

Sunday, October 20, 2024

XXIX Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

World Mission Sunday

Is 53:10-11; Ps 33; Heb 4:14-16; Mk 10:35-45

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for World Mission Sunday is: “Go and invite everyone to the banquet” (Mt 22:9) The banquet is that of the wedding feast of the Son, of the One who comes to marry all humanity and therefore wants to invite everyone to the wedding feast. He says, “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.” What is this baptism for Jesus if not to be immersed in our humanity from birth to His passion and death, when He will give His life for the many? The Bridegroom has been tested in every way and offers us a love of compassion, mercy and deliverance (Psalm of the Day). More than that, he offers us his life in return - what a greater grace, what a greater gift! We are invited to a sublime, wonderful, merciful wedding (2nd reading)!

The Bridegroom speaks of serving us, which is not our wedding custom. He is the servant who was crushed by suffering and who will vindicate the multitude of his brothers and sisters in humanity (First Reading). Thus, on the menu of the banquet, he offers to serve us salvation, nothing less. His sacrifice, offered in the Holy Eucharist, is a healing grace for our wounded humanity. Yes, we expect our new life from him, sings the Psalm, may his love be upon us, our hope is in him. Let us invite everyone to the banquet of the Eucharist, to the wedding feast of the Lamb: this is our universal mission, *ad gentes*, to all peoples. In his message for today, Pope Francis tells us: “While the world sets before us the various “banquets” of consumerism, selfish comfort, the accumulation of wealth and individualism, the Gospel calls everyone to the divine banquet, marked by joy, sharing, justice and fraternity in communion with God and with others. This fullness of life, which is Christ’s gift, is anticipated even now in the banquet of the Eucharist, which the Church celebrates at the Lord’s command in memory of him. The invitation to the eschatological banquet that we bring to everyone in our mission of evangelization is intrinsically linked to the invitation to the Eucharistic table, where the Lord feeds us with his word and with his Body and Blood” (Message for World Mission [Sun]Day 2024).

Let’s look at the life of a baptized woman to see what it means to be given the grace to serve our loved ones, even to the point of drinking the cup of suffering and sacrifice. Pope Francis gives us the example of Josephine Bakhita from Sudan: “Born in Darfur — battered Darfur! — in 1869, she was abducted from her family at the age of seven, and made a slave.[...] She had eight different masters — each one sold her on to the next. The physical and moral suffering she experienced as child left her with no identity. [...] But she herself testified: ‘As a slave, I never despaired, because I felt a mysterious force supporting me.’ [...] what was Saint Bakhita’s secret? We know that a wounded person often wounds in turn: the oppressed easily becomes the oppressor. Instead, the vocation of the oppressed is that of freeing themselves and their oppressors, becoming restorers of humanity. Only in the weakness of the oppressed can the strength of God’s love, which frees both, be revealed. Saint Bakhita expresses this truth very well.

One day her tutor gave her a small crucifix and she, who had never owned anything, treasured it jealously. Looking at it, she experienced inner liberation, because she felt she was understood and loved and therefore capable of understanding and loving: this was the beginning. [...] Indeed, she would go on to say: “God’s love has always accompanied me in a mysterious way... The Lord has loved me very much: you have to love everyone ... you have to have pity!” This is Bakhita’s soul. Truly, to feel pity means both to suffer with the victims of the great inhumanity in the world, and also to pity those who commit errors and injustices, not justifying, but humanizing. This is the caress she teaches us: to humanize. When we enter the logic of fighting, of division among us, of bad feelings, one against the other, we lose our humanity. And very often we think we are in need of humanity, of being more humane. And this is the work that Saint Bakhita teaches us: to humanize, to humanize ourselves and to humanize others.

When Saint Bakhita, became Christian, she was transformed by the following words of Christ, upon which she meditated every day: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34) [...]. We can say that St Bakhita’s life became an existential parable of forgiveness. It is nice to be able to say about someone: “he was capable, she was capable of forgiving, always”. [...] Forgiveness set her free. Forgiveness she first received through God’s merciful love, and then the forgiveness given, made her a free, joyful woman, capable of loving. Bakhita was able to experience service not as slavery, but as an expression of the free gift of self. And this is very important: made a servant against her will — she was sold as a slave — she later freely chose to become a servant, to bear the burdens of others on her shoulders. (Catechesis 22 The passion for evangelization).

Finally, the call to drink the cup and lay down one’s life can invite missionary disciples to lay down their lives for Christ. They are nourished at the banquet of the Eucharist and called to conform their lives to this mystery of nuptial love. Since Jesus gave his life for us, they can give their lives out of love for him and for their loved ones. Here’s how Pope Francis explains it, inspired by the martyrdom of St. Lawrence: “Saint Augustine often underlines this dynamic of gratitude and the gratuitous reciprocation of giving. Here, for example, is what he preached on the feast of Saint Lawrence: “He performed the office of deacon; it was there that he administered the sacred chalice of Christ’s blood; there that he shed his own blood for the name of Christ. The blessed apostle John clearly explained the mystery of the Lord’s supper when he said, ‘Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we too ought to lay down our lives for the brethren’ (1 Jn 3:16). Saint Lawrence understood this, my brethren, and he did it; and he undoubtedly prepared things similar to what he received at that table. He loved Christ in his life, he imitated him in his death” (Sermons 304, 14; pl 38, 1395-1397). In this way, Saint Augustine explained the spiritual dynamism that inspired the martyrs.” (Catechesis 11 The passion for evangelization)

Vatican Council II reminds us that “martyrdom makes the disciple like his master, who willingly accepted death for the salvation of the world and through it he is conformed to him by the shedding of blood. Therefore the Church considers martyrdom the highest gift and supreme proof of love” (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 42). Pope Francis explains: “Imitating Christ and with his grace, martyrs turn the violence of those who reject the proclamation into the supreme proof of love, which goes as far as the forgiveness of their own persecutors. This is interesting: martyrs always forgive their persecutors. Stephen, the first martyr, died as he prayed, “Lord, forgive them,

for they know not what they do”. Martyrs pray for their persecutors. Although martyrdom is asked of only a few, “nevertheless all must be prepared to confess Christ before men. They must be prepared to make this profession of faith even in the midst of persecutions, which will never be lacking to the Church, in following the way of the cross” (ibid., 42). But, were these persecutions something of those times? No, no: today. Today there are persecutions of Christians throughout the world, many, many. There are more martyrs today than in the early times. Martyrs show us that every Christian is called to the witness of life, even when this does not go as far as the shedding of blood, making a gift of themselves to God and to their brethren, in imitation of Jesus.” (Catechesis 11).

On this World Mission Sunday, let us respond to the call of all the baptized to serve and to give our lives. Let us invite everyone to discover the richness of our Christian spirituality and our Eucharistic banquet, where Jesus gives his life for us and gives us the grace to do the same for others. Let us pray for the great universal mission of the baptized and support it concretely through our financial offerings dedicated entirely to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the pontifical work that helps young Churches. Let us stand firm in the affirmation of our faith, which has as its model the Servant and High Priest Jesus, who gives his life anew today in the banquet of his Eucharist. Let’s go and invite everyone to this banquet of true food, the bread of eternal life!

Finally, even if we’re tempted to stay at the banquet, to stay with Jesus, there’s always the call to mission. Go, says Christ. “However, there is no staying without going. In fact, following Christ is not an inward-looking fact: without proclamation, without service, without mission, the relationship with Jesus does not grow. We note that in the Gospel the Lord sends the disciples before having completed their preparation: shortly after having called them, he is already sending them! This means that the experience of mission is part of Christian formation. Let us then recall these two constitutive moments for every disciple: staying with Jesus and going forth, sent by Jesus.” (Catechesis 4).

Why invite, why announce this banquet to everyone? Pope Francis continues: “Why proclaim: The motivation lies in a few words of Jesus, which it is good for us to remember: “Freely you have received, freely give” (v. 8). They are just a few words. But why proclaim? Because I have received freely, and I should give freely. The proclamation does not begin from us, but from the beauty of what we have received for free, without merit: meeting Jesus, knowing him, discovering that we are loved and saved. It is such a great gift that we cannot keep it to ourselves, we feel the need to spread it; but in the same style, right? That is, in gratuitousness. In other words: we have a gift, so we are called to make a gift of ourselves; we have received a gift and our vocation is to make a gift of ourselves to others; there is in us the joy of being children of God, it must be shared with our brothers and sisters who do not yet know it! This is the reason for the proclamation. Going forth and bringing the joy of what we have received. (Catechesis 4 The passion for evangelization)