

PROCLAIM

A Magazine for Missionary Animation

JAN - APR 2026



VOL 49, NOS.1-2

**FROM THE EMPTY TOMB
TO THE ENDS OF
THE EARTH**

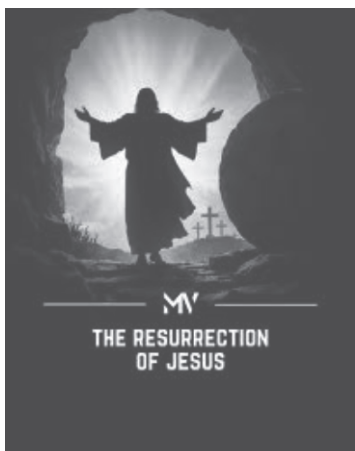
WORLD MISSION DAY 1926 - 2026

Joy • Contentment • Inner Freedom

800 YEARS of the Transitus *of Saint Francis of Assisi*



Mission flows from transformation.
Having encountered Christ, Francis
became a man of joy, peace, and
fraternity.



CONTENTS

♦ The Joy of the Resurrection: One in Christ, United in Mission	02
♦ The Resurrection: The First Mission	03
♦ Proclaiming the goodness of God in Jesus Christ	05
♦ The Mission at the post-resurrection narratives	08
♦ Your voice is the Mission	11
♦ 100 Years of World Mission Day	13
♦ One in Christ: the Missionary identity of the Church	17
♦ Pope urges world leaders to lay down weapons	19
♦ Hope and renewal through Christ's resurrection	20
♦ Faith that moves mountains: A call to peace in a broken world	22
♦ Joy of St Francis: witness through simplicity	24
♦ SAINT OF THE MONTH	
• St Oscar Romero	27
• St Julie Billiart	28
♦ STORY CORNER	
• The villager and the happy man	30
♦ News Roundup	32

PROCLAIM

Editor & Publisher

Rt Rev Dr Ambrose Pitchaimuthu
National Director
Pontifical Mission Organizations

Editorial Board

Dr Thomas J DSouza
Mahesh Lobo

Printers

James Arts Crafts
Sivakasi 626 189
☎ 9789774520

Subscription Rates (six issues/year)

Inclusive of postal charges for
Subscribers in India.

Annual: ₹ 150

3 years: ₹ 400

Annual bulk subscription
(i.e., 20 or more copies): ₹ 125

DONORS: ₹ 5000 (for 15 years)

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this
magazine by writers do not necessarily
reflect the views or policies
of Pontifical Mission Organizations.

For private circulation only.

Content and Pictures used may
have been sourced from the internet
and from the public domain. In case of
an inadvertent copyright issue, kindly
contact the National Director,
Pontifical Mission Organizations
at the contact information published.

PONTIFICAL MISSION ORGANIZATIONS

PB 4216, No. 10, 3rd Cross,
Ulsoor Road, Bengaluru – 560042,
Karnataka, INDIA.
Tel: +91 79758 31942
Email: secretariat@indiapms.com
Website: www.pmoindia.org

The Joy of the Resurrection: One in Christ, United in Mission

From the Empty Tomb to the Ends of the Earth: Resurrection Joy
in the Centenary of World Mission Day and the Jubilee of Saint Francis



There are moments in the life of the Church when memory, mystery, and mission converge with intensity. This year is one such moment. As we celebrate the joy of the Resurrection, we also mark two significant milestones: one hundred years of World Mission Day (1926–2026) and eight hundred years since the Transitus of Saint Francis of Assisi (1226–2026). These are not merely anniversaries to be remembered; they are invitations to rediscover who we are as a Church—one in Christ and united in mission.

At the heart of this convergence lies a simple yet transformative truth: the Resurrection is not only an event to be believed; it is a mission to be lived.

The Resurrection: The First Mission

The Gospel of Easter does not end at the empty tomb. It begins there. The women who encounter the risen Lord are not allowed to remain in that moment of awe. They are sent: "Go and tell." The disciples, once locked in fear, are transformed into witnesses who go forth to the ends of the earth.

Mission, therefore, is not an optional activity of the Church. It is born from the very experience of encountering the Risen Christ. As Pope Francis reminds us, "I am a mission on this earth" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 273). The Resurrection transforms disciples into missionaries. Fear gives way to courage, doubt to proclamation, and isolation to communion.

Joy as the soul of Mission

If the Resurrection is the source of mission, joy is its language. The early Church

did not spread the Gospel through strategies or structures alone, but through the contagious joy of those who had seen the Lord.

This joy is not superficial optimism. It is born from the certainty that death does not have the final word, that sin is overcome, and that Christ is alive. It is this joy that sustains missionaries in difficult terrains, strengthens communities in persecution, and inspires ordinary believers to become witnesses in their daily lives.

In a world often marked by anxiety, fragmentation, and fatigue, the Church is called to be a bearer of this paschal joy—a joy that is credible because it is rooted in hope.

One in Christ: United in Mission

The theme of World Mission Day 2026 invites us to rediscover our identity: one in Christ, united in mission. Unity is not uniformity, but communion grounded in Christ. The Church is missionary not as a collection of individuals, but as a body.

Over the past century, World Mission Day—instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1926—has reminded the faithful that mission is universal. Every local Church is both a recipient and a sender. Every baptized person shares in the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel.

Today, this call takes on renewed urgency. In a globalized yet divided world, the witness of unity becomes itself a proclamation. When the Church lives as one in Christ, she becomes a credible sign of the Gospel she proclaims.

Saint Francis of Assisi: Joyful witness of the Gospel

The commemoration of the 800th anniversary of the Transitus of Saint Francis of Assisi offers us a luminous model of missionary

...Continued on Page 31

Proclaim. Jan - Apr 2026

The Resurrection: The First Mission

*By Fr Dr J Anthony**

The Church's mission begins not with an idea but with an encounter with Jesus Christ, risen and alive. The joy of Jesus' resurrection is so profound, and it offers the assurance that love is eternal and stronger than death. Love surpasses hate and death. The Resurrection triumphs over hate and death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central mystery of the Christian faith and the foundation of the Church's mission. It is not just a past event but a living reality that continues to shape the lives and mission of believers. The profound encounter with the Risen Lord transformed fear into courage and inspired the proclamation of the Gospel. Therefore, the resurrection and mission are inseparably linked: without the Resurrection, there is no mission; without mission, the meaning of the Resurrection remains incomplete.

The Resurrection: Source and foundation of Mission

In the Gospel of John 20: 21, Jesus appears to His disciples and gives them a mandate, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). These Gospel passages, referred to as the Great Commission, establish the universal nature of the Church's mission.

The Resurrection affirms that Jesus is truly Lord and Saviour. As St Paul writes, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain (1 Cor 15:14). Therefore, the mission of the disciples is rooted in the truth of the Resurrection. They do not proclaim an abstract doctrine but testify to a living person whom they have encountered. The Resurrection becomes the heart and motivation of their preaching.



Encounter with the Risen Christ: The beginning of Mission

The personal encounter with the Risen Lord begins with Mary Magdalene, who is acclaimed as the apostle to the apostles. The risen Lord appeared to her, and she became the first witness of His resurrection and was eager to tell the disciples that she had seen the Lord (John 20:18). The Lord commanded her to inform the apostles that He would go before them to Galilee and meet them there.

On the road to Emmaus, the disciples were troubled and confused, discussing the passion and death of Jesus on the Cross. They left Jerusalem and journeyed towards Emmaus. Along the way, they recognised the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread and the Word. After such an encounter, they immediately left the place, returned to Jerusalem, and met the apostles to share the joy of the resurrection.

Their fear, confusion, and indecisiveness were transformed into courage, witness, and resilience. These accounts in the gospels demonstrate that mission flows from the encounter with the risen Lord. The disciples who were timid, fearful, and uncertain were transformed into courageous witnesses. St John Chrysostom highlights this with the following words: "The apostles, who were timid before, became bolder than lions after seeing the Resurrection." The transformation in the lives of the apostles gave them not only conviction that





Jesus was risen from the dead but also the mandate and inner drive to proclaim the Good News.

Mission

is not solely about teaching doctrines and engaging in charitable activities. It is more profound than that. It involves sharing a personal relationship with Jesus. This encounter with Jesus is achievable through prayer, scripture, and the sacraments. Such an encounter leads to transformation, and transformation fuels mission. Without this personal encounter, the mission loses its depth and authenticity. Pope Francis encourages every Christian to be a missionary. He said: “every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120)

Go, proclaim and witness

The encounter with the Risen Lord gave the disciples a new understanding of their mission and role within it. Pope Francis, in his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (the Joy of the Gospel), emphasises that an encounter with Jesus Christ always leads to mission. The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who meet the Risen Jesus. The mission entrusted by the risen Lord had three essential elements: going, proclaiming, and witnessing.

Jesus instructed the disciples plainly: leave behind the closed doors and comfortable surroundings, and step out. They were called to 'go' and reach out to others, especially those unaware of the Good News. Mark 16: 15 states: “Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel.”

The Church should never become self-

referential but serve as a tool for going into the world, understanding people's suffering, pain, poverty, inequalities, and struggles, and making the Gospel relevant to them. Its core identity focuses on outward action—stepping into the world and sharing in its cries and sufferings. The Church should not primarily focus on internal affairs and bureaucracy; instead, it should be a mission-driven community. “The Church which 'goes forth' is a community of missionary disciples” who take the first step towards others (*Evangelii Gaudium* 24). Pope Francis describes the Church's essence as 'going forth,' signalling a shift from passive maintenance to active mission.

The act of going forth is to proclaim the Gospel, announcing the saving mission of Jesus through His life, passion, death, and resurrection. Pope John Paul II once said: “we cannot keep to ourselves the words of eternal life given to us in our encounter with Jesus Christ.” The joy of the gospel drives us to proclaim it to others. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, the disciples overcame their fear and boldly proclaimed to the Jews, Pharisees, chief priests, and elders—despite their previous

reluctance—to whom they had been afraid to speak. They did this as their solemn duty, with joy and enthusiasm (Acts 3: 11-26; 4:1-22).



The mission Jesus gave to his disciples fundamentally includes the

essential element of witness. As Pope Paul VI emphasised in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, there is an inseparable link between witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel. Without a life that actively bears witness, proclamation risks becoming empty and ineffective. True mission is rooted in an authentic lived encounter, where the proclamation of the Gospel flows naturally from a vibrant, witnessing life that has transformative power.

***The writer, a priest of the Diocese of Chingleput, is a professor of Canon Law, St Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore. ♦**

The Missionary Church

Proclaiming the goodness of God in Jesus Christ

By Dr Thomas J Dsouza*

A Church sent forth

The Catholic Church is, by her very nature, a missionary Church. This is not a program she runs, nor a department within her structure. It is her identity — written into her DNA from the moment the Risen Christ breathed the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21)

But what does it mean to be sent? And sent to do what? Sent to proclaim whom? The answer, for the missionary Church, is unambiguous: she is sent to proclaim Jesus Christ. Not a vague divine



benevolence. Not a universal spiritual energy. Not goodness in the abstract — for goodness in the abstract requires no Church, no mission, no sending. Every person of sincere faith, in every tradition, can point toward goodness. What the missionary Church carries is something far more specific, far more startling: the proclamation that in Jesus of Nazareth, the goodness of God became flesh, entered human history, suffered, died, and rose — and that this changes everything.

This is perhaps the most important question the Church must ask herself in every generation — and ask honestly, in light of the world as it actually is, not as we imagine it should be. For the missionary calling is not a timeless formula to be mechanically repeated. It is a living response to a living God, addressed to real people, in real places, with real histories, real wounds, and real longings. The Church that forgets this risks confusing her

own institutional interests with the movement of the Spirit — and the two are not always the same thing.

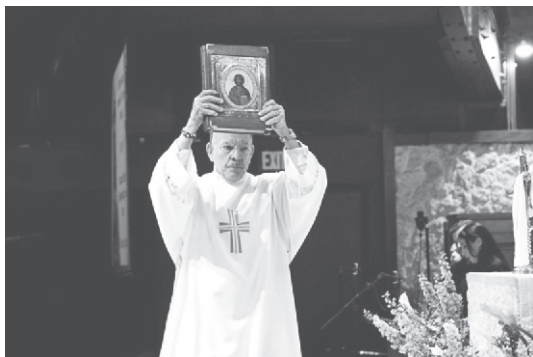
The heart of Mission: proclamation

At the very core of the missionary vocation is one irreducible task: proclamation. Not institution-building. Not cultural imposition. Not the expansion of religious membership. Proclamation — the announcement, in word and in life, of the inexhaustible goodness of God as made known to us explicitly, fully, and definitively in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the specific content of Christian mission. Other faiths proclaim goodness. Other traditions point toward God. But the missionary Church proclaims that goodness has a human face — that it walked among us, spoke to us, healed us, died for us, and rose. That face is Jesus. Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, reminds us that this proclamation is first and foremost the announcement of a Person: Jesus Christ, in whom the love of the Father is made visible, tangible, and accessible to every human being without exception. "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at all times," he writes, "to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them."

Notice the generosity of that language. An openness. An encounter. Not a transaction. Not a recruitment. The missionary does not go forth to win arguments or fill registers. They go forth to bear witness — to say, with their life and with their lips: God is real. God is good. God loves you. I have experienced this, and I cannot keep silent.

That is proclamation. And that is the obligation — the joyful, urgent, inescapable obligation — of every baptized Christian. It is an obligation that rests entirely on the one who





proclaims. Whether the other person listens, accepts, or walks away — that is not within the missionary's jurisdiction. She speaks. She witnesses. She trusts. The rest belongs to God. Every Christian, a Witness

It is still a common assumption, even among Catholics, that mission belongs to a specialized class — the foreign missionaries, the religious orders, the ordained. The ordinary lay faithful, the assumption goes, are the audience, not the actors.

But the Second Vatican Council shattered that assumption definitively. In *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes*, the Council made clear that by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation, every member of the Church shares in Christ's threefold mission as priest, prophet, and king. The prophetic role — bearing witness, proclaiming truth — belongs to all, without exception. You do not need a pulpit. You do not need a religious habit. You need an encounter with Jesus Christ — and the willingness to let that encounter show in the way you live. In the way you treat the poor. In the integrity you bring to your work. In the peace you carry even in suffering. In the love you extend to those the world has written off. A life visibly shaped by the person of Jesus is itself a proclamation — perhaps the most powerful one of all. This is mission. And it happens every single day, in the most ordinary circumstances, long before any formal religious conversation ever begins.

Saint Paul himself understood this distinction with great clarity. Writing to the

Corinthians, he says simply: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." (1 Corinthians 3:6) Paul is almost relieved to draw this line. His task was to plant — to proclaim. What grew from that seed, and when, and how — that was never his department. It was God's.

The goodness we proclaim

What, precisely, are we proclaiming? Not a system. Not a set of doctrines to be defended. Not the superiority of one religious tradition over another. We are proclaiming the goodness of God — but a goodness that has been made known to us through a specific person. This is what distinguishes Christian proclamation from every other proclamation of divine goodness. We do not simply say: God is good. We say: God is good, and we have seen what that goodness looks like — in Jesus of Nazareth, in his words, his table fellowship with sinners, his care for the sick and the outcast, his death on a cross, his resurrection from the dead. Jesus is not merely a messenger of goodness. He is, as the Gospel of John announces from its very first verse, the Word of God made flesh — goodness itself, embodied, historical, personal. This goodness is not the exclusive property of those who have heard the name of Jesus. The Christian tradition itself, at its most theologically generous, has always recognized that God's grace moves where it will, beyond the visible

boundaries of the Church, in ways that exceed our categories and surprise our expectations.



The great theologian Karl Rahner gave us a framework for thinking about this that remains one of the most profound contributions of twentieth-century Catholic theology: the concept of the Anonymous Christian. Rahner's insight was that the grace of Christ — the same grace that the Church proclaims explicitly, the grace

that flows from the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus — is at work universally, in every person of sincere conscience, in every genuine act of love, in every courageous embrace of truth, even where the name of Christ has never been spoken or heard. Crucially, Rahner never removes Jesus from the

center. The anonymous Christian is anonymous precisely because they do not yet know whose grace they are receiving. But we know. The grace is always Christ's grace. The goodness is always the goodness revealed in Him. The missionary does not bring a different God — He/she brings the name, the face, the story, of the One whose grace was already quietly at work.



This is not relativism. It is not a softening of the Gospel's claim. It is, rather, a breathtaking affirmation of the scope of God's love — a love that cannot be contained by institutional boundaries or limited by the accidents of geography and history. As Rahner argued, grace is not a rare commodity rationed out only to the formally initiated. Grace is the very atmosphere in which all human beings live and move and have their being, whether they name it or not. The missionary, in this light, is not bringing God to people who are without Him. They are making explicit what is already, in some form, present and active in them.

Mission in a pluralistic world

This theological vision has profound implications for how the missionary Church understands her task — especially in societies of deep religious plurality, where centuries of rich tradition, spiritual wisdom, and lived holiness precede any Christian presence.

In such contexts, the missionary is not an emissary of religious conquest. They are witnesses. Their task is to make the love of God visible — through service, through solidarity, through dialogue, through the sheer quality of her presence among people. They proclaim not by pressure, but by attraction. Not by demand, but by invitation. Not by telling people what they lack, but by sharing what she has found.

The initiative of faith, the movement of the heart toward God, the desire for deeper encounter — these are the work of the Holy Spirit, not the achievement of any human strategy. The missionary's task is to be faithful, to be present, to

speak the truth in love, and to trust that the God who desires the salvation of all is already at work in every human heart, long before any missionary arrives, and long after she departs.

Baptism, in this vision, is not a target to be met or a number to be reported. It is the sacramental expression of a desire that has already been born in a person's heart — a desire placed there by God, nurtured in silence and in grace, and finally brought to formal expression when the person themselves freely seeks it. That free seeking is everything. The missionary does not manufacture it, cannot manufacture it, and should not try. Their task ends with proclamation. What the other person does with what they have heard — that is between them and God.

Conclusion: Go forth and testify

The Missionary Church, then, is a Church of witnesses — not recruiters, not enforcers, not religious salespeople, but witnesses. People who have tasted the goodness of God and cannot stop speaking of it, not because they must compel others to agree, but because love, by its very nature, wants to share itself.

In every culture, in every language, in every human heart, there is a longing for the good, the true, and the beautiful. The missionary Church does not create that longing. She responds to it. She names what people have already been experiencing in the depth of their own humanity, and she says quietly, humbly, confidently: This goodness you have known — it has a name, a face, a history. His name is Jesus Christ. And he is for you. He is for me. He is for us.

That is the proclamation. That is the mission. And that is enough.

***The writer is a former General Manager, Janavahini (Bangalore); New Editor, Deccan Herald (Bangalore); Assistant Editor, Northern India Patrika (Lucknow); Principal, St Joseph's College (Allahabad); and Professor of Philosophy, St Joseph's Regional Seminary (Allahabad).♦**

The Mission at the post-resurrection narratives

*Fr Dr A John Baptist**

Introduction

There is what is called Post-Resurrection Narratives in the Gospels. They are the narratives of the evangelists of what happened after the burial of Jesus. They narrate how the people close to Jesus, such as apostles, disciples and women including Mary Magdalene came to know that Jesus is risen from the dead. It is communicated to them by angel/s or by the Risen Lord Himself. It is more than the bare details of the events and historical data or proofs: they are the experiences, encounters and faith journeys of the persons involved, and of the Early Church. John the evangelist for example would beautifully narrate how persons like, Mary Magdalene, the beloved disciple, Peter and Thomas have passed from no faith, to partial faith and finally to perfect faith in the Risen Lord (cf. Jn 20-21). There are also a whole lot of emotions involved in these narratives such as mourning and weeping (Mk 16:9-10), fear (cf. Mt 28:4,8; Jn 20:19), doubt (Jn 20:27), great joy (Mt 28:8), belief (Mk 16:17) and disbelief (Mk 16:11, 13, 16).

There are also narratives on how these experiences and the news of the resurrection of Jesus is carried further to other apostles, disciples and to the world. This is called mission or proclamation. There are two ways through which these proclamations happen. First, there are those who went and proclaimed about the resurrection on their own. Second, there are some who were sent on a mission to proclaim. This article is based on the Gospel narratives and tries to explain both.

1. Persons who proclaimed on their own

The Gospel of Mark has two endings. The first one, is known as the first ending or shorter ending,

(Mk 16:1-8), and the other as the later ending or the longer ending (Mk 16:9-20). The later or longer ending narrates about the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus thus, “Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping.” (Mk. 16:9-10). It also speaks of the appearance of the Risen Lord to two men: “After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest.” (Mk 16:12-13). This may refer to the Emmaus incident narrated in the Luke's Gospel.



Luke 24 presents two events of post-resurrection narratives, one involving Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women (cf. Lk. 24:10). They are also mentioned as

“women who had come with him from Galilee” (Lk. 23:55). They encounter two men at the tomb and they are told that Jesus has risen from the dead (Lk 24:5-7). They are asked only to remember what Jesus said when he was in Galilee that he must be handed over to sinners and be crucified and rise again. They too remember it. But the Gospel further says, “and returning from the tomb, they (women) told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.” (Lk 24:9). They were not given any command to tell it to others but they do it on their own. They report their experience. Luke presents them as the eager response of the shepherds in the Infancy Narrative (cf. Lk 2:20). So they come to believe and develop a proper understanding of the event and they proclaim the same.

In the Emmaus event too (Lk 24:13-35), the



disciples recognized the Risen Savior at the breaking of the bread, “That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They say ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ They then describe what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” (Lk 24:33-35). The message about the resurrection and the encounter of the Risen Jesus is such that they can not contain it within themselves but shout and proclaim the good news. We are reminded of what the apostles, Peter and John, said to the leaders in Jerusalem “for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20). Paul would write to the Corinthians “For the love of Christ urges us on” (2 Cor 5:14). Therefore this love for Jesus pushes them to communicate the message of the resurrection to others.

1. Persons who were asked to proclaim

There are people in the post-resurrection narratives, who are asked to communicate this message to others.

In the Gospel of Mathew, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb. There the angel says to them, “Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” (Mt 28:7; cf. Mat 26: 32). As they left the tomb joyfully

and fearfully to execute what was commanded to them, Jesus Himself appeared to them and said, “go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” (Mt 28:10).

The Gospel of Mathew ends with the narration of the gathering of the eleven at Galilee where Jesus appears to them and tells them, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28:19-20). Three things are asked of them, namely, to make disciples, to baptize and to teach. As Daniel Harrington puts it, “The teacher par excellence commissions his disciples to carry on his teaching mission.”

In the shorter ending of Mark's Gospel, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome meet the young man and he says to them “go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you. (Mk 16:7)". The evangelist further narrates, “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” (Mk 16:8). So here the women fail to carry out their task. If this is the original ending of the Gospel, then Mark's Gospel breaks off somewhat awkwardly at Mk 16:8. Did Mark deliberately



break off his narrative? Some explain that it is the literary genius of Mark, leaving the story of Jesus open-ended and demanding a decision from the reader.

The later ending or the second ending of Mark's Gospel recounts Jesus's appearance to them when

he gives them the mission command, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. (Mk 16:15). Mark reports that “And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere” (Mk 16:20).

In the John's Gospel the post-resurrection narratives happen at the tomb (Jn 20:1-18) and in the house (Jn 20: 19-29). At the tomb, the risen

Lord commands Mary Magdalene saying, “But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary, therefore, is to inform the disciples, who are called ‘Jesus’ brethren’. The content of her proclamation is about the forthcoming Ascension of Jesus. The Gospel continues the narrative, “Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.” (Jn. 20:17-18). Here Mary first announces her experience of seeing the Lord. This is a new stage in her journey of faith. At first, thinking that He was a gardener, she called Jesus ‘sir’ (Jn 20:15), then when Jesus calls her by her personal name, she calls him “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher) (Jn 20:16). Now she calls Jesus as the ‘Lord’. Then “Mary informs the disciples of the words that Jesus had spoken to her concerning his return to the Father and the establishment of the oneness between Jesus’ Father and God and the Father and God of the disciples (v. 18c; cf. v. 17c).” Therefore Mary Magdalene stands as a missionary



par excellence in John Gospel. First, she runs to announce to the disciples that the body of Jesus has been taken away. But after experiencing or encountering him, she runs to proclaim to the disciples that she has seen him, and that he is her Lord .

The second part of the narrative in Jn 20 happens in the house (Jn 20:19-29): There Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (Jn 20:21). So the Risen Lord sends his disciples on a mission and the content of their mission was about forgiving and retaining of sins. (cf. Jn. 20:21-23). Francis J. Moloney comments on these

verses, “They (disciples) are not only to be at peace and rejoice, in the midst of their fear, at the physical presence of the risen Lord; they are to be the bearers of the fruits of Jesus’ victory to the world beyond the characters and the time of the story of Jesus (vv. 21-23). ... They are to be to the world what Jesus has been to the world (cf. 13:20; 17:18).”



Summing up the sending and commissioning of Mary Magdalene and the disciples he concludes, “Mary was commissioned by Jesus to announce the message of a new situation initiated by Jesus’ return to the Father. She goes to the disciples, now the brethren of Jesus (vv. 17-18). Despite their fear the disciples are blessed with the peace of Jesus and respond with joy when their crucified and risen Lord appears in their midst. ... They are the ones who will bring the holiness of Jesus to a further generation, thus

enabling the ongoing experience of the peace and joy that only faith in Jesus can bring (cf. 14:27; 16:33).”

Conclusion

This study on the post-resurrection narratives of the Gospels therefore presents, first of all, the encountering of the Risen Jesus by the characters involved in the narrative, secondly, how the message of his resurrection was communicated to the characters. They underwent a transformation from the state of fear to strength, ignorance to one of joy, worship and knowledge of Jesus. Then either they go on their own to proclaim their new experience and belief or they are sent to proclaim the message communicated to them, by angel/s or by the Risen Lord Himself. Finally, through the mission commands the Lord sends them to proclaim His Gospel to the whole world, crossing boundaries and margins. So missionary proclamation is the gift and the task of the risen Lord to the Church and to His believers.

***The writer, a priest of the Diocese of Vellore, is the Director of NBCLC, Bangalore.♦**

Your voice is the Mission

Young people as missionary disciples in everyday life

Sr Dr Metti Amirtham, SC*

It was an ordinary Tuesday afternoon. Ruth, a 21-year-old engineering student from Chennai, stood at a crowded bus stop, earphones in, waiting to go home after college. Around her, life moved quickly—people scrolling through their phones, buses arriving and leaving, conversations fading into the background.

Next to her stood an older woman, quietly crying. Not loudly, but with silent tears slipping down her cheeks. No one seemed to notice—or perhaps they did and chose not to get involved. Ruth noticed. She removed her earphones.

And she simply asked, “Aunty, are you okay?”

That simple question opened a conversation. The woman had just lost her husband and had no one to speak to that afternoon. When the bus finally arrived, she held Ruth's hand and said, “Thank you, child. You reminded me that God still notices me.”

Ruth did not plan this moment. She simply paid attention—and that was enough. That is the mission. That is a proclamation. That is the Gospel lived in real life.

Mission begins where you are

Many young people imagine “mission” as something distant—something carried out by priests, religious, or missionaries in faraway lands. But the truth is far closer than we think. It unfolds in the ordinary spaces of daily life: classrooms, homes, canteens, malls, and even the silent spaces in between.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that “every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus.” Mission, therefore, is not

primarily about going somewhere else; it is about seeing differently. It is recognising that God is already present in the rhythms of everyday life—and choosing to respond with openness and compassion.



Jesus himself did not remain within sacred spaces. He met people at wedding feasts, beside wells, along dusty roads, near rivers, and around dinner tables. He entered ordinary life—and transformed it. In the same way, wherever we are, we are already sent.

Your digital world, your mission field

In today's world, this mission extends into the digital space. The smartphone we carry is more than a device; it is a voice, a presence, and a bridge to others. With a single message or post, we can reach someone who may be silently struggling.

Carlo Acutis recognised this at a young age. He used the internet to share his love for the Eucharist, calling it his “highway to heaven.” He did not wait to become older or more qualified. He used what he had—right where he was.

Yet the digital world is not without its challenges. It is often filled with noise, comparison, and hidden loneliness. Many scroll endlessly, yet feel unseen. In such a space, mission becomes urgent. It calls for authenticity where there is superficiality, kindness where there is harshness, and truth where there is confusion.

Sometimes, mission online is as simple as



this: instead of scrolling past a message of pain, you pause and write, “Are you okay?” The same question Ruth asked at a bus stop can travel across a screen—and still carry the presence of God.

When life itself becomes proclamation

A proclamation is not always spoken. Often, it is lived. It appears in quiet, unnoticed choices: sitting beside someone who feels invisible, listening when others walk away, refusing to engage in gossip, or standing gently but firmly for what is right. These acts may seem small, but they carry a depth that words alone cannot express.

The Church teaches in *Lumen Gentium* that the laity are called to sanctify the world from within. This happens not in extraordinary moments alone, but in daily fidelity. A young doctor serving in a rural village, a teacher patiently guiding struggling students, a student choosing integrity over shortcuts—each becomes a living proclamation of the Gospel. Our lives speak, even when our words are few.

You are the Church—right now

Too often, young people are told that they are “the future of the Church.” While this sounds encouraging, it can also quietly postpone responsibility. The truth is more immediate: young people are the Church now.

Pope Francis expresses this clearly in



Christus Vivit: “Young people, you are not the future; you are God’s now.” The Church needs the energy, creativity, and courage of young people today—not someday.

The lives of the saints remind us that holiness is not limited by age. St Dominic Savio sought holiness as a schoolboy. St Thérèse of



Lisieux revealed the power of small acts done with great love. St Maria Goretti witnessed courage and forgiveness even in her youth. Holiness is not something to be postponed. It is something to be lived—here and now.

The heart of a missionary disciple

A missionary disciple is not someone who has everything figured out, nor someone free from doubt or struggle. It is someone who has encountered Christ and cannot keep that encounter to themselves.

This sharing is not always through words. It flows through prayer, relationships, and service. A missionary disciple prays not out of duty, but out of friendship with God. She reads Scripture not to argue, but to be transformed. She serves without seeking recognition. She walks with others patiently, respecting their journey.

Above all, she is courageous. Not because she has no fear, but because she chooses to act despite it. It takes courage to speak about faith among peers, to choose honesty in a world that rewards shortcuts, and to hold onto hope in a culture that leans toward cynicism. This quiet courage is precisely what the world longs for.

And this interior life does not remain hidden. It overflows—often in small, unnoticed ways—into action.

Start small, start now.

There is no need to wait for the perfect moment to begin. God does not call the already equipped; He equips those He calls. Scripture is filled with young people who felt unready, yet were chosen. Mary said yes in her youth. Jeremiah felt inadequate. Timothy was entrusted early. David was overlooked. Yet in each of them, God worked not through perfection, but through willingness.

The same invitation is given today. It may begin with something small: a kind word, an honest conversation, a moment of listening, a passage of Scripture, or simply noticing someone

...Continued on Page 16

Proclaim. Jan - Apr 2026

100 Years of World Mission Day

A historical reflection on the development of the Church's missionary vision through papal messages and global participation

By Fr Dr Yesu Karunanidhi*



1. Introduction

Mission lies at the heart of the Church's identity. The Second Vatican Council famously affirmed: “The Church on earth is by its nature missionary” (*Ad Gentes*, 2). World Mission Day, celebrated annually on the penultimate Sunday of October, embodies this identity by inviting the entire People of God into a shared responsibility for evangelization.

Marking one hundred years since its institution, this observance provides an opportunity to reflect historically and theologically on how the Church's missionary vision has developed. Through papal messages, ecclesial structures such as the Pontifical Mission Societies, and global participation, World Mission Day has served as both a mirror and a catalyst for missionary renewal.

2. Historical origins: From propagation to universal solidarity

The origins of World Mission Day are closely tied to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, founded in 1822 by Pauline Jaricot in Lyon. This movement emphasized the universal

responsibility of all Catholics to support missions through prayer and financial contributions.

In 1926, responding to a request from this Society, Pope Pius XI instituted World Mission Day as an annual global observance. The first celebration took place in October 1927. The intention was clear: to create a unified moment in which the entire Church would pray for missions and contribute materially to their support. As Pope Pius XI envisioned, this day would foster a sense of “common responsibility with regard to the evangelization of the world.”

From the beginning, World Mission Day was not merely a fundraising initiative but a theological statement: mission is universal, and every baptized person shares in it.

3. Institutional framework: The Pontifical Mission Societies

The implementation and growth of World Mission Day have been closely linked to the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), which were granted pontifical status in 1922. These societies—particularly the Society for the Propagation of the Faith—serve as the Pope's



official instrument for missionary cooperation. Their objectives include:

- Promoting a universal missionary spirit;
- Supporting mission dioceses materially;
- Encouraging prayer and sacrifice among the faithful.

The annual collection taken on World Mission Day supports over 1,100 mission dioceses worldwide, especially in regions where the Church is young or materially poor. Thus, the institutional dimension of World Mission Day reflects a key ecclesiological insight: mission is not an isolated activity but a coordinated, universal effort of the whole Church.

4. Evolution through papal messages

A significant development occurred in 1963 when Pope Paul VI began issuing annual messages for World Mission Day. These messages have become a rich corpus of magisterial teaching, charting the evolution of the Church's missionary theology.

4.1 Pre-Vatican II: Mission as expansion

Before the Second Vatican Council, missionary activity was often understood in terms of geographic expansion and the establishment of ecclesiastical structures. The emphasis was on *ad gentes* mission—bringing the Gospel to non-Christian territories. Pius XI and Pius XII stressed the importance of indigenous clergy and local Churches, anticipating later developments; yet, the model remained largely hierarchical and institutional.

4.2 Vatican II: Mission as identity

The Second Vatican Council marked a

decisive shift. *Ad Gentes* redefined mission as intrinsic to the Church's nature, not merely one of its activities. Evangelization became a participation in the Trinitarian mission: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature" (*Ad Gentes*, 2). This theological reorientation profoundly influenced subsequent World Mission Day messages. Mission was no longer seen as optional or secondary but as constitutive of the Church.

4.3 Paul VI: Evangelization and human development

Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) remains a foundational text. He emphasized that evangelization involves not only proclamation but also the transformation of human life: "The

Church exists in order to evangelize" (EN, 14). His World Mission Day messages highlighted the link between evangelization and human development, stressing justice, peace, and dignity.

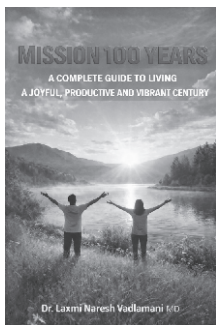
4.4 John Paul II: Universal Mission and personal responsibility

Pope John Paul II deepened the theology of mission in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990). He insisted that mission is

still urgent and universal: "Missionary activity is still the greatest challenge for the Church" (RM, 40). His annual messages repeatedly underscored the baptismal foundation of mission. Every Christian is a missionary, not by delegation but by vocation. He also emphasized the role of witness, noting that faith is strengthened when it is given to others.

4.5 Benedict XVI: Mission and truth

Pope Benedict XVI brought theological depth to missionary reflection, linking mission with the search for truth and the encounter with Christ. In his messages, he emphasized that mission arises from contemplation; the Church proclaims what she has seen and heard. Mission is not mere activism but a participation in divine love.



4.6 Francis: Mission as synodality and peripheries

Pope Francis has reoriented missionary discourse toward the themes of encounter, accompaniment, and synodality. His apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* presents mission as the paradigm of all ecclesial activity: “The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples” (EG, 24). His World Mission Day messages emphasize:

- Mission as witness rather than proselytism;
- The preferential option for the poor;
- The Church as a “field hospital.”

In 2022, he wrote: “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8), highlighting the communal and participatory nature of mission.

5. From clerical Mission to baptismal participation

One of the most significant developments over the century has been the shift from a clerical understanding of mission to a baptismal one. Initially, mission was largely associated with priests and religious sisters/brothers sent to foreign lands. Today, the Church recognizes that every baptized person shares in Christ's mission. World Mission Day embodies this shift by inviting all Catholics—laity, clergy, and religious—to participate through prayer, sacrifice, financial support, and daily witness. This reflects a deeper ecclesiology of communion, where mission is the responsibility of the entire People of God.

6. Global participation and catholicity

World Mission Day is celebrated in every local Church, making it a unique expression of catholicity and universal solidarity. The global



collection symbolizes a profound theological reality: the unity of the Church across cultural,



economic, and geographic boundaries. In a world marked by division, World Mission Day manifests the Church as a communion of giving and receiving. Wealthier Churches support those in need, while younger Churches enrich the

universal Church with vitality and faith.

7. Mission in a changing world

Over the past century, the context of mission has undergone significant transformations: decolonization and the emergence of local Churches; globalization and digital communication; and religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. These changes have reshaped the Church's missionary approach. Mission is no longer understood primarily as “sending” but as encountering, dialoguing, and witnessing. Pope Francis captures this shift when he calls for a Church that “goes forth” to the peripheries—both geographical and existential.

8. Theological themes emerging from a century

A synthesis of papal messages over the past century reveals several key theological themes:

- 8.1 Mission as Participation in the Trinity: Mission originates in the sending of the Son and the Spirit. The Church participates in this divine movement.
- 8.2 Mission as Witness: The emphasis has shifted from proclamation alone to credible witness rooted in life.
- 8.3 Mission as Communion: Mission builds an expresses the unity of the Church.
- 8.4 Mission as Service: Evangelization includes works of charity, justice, and human development.
- 8.5 Mission as Hope: Especially under Pope Francis, mission is presented as a source of hope in a fragmented world.

9. Contemporary significance

In the present context, World Mission Day remains deeply relevant for:

- The Renewal of Missionary Identity: It reminds the Church that mission is not optional but essential.
- The Formation of Missionary Disciples: Through catechesis and liturgy, it fosters a missionary spirituality among the faithful.
- Solidarity with the Global Church: The collection supports mission territories, ensuring the Gospel reaches the most marginalized.
- A Response to Global Challenges: In a world marked by inequality, conflict, and secularization, mission becomes a witness to hope, peace, and human dignity.

10. Conclusion

One hundred years after its institution, World Mission Day stands as a testament to the Church's enduring commitment to evangelization. From its origins in the Propagation of the Faith to its contemporary

expression as a global celebration of missionary discipleship, it reflects the dynamic development of the Church's self-understanding.

Through papal messages, ecclesial structures, and the participation of the faithful, the vision of mission has expanded: from geographic expansion to existential encounter, from clerical activity to baptismal vocation, and from institutional support to synodal communion. As the Church enters a new century, World Mission Day continues to call all believers to rediscover their identity as missionaries—sent forth to proclaim, to serve, and to witness to the Gospel in every corner of the world. In this sense, the centenary is not merely a commemoration of the past but a summons for the future: a renewed commitment to be “witnesses to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

***The writer is a priest of the Archdiocese of Madurai, Tamil Nadu. He is currently serving at the Pontifical Academy of Theology, Vatican City. ♦**

Continued from Page 12: Your voice is the Mission

who feels alone. Nothing offered with love is ever insignificant. God receives it—and multiplies it in ways we may never fully see.

A generation that chooses courage.

The world is not waiting for a perfect generation. It is waiting for a courageous one—a generation willing to choose love over indifference, hope over despair, and authenticity over superficiality.

Pope Francis urges young people not to let themselves be robbed of hope. This call is both simple and profound. It is a call to believe that change is possible—and that each person has a part to play. Like Carlo Acutis, young people are invited to use the tools of their time to lead others toward God. Like the young saints, they are called to live with clarity, purpose, and courage.

The Mission has already begun

The mission is not far away. It is already unfolding—at bus stops, in classrooms, in homes, in friendships, and even through the quiet glow of a

screen in the middle of the night. These are not distractions from the mission. They are the mission.

Every moment holds the possibility of encounter. Every ordinary place can become sacred.

Perhaps, even now, somewhere, someone is waiting—just as that woman once stood at a bus stop—hoping that someone will notice, will pause, will care.

You are called. Not later. Not someday. Now. And your voice, your attentive, compassionate and courageous voice, may be the very place where someone encounters God.

“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go.”—Jer. 1:7

***The writer is a nun of the Cross of Chavanod Congregation, belonging to the Province of Trichy. Currently she serves as the animator of her religious community and teaches Systematic Theology. ♦**

One in Christ: the Missionary identity of the Church

Fr Dr Merlin Rengith Ambrose*

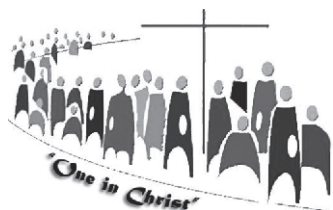
Introduction

As the Catholic Church approaches World Mission Day 2026, we find ourselves at a historic threshold. This year marks the centenary of the first World Mission Sunday. Over the past century, the landscape of global mission has shifted from a “West-to-the-Rest” model. At the heart of this milestone is the fundamental theme: “One in Christ: The Missionary Identity of the Church.” This theme reminds us that the Church does not “have” a mission as one of many activities; rather, the Church is mission. This identity is rooted not in organisational efficiency or social activism, but in unity in Jesus Christ. “To be in Christ is to be sent by Him”

The historical highlights

The theme for World Mission Day 2026 is “One in Christ, united in mission”. This year marks the 100th anniversary of World Mission Sunday, established in 1926 by Pope Pius XI. To be celebrated on October 18, 2026, the centenary theme focuses on unity in faith and the shared mission of evangelisation, echoing the Pontifical Motto of Pope Leo XIV, “*In Illo uno unum*” (“In Him, one”). The message was published on Sunday, January 25, the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle. This centenary celebration will be a moment of gratitude and reflection for missionaries around the world, highlighting the Universal Church's enduring commitment to support the life-giving work of mission.

Unity in Christ - The source of Mission



The theme emphasises that unity with Christ (the “one”) is the source of the common mission of all believers. Pope

Leo XIV highlights the importance of unity in Christ as the foundation of our missionary calling and that our Christian mission aims to bring people into communion with Christ and us. Therefore, it is unity with Christ and unity among the Christians. The theme of World Mission Day 2026, which in its first part recalls the motto chosen by the Holy Father for his Pontificate, “*In Illo uno unum*”, recalls the unity of believers in faith, based on the unity with Christ with the Father.



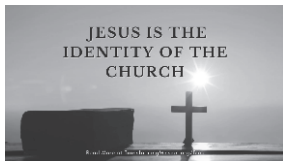
As one body in Christ, we are called to journey together, to listen, to serve, and to share the love that transforms hearts and communities. Whether near or far, each act of faith and generosity strengthens our communion and reveals the face of Christ among us. Pope Leo

XIV also links the theme to ecumenical efforts, encouraging Catholics to deepen engagement with other Christians, “building upon the opportunities arising from the joint celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.”

Unity in Christ and among Christians – Not an end in itself

“The unity of disciples is not an end in itself; it is directed towards mission,” Pope Leo XIV writes. This unity calls us to see one another as sisters and brothers, working together to bring the Good News to life in every corner of the world. Unity is ordered toward the proclamation of the Gospel. It is through the witness of a reconciled, fraternal and united community that the proclamation of the Gospel acquires its full communicative power. Pope recalls the motto of Blessed Paolo Manna, “All the Churches united for

the conversion of the whole world”, and notes the 110th anniversary of the Pontifical Missionary Union, founded in 1916. “No baptised person is exempt from or indifferent to mission,” Pope Leo XIV writes.



Our unity is not a human achievement or a political consensus; it is a gift from the Triune God. When Jesus prayed at the Last Supper, “that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you” (John 17:21), He immediately linked this unity to mission: “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Therefore, the Church discovers its unity in Christ as the foundation of missionary communion. A divided Church obscures the face of Christ; a united Church reveals Him.

The Centenary Call: From maintenance to Mission

As we reflect on 100 years of World Mission Day, we must heed the call of Pope Leo XIV to move from a “pastoral of maintenance” to a “missionary pastorality.” The temptation for many communities is to turn inward, focusing on the preservation of buildings or the comfort of the few who remain. However, the theme “One in Christ” reminds us that Christ is always “on the move.” To stay with Christ is to follow Him to the peripheries, both existential and geographical. The missionary identity of the Church is found in her “exodus” nature. A Church that does not go out eventually

becomes sick with self-referentiality.



The 2026 celebration is an invitation to every baptised

person to rediscover their identity as a “missionary disciple.” Mission is not the specialised task of a few priests or religious sisters; it is the common vocation of all who belong to Christ. Whether through prayer, financial support (as encouraged by the Pontifical Mission Societies), or the direct witness of life in the secular world, we are all agents of this communion.

Witnessing in a wounded world

The world of 2026 is one marked by war and “existential loneliness” despite technological hyper-connectivity. People are searching for belonging, for truth, for peace and for a

love that does not fail. The missionary identity of the Church responds to this hunger by offering “communion.” We do not go to the world only to impose a doctrine, but to propose an encounter, an encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ. Our mission is one of “attraction,” as Pope Benedict XVI often said. When people see a community that is truly “One in Christ”, where the poor and marginalised are honoured, the suffering and oppressed are liberated, and the sinner is forgiven, they are drawn to the source of that unity. Our prayers for the missions must therefore begin with a prayer for our own conversion. We ask the Lord to heal our divisions so that our missionary communion may be a credible sign of the Gospel.

Conclusion

As we get ready for this centenary celebration, our goal at The Pontifical Mission Societies is to help everyone baptised feel the joy of being “one in Christ and united in mission.” The ultimate goal of the Church's mission is the gathering of all things in Christ. The vision of the Book of Revelation, a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, is the final fulfilment of our missionary identity. As we look toward World Mission Day 2026, we renew our commitment to this vision. We thank God for the courage and remarkable mission of the i) Pontifical Society of the Propagation of the Faith, ii) the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood, iii) the Pontifical Society of St. Peter the Apostle, iii) the Pontifical Missionary Union and the missionaries who have gone before us over the last century, and we look forward with hope. Bound together, we move forward as one. We are one in faith, one in hope, and one in the missionary love of Christ.

***The writer, a priest of the Diocese of Kottar, is currently a professor of Canon Law at St Peter's Pontifical Institute in Bangalore and the Executive Secretary of the Commission for Canon Law in the CCBI. ♦**

Pope urges world leaders to lay down weapons

*Brothers and sisters,
Christ is risen! Happy Easter!*

For centuries, the Church has joyfully sung of the event that is the origin and foundation of her faith: “Yes, Christ my hope is arisen / Christ indeed from death is risen / Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning” (*Easter Sequence*).

Easter is the victory of life over death, of light over darkness, of love over hatred. It is a victory that came at a very high price: Christ, the Son of the living God (cf. *Mt* 16:16), had to die — and die on a cross — after suffering an unjust condemnation, being mocked and tortured, and shedding all his blood. As the true immolated Lamb, he took upon himself the sin of the world (cf. *Jn* 1:29; *1 Pet* 1:18–19) and thus freed us all — and with us, all creation — from the dominion of evil.

But *how* was Jesus able to be victorious? What is the strength with which he defeated once and for all the ancient adversary, the prince of this world (cf. *Jn* 12:31)? What is the power with which he rose from the dead, not returning to his former life, but entering into eternal life and thus opening in his own flesh the passage from this world to the Father?

This strength, this power, is God himself for he is Love who creates and generates, Love who is faithful to the end and Love who forgives and redeems.

Christ, our “victorious King,” fought and won his battle through trusting abandonment to the Father's will, to his plan of salvation (cf. *Mt* 26:42). Thus he walked the path of dialogue to the very

end, not in words but in deeds: to find us who were lost, he became flesh; to free us who were slaves, he became a slave;



to give life to us mortals, he allowed himself to be killed on the cross.

The power with which Christ rose is entirely nonviolent. It is like that of a grain of wheat which, having rotted in the earth, grows, breaks through the clods, sprouts, and becomes a golden ear of wheat. It is even more like that of a human heart which, wounded by an offense, rejects the instinct for revenge and, filled with compassion, prays for the one who has committed the offense.

Brothers and sisters, this is the true strength that brings peace to humanity, because it fosters respectful relationships at every level: among individuals, families, social groups, and nations. It does not seek private interests, but the common good; it does not seek to impose its own plan, but to help design and carry out a plan together with others.

Yes, Christ's resurrection is the beginning of a new humanity; it is the entrance into the true promised land, where justice, freedom, and peace reign, where all recognize one another as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father who is Love, Life, and Light.

Brothers and sisters, through his resurrection, the Lord confronts us even more powerfully with the dramatic reality of our freedom. Before the empty tomb, we can be filled with hope and wonder, like the disciples, or with fear like the guards and the Pharisees, forced to resort to lies and subterfuge rather than acknowledge that the one who had been condemned is truly risen (cf. *Mt* 28:11–15)!

In the light of Easter, let us allow ourselves to be amazed by Christ! Let us allow our hearts to be transformed by his immense love for us! Let those who have weapons lay them down! Let those who have the power to unleash wars choose peace! Not a peace imposed by force, but through dialogue! Not with the desire to dominate others, but to encounter them!

...Continued on Page 21

Hope and renewal through Christ's resurrection

This is the full text of Pope Leo XIV's homily given at the Easter mass on April 5, 2026, in St Peter's Square.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today all of creation is resplendent with new light, a song of praise rises from the earth, and our hearts rejoice: Christ is risen from the dead, and with him, we too rise to new life!

This Easter proclamation embraces the mystery of our lives and the destiny of history, reaching us even in the depths of death, where we feel threatened and sometimes overwhelmed. It opens us up to a hope that never fails, to a light that never fades, to a fullness of joy that nothing can take away: death has been conquered forever; death no longer has power over us!

This is a message that is not always easy to accept, a promise that we struggle to embrace, because the power of death constantly threatens us, both from within and without.

From within, this power threatens us when the weight of our sins prevents us from “spreading our wings” and taking flight, or when the disappointments or loneliness we experience drain our hope. It likewise looms over us when our worries or our resentments suffocate the joy of living, when we are sad or tired, or when we feel betrayed or rejected. When we have to come to terms with our weakness, with the sufferings and the daily grind of life, we can feel as if we have ended up in a tunnel with no end in sight.



From without, death is always lurking. We see it present in injustices, in partisan selfishness, in the oppression of the poor, in the lack of attention given to the most vulnerable. We see it in violence, in the wounds of the world, in the cry of pain that rises from every corner because of the abuses that crush the weakest among us, because of the idolatry of profit that plunders the earth's resources, because of the violence of war that kills and destroys.

In this reality, the Passover of the Lord invites us to lift our gaze and open our hearts. It continues to nourish the seed of the promised victory within our spirit and throughout the course of history. It sets us in motion, like Mary Magdalene and the Apostles, so that we may discover that Jesus' tomb is empty, and therefore in every death we experience there is also room for new life to arise. The Lord is alive and remains with us. Through the cracks of resurrection that open up in the darkness, he entrusts our hearts to the hope that sustains us: the power of death is not the final destiny of our lives. We are all directed, once and for all, on the path to fulfilment, because in Christ we also have risen.

With heartfelt words, Pope Francis reminded us of this in his first Apostolic Exhortation, “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” affirming that the resurrection of Christ “is not an event of the past; it

contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit" (n. 276).

Brothers and sisters, Easter gives us this hope, as we remember that in the risen Christ a new creation is possible every day. This is what today's Gospel tells us, as it clearly describes the event of the resurrection as taking place on "the first day of the week" (Jn 20:1). The day of Christ's resurrection thus takes us back to that first day when God created the world, and at the same time

proclaims that a new life, stronger than death, is now dawning for humanity.

Easter is the new creation brought about by the Risen Lord; it is a new beginning; it is life finally made eternal by God's victory over the ancient enemy.

We need this song of hope today. It is ourselves, risen with Christ, who must bring him into the streets of the world. Let us then run like Mary Magdalene, announcing him to everyone, living out the joy of the resurrection, so that wherever the specter of death still lingers, the light of life may shine.

May Christ, our Passover, bless us and give his peace to the whole world!

Continued from Page 19: Pope urges world leaders to lay down weapons



We are growing accustomed to violence, resigning ourselves to it, and becoming indifferent. Indifferent to the deaths of thousands of people. Indifferent to the repercussions of hatred and division that conflicts sow. Indifferent to the economic and social consequences they produce, which we all feel. There is an ever-increasing "globalization of indifference," to borrow an expression dear to Pope Francis, who one year ago from this loggia addressed his final words to the world, reminding us: "What a great thirst for death, for killing, we witness each day in the many conflicts raging in different parts of the world!" (*Urbi et Orbi Message*, 20 April 2025).

The cross of Christ always reminds us of the suffering and pain that surround death and the agony it entails. We are all afraid of death, and out of fear we turn away, preferring not to look. We cannot continue to be indifferent! And we cannot

resign ourselves to evil! Saint Augustine teaches: "If you fear death, love the resurrection!" (*Sermon 124*, 4). Let us too love the resurrection, which reminds us that evil is not the last word, because it has been defeated by the Risen One.

He passed through death to give us life and peace: "I leave you peace; I give you my peace. Not as the world gives it, I give it to you" (*Jn 14:27*). The peace that Jesus gives us is not merely the silence of weapons, but the peace that touches and transforms the heart of each one of us! Let us allow ourselves to be transformed by the peace of Christ! Let us make heard the cry for peace that springs from our hearts! For this reason, I invite everyone to join me in a prayer vigil for peace that we will celebrate here in Saint Peter's Basilica next Saturday, April 11.

On this day of celebration, let us abandon every desire for conflict, domination, and power, and implore the Lord to grant his peace to a world ravaged by wars and marked by a hatred and indifference that make us feel powerless in the face of evil. To the Lord we entrust all hearts that suffer and await the true peace that only he can give. Let us entrust ourselves to him and open our hearts to him! He is the only one who makes all things new (cf. *Rev 21:5*).

Happy Easter!

Faith that moves mountains: A call to peace in a broken world

*The following is the full text of Pope Leo XIV's reflection at the Prayer Vigil for Peace
on April 11, 2026, in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.*

Dear brothers and sisters,

Your prayer is an expression of that faith which, according to the words of Jesus, moves mountains (cf. Mt 17:20). Thank you for accepting this invitation to gather here at the tomb of Saint Peter and in so many other places around the world to pray for peace. War divides; hope unites. Arrogance tramples upon others; love lifts up. Idolatry blinds us; the living God enlightens. My dearest friends, all it takes is a little faith, a mere “crumb” of faith, in order to face this dramatic hour in history together — as humanity and alongside humanity. Prayer is not a refuge in which to hide from our responsibilities, nor an anesthetic to numb the pain provoked by so much injustice.



Rather, it is the most selfless, universal and transformative response to death: we are a people who are already risen! Within each of us, within every human being, the interior Teacher teaches peace,

urges us toward encounter and inspires us to make supplication. Let us rise from the rubble! Nothing can confine us to a predetermined fate, not even in this world where there never seem to be enough graves, for people continue to crucify one another and eliminate life, with no regard to justice and mercy.

In the context of the 2003 Iraq war crisis, Saint John Paul II, a tireless advocate for peace, said with deep emotion: “I belong to that generation that lived through World War II and, thanks be to God, survived it. I have the duty to say to all young people, to those who are younger than I, who have not had this experience: “No more war” as [Saint] Paul VI said during his first visit to the United Nations. We must do everything possible. We know well that peace is not possible at any price. But we all know how great is this responsibility” (Angelus, 16 March 2003). I make his appeal my own this evening, relevant as it is today.

Prayer teaches us how to act. In prayer, our limited human possibilities are joined to the



infinite possibilities of God. Thoughts, words and deeds then break the demonic cycle of evil and are placed at the service of the Kingdom of God. A Kingdom in which there is no sword, no drone, no vengeance, no trivialization of evil, no unjust profit, but only dignity, understanding and forgiveness. It is here that we find a bulwark against that delusion of omnipotence that surrounds us and is becoming increasingly unpredictable and aggressive. The balance within the human family has been severely destabilized. Even the holy Name of God, the God of life, is being dragged into discourses of death. A world of brothers and sisters with one heavenly Father vanishes, as in a nightmare, giving way to a reality populated by enemies. We are met by threats, rather than the invitation to listen and to come together. Brothers and sisters, those who pray are aware of their own limitations; they do not kill or threaten with death. Instead, death enslaves those who have turned their backs on the living God, turning themselves and their own power into a mute, blind and deaf idol (cf. Ps 115:4–8), to which they sacrifice every value, demanding that the whole world bend its knee.

Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power! Enough of war! True strength is shown in serving life. With evangelical simplicity, Saint John XXIII once wrote: “The benefits of peace will be felt everywhere, by individuals, by families, by nations, by the whole human race.” And echoing the incisive words of Pius XII, he added: “Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war” (Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, 116).

Let us, therefore, unite the moral and spiritual strength of the millions and billions of men and women, young and old, who today choose to believe in peace, caring for the wounds and repairing the damage left behind by the madness of war. I receive countless letters from children in areas of conflict. In reading them, one perceives, through the lens of innocence, all the horror and inhumanity of actions that some





adults boast of with pride. Let us listen to the voices of children!

Dear brothers and sisters, there are certainly binding responsibilities that fall to the leaders of nations. To them we cry out: Stop! It is time for peace! Sit at the table of dialogue and mediation, not at the table where rearmament is planned and deadly actions are decided! Yet there is a no less significant responsibility that falls to all of us — men and women from all over the world. We are an immense multitude that rejects war not only in word, but also in deed. Prayer calls us to leave behind whatever violence remains in our hearts and minds. Let us turn to a Kingdom of peace that is built up day by day — in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and civil and religious communities. A Kingdom that counters polemics and resignation through friendship and a culture of encounter. Let us believe once again in love, moderation and good politics. We must form ourselves and get personally involved, each following our own calling. Everyone has a place in the mosaic of peace!

The Rosary, like other ancient forms of prayer, has united us this evening in its steady rhythm built on repetition. Peace gains ground in the same way: word by word, deed by deed, just as a rock is hollowed out drop by drop, or fabric woven stitch by stitch. These are the slow rhythms of life, a sign of God's patience. We must not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the pace of a world that does not know what it is chasing. Rather, we



must return to serving the rhythm of life, the harmony of creation and healing its wounds. As Pope Francis taught us, "There is also a need for

peacemakers, men and women prepared to work boldly and creatively to initiate processes of healing and renewed encounter" (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 225). There is, indeed, "an 'architecture' of peace, to which different institutions of society contribute, each according to its own area of expertise, but there is also an 'art' of peace that involves us" (*ibid.*, 231).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us return home having made a commitment to pray without ceasing and without growing weary, a commitment to a profound conversion of heart.

The Church is a great people at the service of reconciliation and peace. She advances without hesitation, even when rejecting the logic of war may lead to misunderstanding and scorn. She proclaims the Gospel of peace and instills obedience to God rather than any human authority, especially when the inherent dignity of other human beings is threatened by continuous violations of international law. "Throughout the world, it is to be hoped that every community become a 'house of peace,' where one learns how to defuse hostility through dialogue, where justice is practiced and forgiveness is cherished. Now more than ever, we must show that peace is not a utopia" (Message for the LIX World Day of Peace, 1 January 2026).



Brothers and sisters of every language, people and nation: we are one family that weeps, hopes and rises again. "No more war, a journey with no return; no more war, a vicious cycle of grief and violence;" (Saint John Paul II, Prayer for Peace, 2 February 1991).

Dear friends, peace be with you all! It is the peace of the Risen Christ, the fruit of his sacrifice of love on the cross. For this reason, we raise our prayer to him:

Lord Jesus,
you conquered death without weapons or violence:
you shattered its power with the strength of peace.
Grant us your peace,
as you did to the women filled with doubt on Easter morning,
as you did to the disciples who were hiding in fear.
Send forth your Spirit,
the breath that gives life and reconciles,
that turns adversaries and enemies into brothers and sisters.
Inspire in us to trust in Mary, your mother,
who stood at the foot of your cross with a broken heart,
firm in the faith that you would rise again.
May the madness of war cease
and the Earth be cared for and cultivated by those who still
know how to bring forth, protect and love life.
Hear us, Lord of life! ♦

Joy of St Francis: witness through simplicity

Br Johnsekar OFM*

The year 2026 has been declared the Year of St. Francis of Assisi, marking the 800th anniversary of his passing. This is a cause for celebration not only for Franciscans but for all of humanity. Indeed, the appeal of St. Francis extends beyond the human family to the entire universe—to the plants, insects, and animals he so dearly loved. He understood deeply that *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands"* (Psalm 19:1).

What draws the world to St. Francis is his irrepressible joyful nature; he was a man who would burst into song at the mere sight of a tiny insect glorifying its Creator. Though eight centuries have passed since his *Transitus*, his presence feels as immediate as if he were here today. This enduring legacy has been powerfully reawakened by Pope Francis, who chose the Poverello as the guiding force of his papacy.



It is largely true that for the past eight centuries, the world has tried to domesticate Francis—turning him into a quiet patron of birdbaths and gardens—yet his true message remains as unsettling and transformative as ever. In an age defined by the pursuit of power and authority, where any means are adopted to grab and possess it, St. Francis emerges as a profound paradox.

This 800-year milestone urges us to look beyond the soft imagery and confront the



"Crucified Joy" that Francis discovered. It is a joy that does not flee from the mud, the cold, or the rejection of the world, but rather finds its throne there.

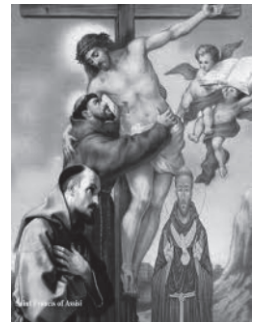
'Joy is being Franciscan', is a very popular saying which defines the essential dimension of the Franciscan way of life! 'Joy' implies here the Perfect Joy. It is therefore important to understand what this Perfect Joy is... We find this Perfect Joy' so ... profoundly visualised in an inspiring conversation between St. Francis and Brother Leo.

'Perfect Joy' according to Francis is

- *not when Friars are great examples of holiness,*
- *not when Friars perform great miracles,*
- *not when friars speak many languages,*
- *not when friars have obtained high degrees in various sciences,*
- *not when friars are able to explain every book in the Scripture,*
- *not when Friars are able to sing like the angels,*
- *not when they can predict the movement of the stars,*
- *not when Friars know everything about the creation,*
- *not when Friars could preach and convert every person to Christ!*

St. Francis says, "hear well and note carefully, brothers and sisters, these are not Perfect Joy."

In our 'human standards' and 'worldly criteria' - what St. Francis says, as not perfect joy, should actually be the Perfect Joy. But St. Francis





goes not by the measures of this world, not by the human ideals but he goes by God's standards and Gospel measures. He echoes St. Paul's sentiment: *"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ"* (Philippians 3:7).

So, if you thought your personal holiness, your power of miracles, your linguistic skills, your education qualifications, scriptural knowledge, talents, prophecy and preaching should be the source of joy – you are wrong!

If you are happy that you have extraordinary talents – this is not Perfect Joy! If you are happy that you have occupied high positions of authority -this is not Perfect Joy! If you are happy that you know the Bible too well and deliver wonderful sermons – this is not Perfect Joy! If you are happy that you are highly qualified - this is not Perfect Joy! This is not being Franciscan.



Aren't these quite unsettling to hear? Aren't these deeply frustrating to hear? Aren't these extremely confronting to hear? Yes. They are! What arises out of human accomplishments in the world is not really joy but can only be imperfect joy or in other words 'transitory pleasure'. The 'pleasure' is sporadic, sometimes harmful and deceptive.

To paraphrase what St. Francis implies here, our achievements in worldly standards, our successes in human measures, our accomplishments on earth, our feats in life can

never be the source of Perfect Joy! If, in any case, they are so, then this is a fundamental misconception, which will gradually but completely erase 'the Franciscan Spirit' in our way of life here on this earth!

St. Francis strikes at the heart of our ego. He warns us in his Admonitions (XX): *"Blessed is that religious who takes no pleasure and joy except in the most holy words and deeds of the Lord."* He reminds us that if our happiness depends on our own extraordinary talents or positions of authority, it is not Franciscan. It is merely the ego masquerading as spirit.

We are now left to wonder as to what then Perfect Joy is! What then could the source of this Perfect Joy be! Let us hear from St. Francis himself. Perfect Joy according to St. Francis is

- *If Francis and Leo arrive at a friary, drenched with heavy rain, trembling with cold, covered in mud,*
- *exhausted from hunger and the friar doorkeeper does not recognize them*
- *and calls them imposters and abuses them and refuses to open the gate*
- *and leaves Francis and Leo outside exposed to rain and snow suffering from cold and hunger*
- *and then if Francis and Leo embrace this injustice, cruelty and contempt with patience*
- *and without complaining believing in faith, love, humility*
- *that God let this happen then this is Perfect Joy.*

St. Francis says, "hear well and note carefully, brothers and sisters, this is Perfect Joy!"

It is good to imagine for ourselves, if we were to find ourselves in the situation that St. Francis describes here, what would have been our reaction? *Anger! Irritation! Impatience! Vengeance!* St. Francis however chooses the path less travelled – patience is his reaction, humility is his reaction, love is his reaction, acceptance is his reaction - Joy is his reaction! This is what Perfect Joy looks like! *In the face of pain and suffering, injustice and*

cruelty, disappointments and frustrations, St. Francis says, we should not be led to anger and vengeance but patience and acceptance.

Just as Jesus our Lord embraced the Cross and St. Francis walked the way of the Cross, if we in our lives endure the pains and sufferings of whatever kind they may be with faith, love and humility instead of reacting in fury, arrogance and stubbornness, we then experience Perfect Joy.

In how St. Francis describes Perfect Joy we identify the following elements – physical suffering can also be source of Perfect Joy provided it is approached rightly. Rejection and Refusal can also be source of Perfect Joy provided they are seen with Gospel standard. Abuses and hurts can also be source of Perfect Joy provided they are accepted with Jesus' measures. Injustice, cruelty and contempt can also be source of Perfect Joy provided they are received with faith, love and humility...

Joy arising out of human ordinary experiences of pain and suffering is perfect joy, eternal joy and immortal joy! *Because this joy does not lead to pride as against the achievements but leads to humility! Because this joy does not lead to arrogance as against the successes but leads to obedience! Because this joy does not lead to impatience with other as against the human feats but leads to understanding! Because this joy does not lead to superiority complex because of positions of authority but leads to acceptance of the other with the genuine love.*

This Perfect Joy brings a freedom, a freedom to live fully in this life not limited by any fear; e.g. fear of what to wear or eat, fear of who will care for us, fear of what others may think, or of what others may do to us. In Perfect Joy, we become a perfect instrument in the hand of God, ready to do his will no matter what the position is and no matter what consequences are. This "Perfect Joy" is the hall mark of our life! In Perfect Joy, we become instruments in the hand of God. Francis knew that this Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It makes us rejoice in sharing Jesus' humiliation and suffering, knowing we will share in His resurrection and glorification.



In defining what is not "Perfect Joy", St. Francis lays emphasis on the virtue of abandonment – abandoning our sense of being successful in worldly terms including the sense of success in personal holiness! In defining what is "Perfect Joy", St. Francis lays emphasis on the virtue of endurance – enduring in our Franciscan identity, in carrying the Cross, overcoming oneself and accepting willingly, out of love for Christ, all suffering, injury, discomfort and contempt.

In the life of St. Francis, he had several moments of perfect joy – *When he lost the battle in Perugia and imprisoned- a moment of Perfect Joy! When he was thrown out of the house by his own Father – a moment of Perfect Joy! When he stood naked before the Bishop of Assisi- a moment of Perfect Joy! When he had no place to go but found himself residing in the caves – a moment of Perfect Joy! When he was robbed even the little, he had by the robbers – a moment of Perfect Joy! When he fasted a lot and lived with a bare minimum food – a moment of perfect joy! When his own brothers failed to listen to him – a moment of Perfect Joy! When the Rule he wrote was opposed by his own brothers – a moment of Perfect Joy! When he suffered from physical ailments – a moment of Perfect Joy! When he received the five wounds Jesus imprinted in his body – a moment of Perfect Joy! When on death bed singing praises and reading the gospel, he embraced sister death – a moment of Perfect Joy! These, in the eyes of world, moments of pain and suffering but for Francis, who had the eyes and heart of the Gospel, these were the moments of Perfect Joy!*

It feels so good and so nice to fixate on those aspects of St. Francis's life that please us while readily ignoring those aspects which disconcerts and disturbs us. This "Perfect Joy" of St. Francis is one such aspect which unsettles and displaces us from our cosy comfort zones, convenient life styles and suitable status quo! This "Perfect Joy" of St. Francis challenges us to embrace the cross of Jesus and carry it joyfully!

***The writer is a Franciscan priest who is presently the Guardian of Nesakkaram Fraternity in Chennai. He is also the Provincial Councillor and a regular retreat preacher. ♦**

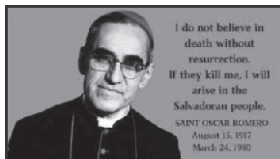
SAINT OF THE MONTH – I

St Oscar Romero

15 August 1917 – 24 March 1980

Feast Day: 24 March

Oscar Romero was born in 1917 in San Miguel, El Salvador. Aged 14, he entered the youth seminary of San Miguel before travelling to Italy to continue his studies. He was ordained a priest in Rome in 1942.



Upon returning to El Salvador after his ordination, Romero was first assigned as a priest in his hometown, where he grew a reputation for his passionate sermons and dedicating his time to visiting prisons and organising catechism classes.

Over time, Romero was appointed as a bishop in the capital city of San Salvador, where he gained popularity among the conservative and elite upper class of El Salvador. They saw Romero as sympathetic to their views given his notable critiques of 'politicised priests' who were encouraging the laity to take an active role in bringing about changes to El Salvador's social and political systems.

In El Salvador, a country ruled by a wealthy oligarchy and populated mostly by the landless poor, simmering with economic instability and political unrest, El Salvador's political landscape grew increasingly fraught. Government forces, paramilitary groups and guerillas became increasingly violent. Masses of the oppressed poor began to organize, speaking out against the misery in which they lived. In this climate, Romero was installed Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. He was considered a "safe" choice. How could a conservative intellectual who talked about holiness bother anyone? Also many believed he would curb the church of the liberation theology movement that had taken root. However, things changed when just one month later, Romero's friend, Fr Rutilio Grande, SJ, and two companions were ambushed and killed on their way to Mass. Fr Grande had been very outspoken against the government on behalf of the poor and many believed this led to his assassination.

After the murder of his friend, Romero refused to attend any government ceremonies or

events, which fuelled tension between the Archbishop and political powers, as well as conservatives within the church.

Soon after, a right-wing paramilitary group ordered all Jesuits to leave the country or to face execution. Although Fr. Grande's murder had enormous impact on Romero, he realized that it was not an isolated incident. Literally tens of thousands of men, women, and children were murdered by military and para-military death squads under the guise of "anti-communism," "law and order," and "maintenance of traditional values." On one day alone—January 22, 1979—paramilitary snipers killed 21 people and wounded 120 more while they were staging a peaceful protest march through downtown San Salvador. In rural areas, many were murdered on a daily basis and their bodies were left to rot on road sides, as warnings to others who might "forget their place." The death squads, commanded by Major Roberto D' Aubuisson, a Salvadoran army officer who founded the right-wing ARENA political party, and self-proclaimed "fuhrer of San Salvador"—routinely murdered, tortured, raped, and looted with absolute impunity. The police and the courts existed primarily to exonerate the guilty and to punish those victims who dared to speak about the mistreatment they had suffered.

Beyond the overt violence, Oscar Romero saw institutionalized social and economic injustice on a pervasive scale. Two percent of the population controlled 57 percent of the nation's usable land, and the 16 richest families owned the same amount of land utilized by 230,000 of the poorer families. The use of the comparative, rather than the superlative, is intentional since the poorest families had no land whatever, and were forced to sleep in ditches and muddy fields. Hungry farm workers were beaten



...Continued on Page 29

St Julie Billiard

12 July 1751 – 08 April 1816

Feast Day: 08 April

In the small village of Cuvilly, north of Paris, France, Marie-Rose Julie Billiard was born on July 12, 1751, the seventh of nine children of Jean-François Billiard and Marie-Louise Antoinette Debraine. Most of her siblings died in infancy or adolescence. Raised by devout Christian parents, her elder sister Madeleine and younger brother Louis-François also married and nurtured good Christian families.

Even as a child, Marie-Rose Julie heard God's call within her, and she shared her beliefs and deep love of God by teaching other children in the village. Although ordinary in many ways, the mark of the cross was a distinctive sign of her inner spiritual greatness. Suffering accompanied her throughout her early life — in the loss of family members, the robbery of her father's shop, and the illness brought on by severe shock following an attempt on her father's life in 1774. Poor medical treatment in 1782 resulted in the paralysis of her legs. For the next two decades, she continued to teach catechism from her bed, offered spiritual counsel, and attracted visitors who had heard of her holiness.

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, revolutionary forces became aware of her allegiance to fugitive priests. With the help of friends, she was smuggled out of Cuvilly hidden in a hay cart. She then spent several years in hiding in Compiègne, moved from house to house despite her growing physical pain. She even lost the power of speech for a time.



Yet this period also proved to be a fruitful one spiritually for Julie. It was during these years that she had



a vision in which she saw Calvary surrounded by women in religious habits and heard a voice saying: *"Behold these spiritual daughters whom I give you in an institute marked by the cross."*

As time passed, Julie Billiard continued her unsettled life and came to know an aristocratic woman, Françoise Blin de Bourdon, who shared her passion for teaching the faith. In 1803, the two women founded the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, a congregation dedicated to providing education and care to the poor and marginalised. The following year, the first Sisters of Notre Dame made their vows — the same year that Julie was healed of her illness and able to walk for the first time in 22 years.

Under her leadership and guidance, the Sisters established schools, orphanages, and hospitals, serving thousands of people in need. Julie's vision for education was revolutionary for her time, emphasising the importance of providing quality instruction to all, regardless of social class or background.

Throughout her life, Julie faced numerous challenges, including poverty, illness, and opposition. Yet she persevered, trusting in God's providence. Her faith inspired countless others, and her legacy continues to do so around the world.

Although Julie Billiard had always been especially attentive to the needs of the poor — and that remained her priority — she also came to recognise that other classes in society needed Christian instruction. From the founding of the Sisters of Notre Dame until her death, Julie was constantly travelling, opening a variety of schools in France and Belgium that served both the poor and the wealthy, as well as vocational groups and teacher-training centres. Eventually, St. Julie Billiard and Françoise moved the motherhouse to

Namur, Belgium.

The seven remaining years of her life were devoted to forming her Sisters in solid piety and the interior spirit, of which she was herself the model. Monsignor De Broglie, Bishop of Ghent, said of her that she saved more souls through her inner life of union with God than through her outward apostolate. She received special supernatural graces and unexpected aid in times of danger and need.

In the space of twelve years (1804–1816), Mother Julie founded fifteen convents, made one hundred and twenty journeys — many of them long and arduous — and maintained a close correspondence with her Sisters. Hundreds of these letters are preserved in the motherhouse. In 1815, Belgium became a battleground during the

Napoleonic Wars, and the Mother General suffered great anxiety as several of her convents lay in the path of the armies; mercifully, they escaped unharmed. In January 1816, she fell gravely ill, and after three months of pain borne in silence and patience, she died with the Magnificat on her lips. Julie Billiart was canonised by Pope Paul VI on June 22, 1969. Her feast day is April 8.

Today, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur are a global congregation serving in over 30 countries. St. Julie Billiart's legacy is a testament to the power of faith, perseverance, and service — a reminder that even in the face of adversity, we can make a difference in the lives of others.

Sources:

www.franciscanmedia.org; www.sndden.org; www.catholic.org; www.stjulies.org.uk ♦

Continued from Page 27: St Oscar Romero

or shot for eating a piece of the very produce they had grown. Mines and factories operated under the theory that it was cheaper to replace a dead or crippled worker than to repair defective equipment. Sixty percent of all babies died at birth, and 75 percent of the survivors suffered severe malnutrition. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children died from diseases that could have been cured by basic medications.

Facing such realities, Archbishop Romero began to ask his now-famous questions: “How can Christians do such things to each other? What can the Church do to help?” He found his answer in the realization that he had been called to Christ a second time, to the Christ who spoke to him in the Beatitudes. He found it also in the principles of the Liberation Theology that he had once condemned; in the voices that had risen at the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate at Medellín, Colombia, and in the simple yet powerful truth of Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez' dictum: “To know God is to do justice.”

In the last sermon Romero preached, only one day before his assassination, he spoke directly to the military: “I want to make a special appeal to soldiers, national guardsmen, and policemen:

each of you is one of us. The peasants you kill are your own brothers and sisters. When you hear a man telling you to kill, remember God's words, 'thou shalt not kill.' No soldier is obliged to obey a law contrary to the law of God. In the name of God, in the name of our tormented people, I beseech you, I implore you; in the name of God I command you to stop the repression.”

This was too much to the political authorities. They couldn't take it. On March 24, 1980 Archbishop Romero spent day at a priests' retreat. At a Mass he celebrated that evening, he preached a homily, saying, “Those who surrender to the service of the poor through love of Christ, will live like the grain of wheat that dies...” After the homily, he approached the altar. A gunman entered the church and fired.

Oscar Romero became that grain of wheat, offering his blood for the “redemption and resurrection” of his people. In 2018, wearing the bloodstained belt that Romero had on at his last Mass, Pope Francis declared this martyred bishop a saint.

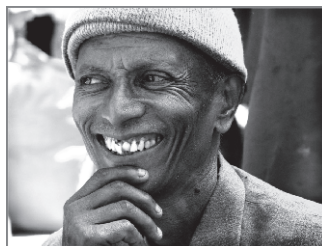
Source:

www.britannica.com; www.vaticannews.va; https://kellogg.nd.edu; www.sciaf.org.uk ♦

The villager and the happy man

STORY

In a small village in the valley, there lived a man who was always happy, kind, and well disposed to everyone he met. He always smiled and had kind, encouraging words to say whenever they were needed. Everyone who met him left feeling better, happier, and uplifted. People knew they could count on him and regarded him as a dear friend.



"Do not dwell on the difficulties, otherwise that is all you will see and experience. Simply quieten your feelings and thoughts, and try to remain in that peace. Try to be calm, and do not let yourself be carried away by your thoughts."

"Is that all?" asked the villager.

One of the villagers was curious to know his secret — how he could always be so kind and helpful, and how it was that he held no grudge against anyone and remained constantly happy.



One day, upon meeting him in the street, the villager asked him: "Most people are selfish and unsatisfied.

They do not smile as often as you do, nor are they as helpful or kind. How do you explain it?"

The man smiled and replied, "When you make peace with yourself, you can be at peace with the rest of the world. If you can recognise the spirit within yourself, you can recognise the spirit in everyone, and then you find it natural to be kind and well disposed to all. If your thoughts are under your control, you become strong and firm.

The personality is like a robot programmed to perform certain tasks. Your habits and thoughts are the tools and programmes that control your personality. Free yourself from that programming, and the inner goodness and happiness that reside within you will be revealed."

"But a great deal of work is necessary," lamented the villager. "Good habits have to be developed. The ability to concentrate and to control one's thoughts has to be strengthened. The work is difficult and endless, and there are many walls to be climbed. It is not an easy task."

"Try to watch your thoughts and observe how they come and go. Rest in the stillness that arises. The moments of peace will be brief at first, but in time they will grow longer. This peace is also strength, power, kindness, and love. In time, you will realise that you are one with a Universal Power, and this will lead you to act from a different dimension of consciousness — not from the selfish, small, and limited ego."

"I will try to remember your words," said the villager. He continued, "There is one more thing I am curious about. You do not seem to be affected by your surroundings. You have a kind word for everyone and you are always helpful. People treat you well and never take advantage of your goodness."

"Being good and kind does not point to weakness. When you are good, you can also be strong. People sense your inner strength and therefore do not impose on you. When you are strong and calm inside, you help people because you can, and because you want to. You act from strength, not from weakness. Goodness is not a sign of weakness, as some people mistakenly believe. It can exist alongside power and strength."

"Thank you very much for your advice and explanations," said the villager, and went away happy and satisfied.

*By Remez Sasson :
www.successconsciousness.com ♦*



discipleship. Francis did not preach a complex theology; he lived the Gospel with radical simplicity.

His life teaches us that mission flows from transformation. Having encountered Christ, Francis became a man of joy, peace, and fraternity. He embraced poverty, not as deprivation, but as freedom. He saw creation not as an object to be used, but as a gift to be cherished. He approached others not as strangers, but as brothers and sisters.

In an age seeking authenticity, the Franciscan way reminds us that the credibility of mission lies not in power, but in witness. Joyful simplicity, humble service, and universal fraternity are not secondary to mission—they are its very form.

Mission in a wounded world

Our world today is marked by conflict, ecological crisis, and deep social inequalities. In such a context, mission cannot be reduced to words alone. It must become a presence of reconciliation, care, and hope.

Inspired by the vision of Saint Francis and the call of the Gospel, the Church is invited to engage in a mission that heals: heals relationships, heals creation, and heals the human heart. Mission becomes a bridge where there are divisions, a light where there is darkness, and a voice where there is silence.

India in the universal Mission

The Church in India has a rich missionary heritage. From the early apostolic traditions to the vibrant missionary movements of today, India continues to offer generous witnesses to the universal Church.

Priests, religious, and lay missionaries from India serve across continents, embodying the universality of the Gospel. Their witness reminds us that mission is not a one-way movement from "centres" to "peripheries," but a dynamic exchange of faith, culture, and hope.

In this centenary year of World Mission

Day, the contribution of the Indian Church stands as a testament to the power of faith lived in diversity and shared in communion.

Young people: The future of Mission

No reflection on mission can ignore the role of young people. They are not merely the future of the Church; they are its present. In a digital and rapidly changing world, young people are called to become missionary disciples in new frontiers.

Their creativity, energy, and openness offer new possibilities for evangelization. Yet they also seek authenticity, meaning, and belonging. The Church's task is not only to send them on mission, but to walk with them, forming them in faith and accompanying them in their journey.

Pilgrims of hope

As we celebrate the Resurrection, commemorate a century of World Mission Day, and remember the witness of Saint Francis, we are invited to see ourselves as pilgrims of hope. Mission is not a task we complete; it is a journey we undertake. It is the ongoing movement from the empty tomb to the ends of the earth, from encounter to proclamation, from joy to service. The Risen Lord goes before us. He meets us on the way. He sends us forth.

Conclusion

This issue of Proclaim seeks to reflect on this rich convergence of themes—Resurrection, mission, unity, and witness. It invites each of us to ask: Have I truly encountered the Risen Lord? Does my life reflect the joy of that encounter? Am I part of the Church's mission? The answer to these questions will shape not only our personal faith, but the future of the Church. For in the end, mission begins not with a program, but with a person—the Risen Christ, who calls us, unites us, and sends us.

+ Ambrose Pitchaimuthu

Bishop of Vellore

Director, PMO - India

PMO moves to new headquarters

In Bengaluru's Sivanchetti Gardens, the Pontifical Mission Organizations (PMO) inaugurated its new headquarters, “Living Water,” at No. 10, 3rd Cross, Ulsoor Road on February 7, 2026. The building — combining offices, residence, and revenue-generating rentals — fulfills a long-held vision to secure sustainable support for the Church's mission across India.

The PMO's presence on this plot dates to January 19, 1962, when it acquired a small house that served as office and residence. Globally established in 1922, the PMO supports the spiritual and material needs of Church missions, raises awareness of ecclesial life, and promotes education in justice, particularly among youth. In India, collections from 165 dioceses are coordinated through this national hub. The Holy Childhood Movement, which has inspired children for mission since 1860, is part of this legacy.

As Bengaluru modernized, the old structure became inadequate. Renewal efforts began in 1999 and advanced under leaders including Msgr. Siluvai Ignaci and Fr. Faustine Lucas Lobo. The foundation stone was blessed on January 29, 2024, by His Eminence Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão, then CCBI President and PMO head, with other Church leaders present. Cardinal Ferrão's inscription committed the project to serve future generations.

On inauguration day, His Excellency Most Rev. Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, presided, while Cardinal Ferrão led the consecratory

blessing. The ceremony drew a large assembly of Church hierarchy: Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops — including CBCI and CCBI leadership — and over 130 archbishops and bishops, alongside commission secretaries and the Metropolitan Archbishop of Bengaluru.

The liturgy featured addresses and prayers from Church leaders: Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara welcomed guests; Bishop Ambrose Pitchaimuthu, PMO National Director, greeted the Nuncio; Fr. Paul D'Souza, PMO Secretary General, honored Cardinal Ferrão; and Archbishop Peter Machado delivered the homily. Bishop Ambrose's vote of thanks recognized key contributors — consultant Stanly Kumar, contractor Abraham, interior designer Pramod — and many benefactors.

The new facility honors a lineage of committed stewards — past directors and clergy whose service preserved the PMO's mission through decades. Its mixed-use design ensures financial self-reliance through rental income, allowing greater support for distant Churches, youth formation in justice, and mission outreach aligned with the Holy Childhood's spirit.

“Living Water” stands as a tangible sign of synodality—where prayer, pastoral care, and prudent stewardship meet—to sustain and expand the PMO's work in India's vast and diverse context. The new headquarters invites clergy, laity, and benefactors to join in advancing the Church's mission for generations to come.

Holy Father's Prayer Intentions

January 2026: For prayer with the word of God

Let us pray that praying with the word of God be nourishment for our lives and a source of hope in our communities, helping us to build a more fraternal and missionary Church.

February 2026: For children with incurable diseases

Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.

March 2026: For disarmament and peace

Let us pray that nations move toward effective disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, and that world leaders choose the path of dialogue and diplomacy instead of violence.

April 2026: For priests in crisis

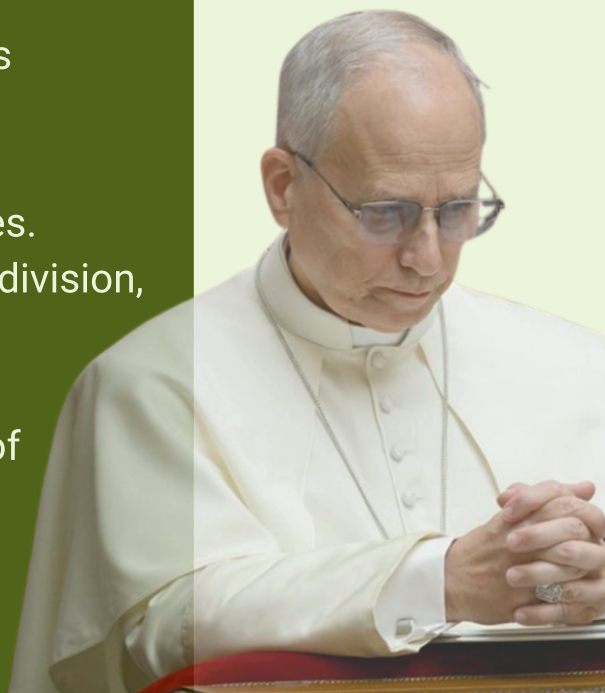
Let us pray for priests going through moments of crisis in their vocation, that they may find the accompaniment they need and that communities may support them with understanding and prayer.

POPE LEO XIV

PRAYER TO SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI FOR PEACE



Saint Francis, our brother,
you who eight hundred years ago
went to meet Sister Death
as a man at peace,
intercede for us before the Lord.
You recognized true peace
in the Crucifix of San Damiano,
teach us to seek in Him
the source of all reconciliation
that breaks down every wall.
You who, unarmed, crossed the lines
of war and misunderstanding,
give us the courage to build bridges
where the world raises up boundaries.
In this time afflicted by conflict and division,
intercede for us so that
we may become peacemakers:
unarmed and disarming witnesses of
the peace that comes from Christ.
Amen





ONE IN CHRIST UNITED IN MISSION

Pope Leo XIV for
the 100th World
Mission Day



“Mission begins not
with a program, but
with a person - the
Risen Christ, who
calls us, unites us,
and sends us.”

Most Rev Dr Ambrose Pitchaimuthu
Bishop of Vellore
National Director, PMO India



#10, 3rd Cross, Ulsoor Road, Bengaluru 560 042, Karnataka, INDIA

+91 9606840089 secretariat@indiapms.com www.pmoindia.org