have become multicultural and pluralistic and are host to a multitude of religions that are maybe small but are truly significant minorities.

Mission *ad gentes* remains valid and urgent. Mission *inter gentes* cannot and should not replace it. But, the latter definitely and necessarily complements the former. While there are

many “*gentes*” that are still “*extra*” (outside, far from us), there are also “*gentes*” that are now “*intra*” (inside, among us). One and the same mission may be pursued by going to another country—so-called mission territory—or by simply crossing the street, the aisle, the socio-cultural and religious divides.

Concern. It is said that the longest distance is the distance between the head and the heart. We may know something clearly and know that it is crucial and urgent, yet we may not really be bothered much about it. Thus, it is necessary to ask: Why is mission *ad gentes* and mission *inter gentes* of concern for all members of our communities?

Jesus himself is concerned. He said: “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Mt 9:37-38). But to truly pray means to really be concerned about and involved with it. If King Cyrus, an unbeliever, could be God’s instrument (cf. First Reading: Is 45:1, 4-6), how much more a believer!

It will help a lot in promoting mission in all our communities when it becomes clear that we do mission not only because the non-Christians need to hear “the story of Jesus,” but also because—nay, more importantly because—we Christians need to share “the story of Jesus.” Saints Peter and John expressed it very well: “It is impossible for us not to speak...” (Acts 4:20). Doing mission is our very identity, dignity, and destiny as Christians

Commitment. The needed clear consciousness and personal concern mentioned above may be achieved through mission animation among the different lay organizations, movements, associations and communities in our parishes. May the knowledge in our heads and the passion in our hearts bear fruit in the works of our hands. Promoting mission *ad gentes* and mission *inter gentes* in all our communities means helping mostly rank and file faithful, that is “non-professional” missionary candidates. We can further enlighten their minds and further fan into flame their hearts when we assist them in identifying, appreciating and owning simple but important first steps towards being truly missionary disciples.

Some initial steps or, as the Second Reading puts it, are “work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope” (1 Thes 1:3). Other possible steps in nourishing the missionary commitment may include the following: (1) Promoting the praying of the monthly Universal Intention and Evangelization Intention of the Holy Father; (2) Praying for and supporting vocations for mission *ad gentes*; (3) Promoting the program and activities of the Pontifical Mission Societies; (4) Cooperating with the Ministry for Migrants and Itinerant Peoples in preparing parishioners who are going abroad that they may be missionaries wherever they will be; doing the same for overseas Filipino workers who are in town for vacation; (5) Organizing activities that will involve our parishioners and non-Christian residents in an atmosphere that is welcoming and life-giving.

Conclusion. When we go out of our way to help our communities to grow in the spirit of gratitude for the gift of Faith and other blessings—giving God what belongs to him: glory and honor (cf. Gospel: Mt 22:15-21 and Psalm: Ps 96), we will surely grow as well in the spirit of generosity—learning to go beyond being “self-referential” and starting to reach out to the “peripheries” which alone can bring true and lasting gladness to all.

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