

OCTOBER 20, 2019

Sunday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Year C

World Mission Day 2019

Ex 17:8-13

Ps 121:1-8

2 Tm 3:14-4:2

Lk 18:1-8

*Message of His Holiness Pope Francis
for World Mission Day 2019*

BAPTIZED AND SENT:

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON MISSION IN THE WORLD

By falling on the Sunday dedicated by the Church to its evangelizing mission in the world, today's first reading, which narrates the battle between Amalek and Israel, might cause some embarrassment to those who want to talk about the importance of this Christian call. The text can be misinterpreted as a spur to holy war or a fanatic proselytism. On the contrary, mission aims at the proclamation of the Passover of Jesus and of the divine reconciliation he offers. Its purpose is to witness to Jesus Christ, to communicate his Gospel, to build up his Church, in a climate of sincere fraternity and authentic and respectful religious freedom in the common search for greater communion and justice in the world. Not to mention the fact that the Gospel also teaches us, through to the example of Jesus, to love enemies and pray for persecutors. The baptized and sent Christian does not have a product to sell to or impose upon the world. As the Church of Christ in mission, the believer receives divine life to

proclaim, witness, and communicate for his own salvation and that of everyone else.

The biblical text of Exodus 17:8-13 offers the memory of an episode in which Israel, a fugitive people in search of a land to settle in, is threatened with annihilation and engaged in a struggle for its own survival. Certain to achieve victory, as well as liberation from Egypt, thanks only to God's help, the people of Israel keep the memory of this battle, and of the others that will follow, as a testimony of its faith in the true God, the Lord of heaven and earth, the God of hosts, who comforts the weak and frees the oppressed. This is the praise that the psalmist, with trust and gratitude, raises to the Lord, the guardian of Israel:

I raise my eyes toward the mountains.
 From whence shall come my help?
 My help comes from the LORD,
 the maker of heaven and earth. (Ps 121:1-2)

The elements of aggression, hatred, and revenge that historically accompanied this Old Testament mode of interpreting the faith had to be gradually purified over the centuries by holy people, such as the prophets and the sages, and ultimately, by the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace and Justice, who was foreseen by their prophecy and awaited for centuries. What was meant by the force and violence of the extermination of idols and pagans, in Jesus becomes a burning passion and fiery love for the salvation of all.

The Cross of Jesus is the place where evil is defeated by the love of the One who dies for us, who dies in our place, making the experience of our death his own. He also dies for the salvation of his persecutors and enemies. All vengefulness is annihilated by the God of Jesus Christ in whom hatred and death provoke, in the Trinitarian communion, ever greater love and ever more efficacious mercy. God has destroyed our sin, injustice, and death by making them his own, and has annihilated them through his boundless

love. “Christ’s death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. In the Paschal Mystery, our deliverance from evil and death has taken place” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 9). The New Testament and all the Holy Scriptures introduce us to and educate us in this saving action of God in the world.

In this perspective, the second reading shows us how Paul teaches Timothy the importance of the Scriptures: “From infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tm 3:15). Timothy, in fact, has studied them since childhood, like every Jewish boy; since then, Christian children, too, learn them, with the help of their parents and the community. Timothy is a young man who, together with his family, embraced the faith during the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul and who later becomes a member of his missionary group. The son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, Timothy received from his childhood a deep and firm religious education from his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice, who introduced him to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. This is necessary because the Scriptures are inspired by God and, if they are explained well (rather than manipulated and distorted, as the Second Letter of Peter reminds us; see 2 Pt 1:19-21), they encourage us to practice good works and build us up in righteousness and holiness. Genuine missionary zeal is not violent proselytism; it is the desire for a fraternal heart full of Christ and driven by the Holy Spirit to cooperate for the salvation and happiness of all people, of all ethnic groups, sharing ethical and cultural values, hopes and joys, in search of a full life and true peace, which is Jesus Christ who died and rose again. For this reason, Paul exhorts Timothy vigorously so that, while waiting for the Parousia of the Lord, he dedicates himself body and soul to the teaching of the Word.

The Apostle often mentions in his letters the service rendered by Timothy to the work of evangelization. Always available and attentive, he accompa-

nies the ecclesial communities with generosity and affection. Paul reminds the Philippians of his testimony and fidelity: “I hope, in the Lord Jesus, to send Timothy to you soon.... You know his worth, how as a child with a father he served along with me in the cause of the gospel” (Phil 2:19,22). Writing to the Thessalonians he highlights his courage and missionary charisma: “We ... sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one be disturbed in these afflictions” (1 Th 3:2-3). Timothy, then, travels with readiness and diligence to put himself at the service of the newly founded churches, whenever they need clarification of their doubts or support in their struggles. The word of God is his strength and his companion.

The Alleluia verse offers us, with splendid lyricism and refined language, a sublime hymn dedicated to the word of God, which it describes as “living and effective,” because it penetrates our conscience just like a double-edged sword. The Lord, as the psalmist says, probes our hearts and minds and sees all our paths. Also in the Letter to the Ephesians we find the metaphor of the sword; attributed to the Spirit, it represents the intense and penetrating power of the word of God (see Eph 6:17). And so a cruel instrument of war bends to symbolize another struggle, that spiritual conflict that produces repentance and conversion, joy and new life, goodness and faithfulness. These are the fruits of the divine, spiritual, living, and personal Word, the fruits of Wisdom that sees everything and knows everything, that pervades everything and judges everything, that is present in the deepest part of the conscience and shines in such a way that no one can hide from its light. The Gospel of Jesus, Divine Wisdom, is spirit and life. It makes the dead rise again, restores dignity to the excluded, gives joy to the afflicted, renews every creature, transforms, sanctifies, and offers eternal life. When the Word illuminates, however, at the same time it judges, because it strips the soul of its masks, revealing the truth that is exposed in the conscience. In the heart where the Spirit of the Risen One was poured, the judgment of the penetrating Word is always for forgiveness and purification.

The parable of Jesus in the Gospel this Sunday portrays a woman who has been denied the right to express herself by a corrupt judge, an experience that many people all over the world suffer today. The parable is set “in a certain town” (Lk 18:2), a city without a name since what is told seems to take place everywhere – for the judge’s enemies, the law must be applied; for his friends, it need only be interpreted.

The widow in the parable is not a friend of the judge, so she does not receive an audience. This widow lost her husband’s support, and in the first-century Palestinian world, she could not inherit his property. Widows were economically vulnerable and could be exploited, as Jesus reminds us sharply when he accuses the religious leaders of devouring the houses of widows (see Lk 20:46-47). Not being able to afford a lawyer, the widow presents herself to offer her case against her opponent. Jesus exposes the inner reasoning of the corrupt judge, who is uninterested in her complaints and indifferent to who she is. He doesn’t fear God and doesn’t care for the good of people. The widow is determined not to remain invisible or unheard, even before a dishonest judge, until the case is definitively resolved in her favor.

Jesus uses the parable to teach about the necessity of urgent and continual prayer. If prayer is the heart of the Church’s mission, it is because within this personal and ecclesial relationship with God (liturgy), persons and communities are renewed through the salvation offered to us by Jesus. His question about faith when he will return seems to indicate a preoccupation by Jesus about the efficacy of the mission that will be carried out and the authenticity of the witness of the missionary disciples. These disciples, incorporated into the Paschal Mystery through baptism, are sent into the world as the Church of Christ, the community of the redeemed, to be the seed and beginning of the kingdom so that all history and all humanity may be transfigured and redeemed. The efficacy of continuous prayer, of constant supplication, of the insistent search for love for truth and justice, forges the disciple’s capacity for mission. Only those who insistently pray

put Christ at the center of their lives and of the mission entrusted to them, growing in faith. Only those who insistently pray become attentive and able to listen, to realize and discover the needs and requests for material and spiritual redemption so present in the heart of today's humanity.



October
2019