

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

REFLECTION 1:

RESPONSE IN FAITH

'We want you to do us a favour', James and John asked Jesus (Mark 10: 35-45). Asking a favour seems such a reasonable thing and many of us may have done the same. However, asking Jesus to be part of an enterprise that diminishes other people is to miss something fundamental about Jesus. Gracious as ever in the face of the request, Jesus did not claim to do what was not in his power. What he did ask of his followers was something altogether more radical – to put others and their needs first and this calls for a completely different way of living. As a consequence of our baptism, each of us has a calling to share our gift of faith and to work for the propagation of that faith in our own special way and in our own particular place. Mother Teresa said that 'Jesus came into this world to proclaim the good news that God is love; that God loves you, loves me, and that he wants us to love one another as he has loved each one of us'.

Today is Mission Sunday – that special day on the penultimate Sunday of October when we focus our attention on Jesus' Last Will and Testament and ponder its implications for us in today's world. Jesus left this physical planet of ours and ascended to his Father, but before he bid us adieu, he issued a command to his disciples – 'Go, teach all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. The word 'go' in Latin gives rise to the name of this day, *missio* meaning 'I send forth'. So, Mission Sunday is a day when we outreach as it were beyond the borders of our already converted community and invite all those who have not as yet been touched by the Gospel message. Jesus expects us to be teachers; '...teach all nations...' – we must spread the word, the good news ourselves or through others, not only verbally but also through the witness we ourselves give by living the life of Christ. 'See' said the pagans of early Christian times, see these Christians how they love one another'.

Throughout the centuries we have been enlivened and full of admiration of the heroic efforts of individual missionaries, from our own land, even our own parish, such as Sister Rebecca, Edel Quinn, Bishop Shanahan, Frs. Tony Farrell and Páraic McDermott, the Foley Brothers and Paddy Byrne to mention just a few. Then there were others who were powerhouses of prayer behind their convent walls, such as the Little Flower, Co-Patron of the Missions with St. Francis Xavier. And yet we know that in spite of the gargantuan efforts of missionary priests, nuns and lay workers, the harvest in the mission fields still awaits the ingathering. It is estimated that if the non-Christians of the world were to walk four abreast at a steady pace, it would take 36 years for that procession to pass that one spot! Archbishop Martin has asked us to look into the need for evangelization within our own diocese, our own parishes, our

own homes, among the growing number of the unchurched, those who feel no need for God or religion in their daily lives. The task could really begin on our own doorstep and within our own families.

A fresh appeal is made today to be extra generous in our financial contribution towards the missions. It is said that if 'money makes the missionary work possible, then prayer and only prayer can make it succeed'. The needs of the missions could be summed up in what I call the 3 Ps – PRAYER, PERSONNEL and PENCE. 'Pray' pleaded Jesus, 'pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into the harvest field'. The need for vocations (PERSONNEL) and finally PENCE, interpreting that in Euro speak, notes rather than coin. The parish of Blessington gives very generously every year towards this appeal. Could we top that this year? 'The love of Christ urges us' (St. Paul).

REFLECTION 2:

SEEING THE LIGHT

Some years ago I was glad to pay a visit to Newgrange Heritage Centre along the banks of the River Boyne, Co. Meath. We were invited into that extraordinary building constructed by our Celtic ancestors around 3000 BC. Only once a year, on 21st December, does the sun on a clear morning cast a beam of light on to the wall at the end of a long passage. Those people of long ago, in an era before Christianity, must have had some inkling, some pre-vision, of a God who would one day allow the light of his glory to shine on so many in ages to come. Isaiah expresses it in our first reading today, Mission Sunday, 'His soul's anguish over, he shall see the light and be content' (Isaiah 53: 10-11).

This brings us to the word 'mission' and to the original meaning of that word for Christians. Mission means sending. We may think of 'the foreign missions', going back to the European conquests and colonisation of the 16th century and after. We may even think of the old style parish mission. However, 'mission' meant none of these. Mission means sending but it also implies movement. It refers to the movement within God, the dynamic interplay of love between Father, Son and Spirit. And it refers to the movement outside God, the movement of God towards God's creation. Mission is God's movement towards humanity. Again and again, Jesus talks about the one who sent me. At the Last Supper Jesus speaks of sending the Spirit, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (Jn. 20: 21). When we think of mission, we should think of something that God is doing. Mission is God's reaching out so that all might share in God's life. Jesus tells us that the focus is not on himself, but on the good news of the coming of God's kingdom. The word 'kingdom' is Jesus' key word. In modern times it might be referred to as his calling card, logo or brand, his mission statement. Kingdom/Reign is his vision and inspiration. It is the passion that absorbs and drives him. Jesus speaks to us in a poetic way in parables, he speaks to our imagination. It is what God earnestly desires for God's people, God's world and us. He calls Abba (Father) when his heart is filled with God's own feelings. People who were sick, people who were poor, people who were excluded took up most of Jesus' public life. He is filled with God's own compassion for them. Compassion is a strong word in the gospels. It means feeling the pain of another as if it were one's own. When people encounter Jesus, they experience the compassionate face of God - they experience the reign of God.

The whole idea around Mission Sunday is for us Catholics, we Christians, to reflect that we possess a treasure we call the good news of the Gospel. That good news is not to be hoarded, but like seed is to be broadcast around this planet of ours, so that the millions who have not yet heard that good news might be excited and enthused to welcome it heart and soul. Through prayer, financial support and personnel we strive today to pass on the message so that the light of Christ might penetrate through the dark avenues of hope-filled people.