

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This weekend the universal Church celebrates World Mission Sunday. This could easily just be one more “something” the Church is marking with the long litany of Sundays or weekends or years that we have nowadays – like the ongoing Year for Consecrated Life and the coming Jubilee Year of Mercy, not to mention today is also known as Laity Sunday. And to be honest, for me World Mission Sunday was just one more thing to talk about or put a poster up on, or put money in a second collection for. However, this year, I’ve decided to take a more interested or in-depth look at this event. For your information, World Mission Sunday began in 1926 when Pope Pius XI asked for a special day of prayer, celebration, and offerings for the Missions. His concern at that time was to bring about a sense of responsibility in people for supporting the Missions throughout the world. And in fact, our prayers and generous support on World Mission Sunday directly benefits the global Church today by supporting clinics caring for the sick and dying, orphanages providing a place of safety and shelter, schools offering education from kindergarten through high school. And our help also provides for seminarians preparing for the priesthood, and religious Sisters and Brothers in formation programs. And all of this takes place in 1,150 mission dioceses, mostly in Africa and Asia, where the poorest of the poor receive an education and health care while experiencing the loving heart of our Lord through the service of priests, religious, and lay faithful (*cited from World Mission Sunday website: www.iamamissionary.org*).

Now, I suspect if I asked the question, “Who is a missionary?”, most of us would probably identify those priests or religious sisters or lay people working in far off lands to bring the Gospel and charitable assistance to people who’ve never heard of Jesus before. And this certainly is an important type of missionary. But, as Bishop Gainer wrote in his letter for World Mission Sunday this year, “This year’s celebration is further enriched as we mark the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*) which proclaims, “The pilgrim Church on earth is missionary by its very nature,” reminding us that all of us are called to be on mission.” All of us are called to be on mission – imagine that!

The theme of this year’s World Mission Sunday, as such, is entitled, “The Grammar of Faith”. And in his own message, Pope Francis writes the following: “Being a missionary is not about proselytizing or mere strategy; mission is part of the “grammar” of faith, something essential for those who listen to the voice of the Spirit who whispers “Come” and “Go forth.” Those who follow Christ cannot fail to be missionaries, for they know that Jesus “walks with them, speaks to them, breathes with them. They sense Jesus alive with them in the midst of the missionary enterprise (*Evangeli Gaudium*, 266)... Dear brothers and sisters, a true missionary is passionate for the Gospel. On this point there can be no compromise: those who by God’s grace accept the mission, are called to live the mission. Mission is a passion for Jesus and at the same time a passion for his people.”

So, what I take away from this, is that being a missionary – literally, one who is sent – is meant to be as fundamental to our Catholic faith as grammar is to learning English. What makes it so fundamental is that it arises from the love that the Church has for her Savior and for all God’s children, who should get to know the love of this Savior. And no people at no time in history is exempted from this right. Thus, the Church’s missionary endeavor is ongoing and involves each of us.

Some of you know that recently, I was blessed to go down to EWTN on a bus trip as a spiritual director with a group of parishioners. In case you don’t know, EWTN is the Eternal Word Television Network, the largest religious programming network in the world, which costs \$4 million to operate each month, which provides programming in numerous languages, and which is watched in some 250 million homes around the world each day. Talk about missionary efforts!

Well, do you know how EWTN began? (Those of you who went can’t answer!) It began in 1962 when a Poor Clare sister, named Mother Angelica, heard God’s call in her heart to leave Canton, Ohio and found a new monastery in Irondale, Alabama. As you can imagine, such a calling is life-changing, and certainly not cheap, and funds for the nuns were desperately needed. And so they started the “Lil ‘Ole Peanut Co.” and made fishing lures to raise money for their projects. But, it was with only \$200 in hand, and from the Our Lady of the Angels Monastery garage that EWTN was launched on August 15, 1981, only to become the great media apostolate that it is today.

The point of the story is that Mother Angelica was a missionary here in America. She had a passion for Jesus, and she had a passion for sharing Him and His Church with others. And it was taking the spark of that invitation from God to do something new that led her to found the blazing bonfire that is EWTN. What if she would have said no? What if Mary, the Mother of God, would have said no to God's plan? What happens if any of us says no, or doesn't even open ourselves to God's will? We are all called to be missionaries. And whether it's in big or international ways or in little, domestic ways isn't up to us – that's up to God. We just have to be open to the call. God bless you.