

THE MISSIONS TODAY

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I am supposed to give a welcome address to all of you, decided as you are to do something for the missionary work of the Church. We all agree that the importance of this missionary activity in our Church can never be overemphasized. So, I wish to quote here one of the provisions of the Decree on the Missions, "Ad Gentes", that says: "Since the whole Church is missionary and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the people of God, all members must cooperate in the missionary apostolate." (Ad Gentes, No. 35).

With the preceding thought, I wish to open this welcome address. To my mind, to continue pondering on the relevance of the missionary activity, let us turn to better sources, such as the Documents of Vatican II, the words of the Holy Father, and the New Testament itself.

1. **Vatican II.** In No. 39 of the Decree "Ad Gentes," the Fathers of Vatican Council II say: "The priests represent the person of Christ and are collaborators with the order of Bishops in the threefold sacred task which by its very nature bears on the mission of the Church. They should fully understand that their life has also been consecrated to the service of the missions. By means of their own ministry which deals principally with the Eucharist, as the source of perfecting the Church, they are in communion with Christ the Head and are leading others to this communion. Hence, they cannot help realizing how much is yet wanting to the fulness of that Body and how much therefore must be done if it is to grow from day to day. Consequently, they will organize their pastoral activity in such a way that it will serve to spread the Gospel among non-Christians. In that pastoral activity they will stir up and preserve amid the faithful a zeal for the evangelization of the world:

—by instructing them in catechism classes and in sermons about the Church's task of announcing Christ to all nations;

—by teaching Christian families about the necessity and the honor of fostering missionary vocations among their own sons and daughters;

—by promoting mission fervor among young people who attend Catholic schools and associations so that among them may arise future heralds of the Gospel. Let them train the faithful to pray for the missions and let them not be ashamed to ask alms of them for this purpose, becoming 'like beggars for Christ and for the salvation of souls.'

Without continuing further, here we have the whole basic program of our missionary activity. It is quite traditional, in the sense that the salvation of souls has precedence over the insistent idea of the ultra-modernists regarding development even if both are important as we shall see later; they are not incompatible anyway.

2. Words of the Holy Father. Pope Paul VI. in his sermon for Mission Sunday celebration in 1970, tells us these encouraging words that can serve as guidelines for our missionary work: "Missionary activity would be failing in its 'raison d'être'—reason for being — if it turned aside from its religious axis: the kingdom of God before everything else, the kingdom of God understood in the vertical, theological, religious sense, freeing man from sin and presenting him with the love of God as the supreme commandment and eternal life as his ultimate destiny. That is to say, the *kerygma*, the word of Christ, the Gospel, faith, prayer, the Cross, Christian living." In these words, the Holy Father clearly delineates the program of priorities, ends, intentions and duties in our missionary activities.

3. The New Testament. When Christ said, according to St. Matthew: "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." He wanted us to "preach the good news." (Rom. 10, 15). The Acts of the Apostles tells us in detail the missionary works of Christ and his apostles. St. John calls Jesus the Way that leads us to the Father (John 14, 9).

Spirituality. If missionary work has to be effective and relevant to Christ's teachings, priorities have to be set. The first one at issue is the importance of the spiritual aspect both for those responsible for conveying the message as well as for those to whom the message is conveyed. In other words, the necessity of emphasizing the spiritual training is of utmost urgency. The missionary, as we often say, is the true witness to the Faith and he must lead the people to the Way which is

the hope that never deceives, according to St. Paul (Rom. 5, 5). Because if Faith is lived then the message of salvation can be passed on in a living manner, according to Cardinal Leger in his article "You Shall Be my Witness." The example of a good missionary whose spiritual life is beyond question, lest we forget, is in itself a heavy loaded sermon.

We all agree in Philosophy on the basic principle of "nemo dat quod non habet"—nobody gives what he does not possess. The Mission Sunday magazine gives us this interesting account of a man who had met Pope Pius XII when he said: "I do not practice any religion. I am not a believer, but when one witnesses the prayer and the Mass of this priest, one feels tempted to do as he does." We priests should be able to repeat the words of our Master: "I sanctify myself for them so that they also may be holy." (John 17, 19).

We speak of dynamism and relevance in this age of technological and material development, but let us not be deceived by the material progress of our times, surprising and hair-splitting though they may be. This seems to be the idols we have to contend with and if we give way to their influence, the spiritual values of our mission can be watered down considerably. The missionary Church in her life-long history since its foundation has always been confronted with barriers and difficulties raised by three types of civilization which have transformed mankind: the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Secularization of technology. We seem to feel ineffective at the thought of technological advances that made man the master of space and the conqueror of the moon. Ours is only to proclaim the Faith and for that we only need to have faith in God and sanctifying grace to make our words more convincing and lasting.

Material Means. The technology that has pervaded our times can be tapped as valuable aids to our mission work.

(a) The mass media of social communication which has also been sufficiently discussed at Vatican II are very powerful means to help us proclaim the message of salvation with more success. "This means," the Holy Father says, "that missionary activity must be conceived in broad and modern terms. A new approach is necessary . . . in publicity, recruitment, training; in the methods and organization of the actual works, we know that this renewal will help build up a climate of successful public relations that create an atmosphere of acceptance or at least sympathy if not approval of the message conveyed.

(b) The mass media are a potent vehicle for conveying the two concepts of what the general direction of missionary activity should be; concepts which may be summed up in two words: evangelization and development. And I would venture to bring to your attention the fact that, as I stated in the beginning, many missionaries believe that the latter is more important than the former, and unfortunately many go on to say that development is the sole concern of man here on earth. And yet the Holy Father says: "For us believers, it would be unthinkable that missionary activity should make of earthly reality its only or principal end, losing sight of its essential end, namely, to bring all men to the light of faith, to give them new life in baptism, to incorporate them into the Mystical Body of Christ that is the Church, to teach them to live like Christians, and to hold out the expectation of an existence beyond this earthly one." In other words, the sacraments are still important. Evangelization and development are rather a question of method. We can not abandon prayer and the ministry of the word — this is the reason for the fecundity of our apostolate. But at the same time under the same category we cannot omit the basic duties of human charity. We must not forget the solemn teaching of the Gospel on the law of our needy and suffering neighbor (Matt. 25, 31-46), reiterated by the Apostles (1 John 4, 20): If someone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For he cannot love God whom he has not seen, if he does not love his brother whom he has seen. And what good is it for a man to say, "I have faith," if his actions do not prove it? (St. James 2, 14-18). What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!" (St. James 2, 16) if you don't give them the necessities of life? The same is also confirmed by the Church's missionary tradition.

Specific Goals and Conclusion. Before you will be allowed to sleep or be impatient with this type of welcome address, I would rather cut short my taxing your patience. But, one important factor we cannot also deny is that of becoming beggars for Christ for His mission work. Bishop Sheen has a very lengthy article just on this. The title is "The Vocation of a Beggar." We can compare statistics just to show you how we fare in this necessary task of begging or collecting alms and support for our famished missionaries in the developing countries of Africa, Oceania, and our neighboring Asian countries. Father Pizarro has given us the summary of our collection for

1971, to wit: P865,769.42. It is just like a drop of water in the big ocean. We are some thirty million (30,000,000) Catholics and each Catholic gives barely three centavos (P0.03) as a sacrifice for Christ in the missions. If we compare this with the collections of smaller countries in Europe like Portugal, Belgium perhaps, and maybe Holland with only five million Catholics, how do we stand?

Last but not least, I hope you will allow me to say a few words about the Mission Society of the Philippines. With but a meager material support despite the promises of all the bishops, it has withstood, thank God, the vicissitudes of a new foundation. We are proud to say here that, new and young as it is, we have already sent two priests to Thailand two-and-a-half years ago, ordained one priest about two years ago, and we shall ordain four deacons to the holy priesthood this coming December. This also needs your constant understanding and sympathy, and generous help both spiritual and material, rather financial. We also have to beg from all our brother Filipinos.

This missionary activity finds its reason in the will of God "who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:4-5), "neither is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4:12).

Therefore, all must be converted to Him as He is made known by the Church's preaching. All must be incorporated into Him by baptism, and into the Church which is His body.

(Ad Gentes, no. 7)