

BECOMING JOYFUL EVANGELIZERS



**CELEBRATING 500 YEARS
OF FAITH**

**DAILY MEDITATIONS FOR
THE MISSIONARY MONTH OF
OCTOBER 2021**

WORLD MISSION DAY
October 24, 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Director’s Message	3
Esteban U. Lo, LRMS	
World Mission Day 2021 Message	5
Socrates C. Mesion, MSP	
World Mission Day 2021 Papal Message	7
MEDITATIONS FOR MISSION	13
Daily Reflections for October 2021	16
James H. Kroeger, MM	
Receiving and Sharing Gifts: Five Centuries of Philippine Christianity	47
James H. Kroeger, MM	
REPORTS	55
<i>A. Collections</i>	56
<i>B. Projects</i>	59

PRAYER FOR MISSION

*Lord, Jesus Christ,
help us to journey with you on the pathway of the Gospel
and to live out our vocation to mission
in the Church and in today's world.*

*Strengthen us in our discipleship
so that we can be faithful heralds of Your Good News
to our local Church and to the ends of the earth.*

*Empower us to serve you as missionaries to the poor,
the afflicted, the abandoned, the oppressed,
the youth and the children.*

*May we draw those who doubt the Living Christ
into the fullness of life through the witness of our faith.*

*Enkindle in our hearts a burning love for Jesus Christ
so that we could be authentic agents of missionary renewal
for our communities.*

*May the Holy Spirit lead us into a new season
of mission for the Church.*

*This prayer we make to you
who are living Lord now and forever.
Amen!*



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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Together with Bishop Socrates C. Mesiona and Father James H. Kroeger, I am happy to share with you this booklet as we celebrate the World Mission Month of October 2021, in the Year of *Missio ad Gentes* and on the 500th anniversary of Christianity (500-YOC) in our country.

The pandemic brought about by COVID-19 continues. Our celebration of 500-YOC continues as well, albeit on a much scaled down manner and mostly online. Our celebration continues not only because we love to celebrate *fiestas*. Rather, it is because we need to go through this pandemic and the rest of our lives, with a “blessed consciousness,” not a “cursed consciousness.” As this pandemic continues to do its worst, let us continue to do our best in the spirit of our 500-YOC theme, “Gifted to Give” (cf. Mt 10:8).

This booklet is filled with printed words. On the one hand, it is true that words are cheap. As we say in Filipino, “*laway lang ang puhunan.*” Yet, on the other hand, words are powerful. Thus, we also say, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” One song captures these two contrary aspects of the reality of words by saying, “They’re only words and words are all I have to take your heart away.” If this is true as far as human words are concerned, how much more the Word of God! The Lord Jesus himself tells us, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63). We thank Father Kroeger for sharing with us in this booklet some fruits of his study, reflection and prayer on the Word of God, the teachings of the Church, and his experiences as a missionary in Asia for several decades.

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for our celebration of the World Mission Month of October 2021 is taken from Acts 4:20: “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” These past seventeen months of the pandemic we have seen and heard a lot of tragic stories and frightening situations. But, thank God, we have also seen and heard countless stories of faith, hope and

love. Indeed, Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us, at all times. Truly, in the midst of darkness, his word “is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path” (Ps 119:105). As we hunger for food, security, health, and many other needs, we realize more and more that “man does not live on bread alone, but on the word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). Facing stress, fatigue, fear, anxiety, psycho-emotional sickness and spiritual struggles, let us wield “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph 6:17).

May this booklet of reflections on the gift, call and challenge of mission help us to become more and more mature missionary disciples. With our “blessed consciousness” may we all the more witness to the abiding and life-giving love of God, not just despite but in the midst of this pandemic. Let us continue to pray for one another and for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Lo', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Msgr. Esteban U. Lo, LRMS
National Director
Pontifical Mission Societies-Philippines

WORLD MISSION DAY 2021 MESSAGE

The month of October is always considered as “mission month,” highlighted with the celebration of World Mission Day. The month-long period designated for mission promotion and animation is a wonderful opportunity for us to renew and deepen our commitment to give witness to our Christian faith. For, after all, faith is something that we cannot keep to ourselves but is to be proclaimed and shared with others.

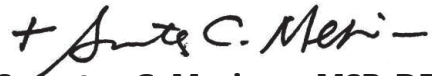
The theme for this year’s World Mission Day celebration is: “*We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard.*” It is taken from Acts 4:20 in which the unschooled and ordinary men, Peter and John, eloquently and bravely spoke about the risen Jesus before the Sanhedrin. They were able to speak with eloquence and conviction because of their personal experience with Jesus. They were living witnesses of what Jesus had said and done.

This year’s World Mission Day theme is a good point for reflection as we also celebrate the 500 Years of Christianity in the Philippines. This milestone in the history of our Christian faith reminds us also of our encounter with the Lord Jesus in the many and different ways that He has revealed himself to us for the past 500 years. We have been blessed with His divine presence as we encountered Him in faith in the different facets and aspects of our lives.

We can therefore say that we are also following the same path with Jesus’ disciples when we acknowledge that we are “gifted to give.” We are gifted to give what we have heard and seen about Jesus. As such, like Peter and John, we are also challenged to be bold to proclaim what we have experienced about the Lord Jesus. As Pope Francis reminds us: “Once we experience the power of God’s love, and recognize his fatherly presence in our personal and community life, we cannot help but proclaim and share *what we have seen and heard.*”

During this Jubilee Year of our Christian Faith may we witness more people who will be moved and inspired to proclaim and share what *they have seen and heard* about Jesus our Lord with others!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Socrates C. Mesiona -". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

+ Socrates C. Mesiona, MSP, DD

Apostolic Vicar of Puerto Princesa

Chairman, Episcopal Commission on Mission – CBCP

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR WORLD MISSION DAY 2021

***“We cannot but speak about what we
have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20)***

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Once we experience the power of God’s love and recognize his fatherly presence in our personal and community life, we cannot help but proclaim and share what we have seen and heard. Jesus’ relationship with his disciples and his humanity, as revealed to us in the mystery of his Incarnation, the Gospel and Paschal Mystery, shows us the extent to which God loves our humanity and makes his own our joys and sufferings, our hopes and our concerns (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 22). Everything about Christ reminds us that he knows well our world and its need for redemption, and calls us to become actively engaged in this mission: “Go therefore to the highways and byways, and invite everyone you find” (Mt 22:9). No one is excluded, no one need feel distant or removed from this compassionate love.

The Experience of the Apostles. The history of evangelization began with the Lord’s own passionate desire to call and enter into friendly dialogue with everyone, just as they are (cf. Jn 15:12-17). The Apostles are the first to tell us this; they remembered even the day and the hour when they first met him: “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon” (Jn 1:39). Experiencing the Lord’s friendship, watching him cure the sick, dine with sinners, feed the hungry, draw near to the outcast, touch the unclean, identify with the needy, propose the Beatitudes and teach in a new and authoritative way, left an indelible mark on them, awakening amazement, expansive joy and a profound sense of gratitude. The prophet Jeremiah describes this experience as one of a consuming awareness of the Lord’s active presence in our heart, impelling us to mission, regardless of the sacrifices and misunderstandings it may entail (cf. 20:7-9). Love is always on the move and inspires us

to share a wonderful and hope-filled message: “We have found the Messiah” (Jn 1:41).

With Jesus, we too have seen, heard and experienced that things can be different. Even now, he has inaugurated future times, reminding us of an often forgotten dimension of our humanity, namely, that “we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love” (*Fratelli Tutti* 68). A future that awakens a faith capable of inspiring new initiatives and shaping communities of men and women who, by learning to accept their own frailty and that of others, promote fraternity and social friendship (cf. *Fratelli Tutti* 67). The ecclesial community reveals its splendor whenever it recalls with gratitude that the Lord loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19). “The loving predilection of the Lord surprises us, and surprise by its very nature cannot be owned or imposed by us.... Only in this way can the miracle of gratuitousness, the gratuitous gift of self, blossom. Nor can missionary fervor ever be obtained as a result of reasoning or calculation. To be ‘in a state of mission’ is a reflection of gratitude” (Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies, May 21, 2020).

Even so, things were not always easy. The first Christians began the life of faith amid hostility and hardship. Experiences of marginalization and imprisonment combined with internal and external struggles that seemed to contradict and even negate what they had seen and heard. Yet, rather than a difficulty or an obstacle leading them to step back or close in on themselves, those experiences impelled them to turn problems, conflicts and difficulties into opportunities for mission. Limitations and obstacles became a privileged occasion for anointing everything and everyone with the Spirit of the Lord. Nothing and no one was to be excluded from the message of liberation.

We have a vivid testimony to all this in the Acts of the Apostles, a book which missionary disciples always have within easy reach. There we read how the fragrance of the Gospel spread as it was preached, awakening the joy that the Spirit alone can bestow. The Book of Acts teaches us to endure hardship by clinging firmly to Christ, in order to grow in the “conviction that God is able to act in any circumstance, even amid apparent setbacks” and in the

certainty that “all those who entrust themselves to God will bear good fruit” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 279).

The same holds true for us; our own times are not easy. The pandemic has brought to the fore and amplified the pain, the solitude, the poverty and the injustices experienced by so many people. It has unmasked our false sense of security and revealed the brokenness and polarization quietly growing in our midst. Those who are most frail and vulnerable have come to feel even more so. We have experienced discouragement, disillusionment and fatigue; nor have we been immune from a growing negativity that stifles hope. For our part, however, “we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5). As a result, in our communities and in our families, we can hear the powerful message of life that echoes in our hearts and proclaims: “He is not here, but has risen (Lk 24:6)! This message of hope shatters every form of determinism and, to those who let themselves be touched by it, bestows the freedom and boldness needed to rise up and seek with creativity every possible way to show compassion, the “sacramental” of God’s closeness to us, a closeness that abandons no one along the side of the road.

In these days of pandemic, when there is a temptation to disguise and justify indifference and apathy in the name of healthy social distancing, there is urgent need for the mission of compassion, which can make that necessary distancing an opportunity for encounter, care and promotion. “What we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), the mercy we have experienced, can thus become a point of reference and a source of credibility, enabling us to recover a shared passion for building “a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time, our energy and our resources” (*Fratelli Tutti* 36). The Lord’s word daily rescues and saves us from the excuses that can plunge us into the worst kind of skepticism: “Nothing changes, everything stays the same.” To those who wonder why they should give up their security, comforts and pleasures if they can see no important result, our answer will always remain the same: “Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty. Jesus Christ is truly alive” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 275) and wants us to be alive, fraternal, and capable

of cherishing and sharing this message of hope. In our present circumstances, there is an urgent need for missionaries of hope who, anointed by the Lord, can provide a prophetic reminder that no one is saved by himself.

Like the Apostles and the first Christians, we too can say with complete conviction: “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Everything we have received from the Lord is meant to be put to good use and freely shared with others. Just as the Apostles saw, heard and touched the saving power of Jesus (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4), we too can daily touch the sorrowful and glorious flesh of Christ. There we can find the courage to share with everyone we meet a destiny of hope, the sure knowledge that the Lord is ever at our side. As Christians, we cannot keep the Lord to ourselves; the Church’s evangelizing mission finds outward fulfilment in the transformation of our world and in the care of creation.

An Invitation to Each of Us. The theme of this year’s World Mission Day – “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), is a summons to each of us to “own” and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts. This mission has always been the hallmark of the Church, for “she exists to evangelize” (Saint Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14). Our life of faith grows weak, loses its prophetic power and its ability to awaken amazement and gratitude when we become isolated and withdraw into little groups. By its very nature, the life of faith calls for a growing openness to embracing everyone, everywhere.

The first Christians, far from yielding to the temptation to become an elite group, were inspired by the Lord and his offer of new life to go out among the nations and to bear witness to what they had seen and heard: the Good News that the Kingdom of God is at hand. They did so with the generosity, gratitude and nobility typical of those who sow seeds in the knowledge that others will enjoy the fruit of their efforts and sacrifice. I like to think that “even those who are most frail, limited and troubled can be missionaries in their own way, for goodness can always be shared, even if it exists alongside many limitations” (*Christus Vivit* 239).

On World Mission Day, which we celebrate each year on the penultimate Sunday of October, we recall with gratitude all those men and women who by their testimony of life help us to renew our baptismal commitment to be generous and joyful apostles of the Gospel. Let us remember especially all those who resolutely set out, leaving home and family behind, to bring the Gospel to all those places and people athirst for its saving message.

Contemplating their missionary witness, we are inspired to be courageous ourselves and to beg “the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2). We know that the call to mission is not a thing of the past, or a romantic leftover from earlier times. Today too Jesus needs hearts capable of experiencing vocation as a true love story that urges them to go forth to the peripheries of our world as messengers and agents of compassion. He addresses this call to everyone, and in different ways. We can think of the peripheries all around us, in the heart of our cities or our own families.

Universal openness to love has a dimension that is not geographical but existential. Always, but especially in these times of pandemic, it is important to grow in our daily ability to widen our circle, to reach out to others who, albeit physically close to us, are not immediately part of our “circle of interests” (cf. *Fratelli Tutti* 97). To be on mission is to be willing to think as Christ does, to believe with him that those around us are also my brothers and sisters. May his compassionate love touch our hearts and make us all true missionary disciples.

May Mary, the first missionary disciple, increase in all the baptized the desire to be salt and light in our lands (cf. Mt 5:13-14).

Rome, Saint John Lateran, January 6, 2021, Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.

Franciscus

FRANCISCUS

Pauline Marie Jaricot (1799-1862)

Foundress

Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith



PRAYER FOR BEATIFICATION

Lord, you inspired Pauline Marie Jaricot to found the Propagation of the Faith and the Living Rosary, as well as her total commitment to the cause of the worker. Hasten the day when the Church will be able to celebrate the saintliness of her life.

May her example lead a great number of Christians to devote themselves to the spread of the Gospel, so that men and women of our time and all peoples everywhere may discover your infinite love manifested in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Pauline Marie Jaricot, a laywoman impassioned with Jesus Christ and the poor, has strongly influenced the vision of the Church's mission in the nineteenth century. She felt called by the Lord to help the Catholic Church's worldwide missionary work, and from which, the idea to found the Society for the Propagation of the Faith emerged. The Society encourages the faithful to give first place to prayer and a spirit of sacrifice for the mission. Its commitment is to arouse in the people of God an authentically universal spirit in order to make grow in the local Churches a missionary awareness in accordance with the Church's natural outreach.

May 3, 2022, is the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and 100th anniversary of its Pontifical designation.

MEDITATIONS FOR MISSION



Introduction

The most influential item I have read in recent years is the very first document from the hand of Pope Francis, his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). Francis issued this beautiful reflection on missionary evangelization in the same year (2013) that he was elected as pope. It is valid to assert that this masterpiece contains most of the key spiritual and pastoral insights of Francis' many decades of dedicated ministry.

There is an obvious focus on joy in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG); this is seen in the sheer number of times that words such as joy, joyful, and joyfully are repeated (nearly 100 times). Pope Francis has mined the treasures found in the two interrelated apostolic exhortations written by Paul VI in 1975: *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) [Evangelization in the Modern World] and *Gaudete in Domino* (GD) [On Christian Joy]. *Both popes* constantly assert that if the Gospel is not heard from “joyful evangelizers,” it will not be heard at all by contemporary humanity.

The lack of joy and hope is an obstacle to effective evangelization. In the introduction of EG (10), Francis quotes extensively the sentiments of Paul VI who believed that joy would enable the world of our time “to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ” (EN 80).

With heartfelt emotion, Pope Francis writes: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.... I ask all of you to do this unfaithfully each day” (EG 3). “I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” (EG 1).

Missionary disciples must listen frequently to the admonition of Saint Paul: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say

it again: rejoice” (Phil 4:4). Be transformed by joy. Believe that joy is “the most infallible sign of the presence of God” (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin). Indeed, joy is convincing; joy evangelizes. Surrender to the “Lord of Joy”! Respond to the invitation of Pope Francis! May these daily meditations assist you in living joyfully as dynamic missionary-disciples! Become joyful heralds of the new evangelization!

- James H. Kroeger, MM

The “Little Way” of Loving

The “mission month” of October always opens with the feast of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, patroness of mission. She was born in France on January 2, 1873. Her exemplary parents, Zélie and Louis Martin, were canonized on October 18, 2015 by Pope Francis. Thérèse died of tuberculosis on September 30, 1897, at the tender age of twenty-four.

Thérèse would have probably attracted little notice, except for her posthumously published autobiographical manuscript, *The Story of a Soul*. Essentially, the work is about the path to holiness in everyday life. Thérèse was canonized on May 17, 1925, only twenty-eight years after her death. On December 14, 1927, Pope Pius XI proclaimed her the principal patroness, equal to Saint Francis Xavier, of all missionaries, men and women, and of all the missions in the whole world. More recently on World Mission Sunday (1997), Pope John Paul II named Thérèse a Doctor of the Church.

Saint Thérèse understood that what is important in the Christian life is great love and not great deeds. Thérèse, the saint of the “little way,” developed a spirituality of ordinariness, in which one offers each moment and every deed simply and lovingly to God. Known as “the Little Flower,” Thérèse is a source of deep hope to millions who desire to serve God through their littleness, simplicity, and love. They find in Thérèse their own vocation and spirituality, their “doable” and “livable” pathway of daily sanctification.

We listen to brief excerpts from Thérèse’s profound insights. “Merit is not to be found in doing much or in giving much, but rather in receiving and in loving much.” “Perfection consists in doing his will, in being that which He wants us to be.” Indeed, Thérèse’s “little way” is the way of hope for all desiring to be missionaries and “saints of the ordinary” in daily life.

Celebrating God's Messengers

As the Church observes the feast of the Guardian Angels, let us recall that simple, reassuring prayer we were taught as children: “Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to whom His love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.”

The word “angel” comes from the Greek word *angelos* meaning “messenger.” Angels are spiritual creatures created by God; their existence is an article of our Catholic faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (328) states: “The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls ‘angels’ is a truth of the faith.”

The Bible is filled with appearances of angels, especially at significant moments in salvation history; they act as God’s messengers. An angel announces to Mary that she will conceive a son to be named Jesus (Lk 1:26-38). Joseph is advised to take Mary as his wife by an angel (Mt 1:18-25). Angels announce Jesus’ birth to the shepherds (Lk 2:1-20). When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to Jesus’ tomb they encounter an angel who announces that Jesus has risen (Mt 28:1-8).

Jesus himself spoke of the loving care that angels offer to each of us: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father (Mt 18:10). Indeed, our personal guardian angel is beside us always, manifesting God’s caring, loving presence and leading us on the path to eternal life.

Pope Francis has spoken about guardian angels, advising us to listen to our guardian angels with meekness and respect. Our personal angel as God’s “missionary” always accompanies us, protecting and advising us like an intimate friend. Truly, we are grateful for God’s love, manifested through the beautiful gift of angels, especially our personal guardian angel!

Jesus' Mission Invitation

On this first Sunday of the “mission month” of October, we recall the many instances in the Gospels where Jesus calls people to follow him in mission. We are familiar with the call of the twelve apostles; however, we also remember that Jesus chooses seventy-two followers and sends them out on mission (Lk 10:1-12). Thus, we should conclude that mission is for **all** of Jesus' disciples—**all** baptized Christians, not just the religious or ordained. Mission begins with Jesus' choice: “You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16).

Recall that “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Lk 10:2). This was true in Jesus' time and remains true today. We must recognize the great task that faces us as Christians in the world; we turn to the Lord in prayer, asking for additional harvesters. Jesus also gives various instructions: “Be on your way.” Do *not* delay! Go, and go now!

Remember that you will face many challenges; you will be like lambs in the midst of wolves. Recognize that some people will welcome your message, while others will reject both you and your very mission. Jesus advises his missionaries to “travel light.” Don't let material “stuff” weigh you down and get in the way of your ministry of preaching Jesus' Good News.

The missioner is to extend peace to everyone; in other words, the Christian message is one of “mercy and compassion” (theme of Pope Francis' 2015 visit to the Philippines). In addition, recall Pope Francis' advice to go to the margins, the peripheries, to the excluded in society. Indeed, as Christians we **all** are to carry on the mission task that Jesus gave us; we are *joyful heralds* of Christ's Good News!

Laudato Sí of Pope Francis

On this feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, we recall that his namesake Pope Francis has written a lengthy encyclical focused on the environment: *Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home*. This document proposes that the care of the earth is a moral and spiritual concern. Francis issues an urgent call to action, pointedly asking: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (LS 160).

Recalling the beautiful canticle of creation of Francis of Assisi, the pope notes that the earth, our sister, “now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her” (2). Francis seeks to “address every person living on this planet.... I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (3). Francis of Assisi helps us see the need for “an integral ecology” (11).

We may ask: What is happening to our common home, our beautiful world? “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (21). “These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture” (22). We need to take a “frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair” (61). Although “humanity has disappointed God’s expectations” (61), there is genuine hope.

Pope Francis sees “the rich contribution which religions can make towards an integral ecology and the full development of humanity” (62). “The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time she must above all protect humanity from self-destruction” (79). Imitating Francis of Assisi, we Christians must adopt “the gaze of Jesus” on the world and all creation.

Living an Integrated Life in Mission

Today's Gospel (also used for the new feast of Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus on July 29) probably reflects a typical scene from the life of Jesus. He had a very close friendship relationship with them, often going to their home in Bethany to relax, enjoy their company, share some of Martha's good cooking, and simply rest from his demanding ministry activities.

Saint Luke presents Mary seated near Jesus and listening to him. Martha, being a good host, is busy with all the demands of hospitality. Understandably, she becomes upset that Mary seems to be taking it easy and leaving all the work to her. Jesus lovingly cautions Martha not to be overly concerned about all the details of serving.

Is Jesus rebuking Martha, even disregarding her concerns, when he says that Mary "has chosen the better part"? Certainly not! He is gently reminding Martha to keep everything in balance, to fulfill one's daily duties (work, cook, wash, clean) and still remain centered on Christ (time for prayer and reflection). This is captured well in the Benedictine motto: *ora et labora*, pray and work. We need both prayer and work in order to live a truly Christian life, to accomplish our mission. If we as active evangelizers were to embrace prayer without also performing the tasks inherent in our missionary calling, we would stagnate. When guided by God's will, our labors bring us closer to Him.

Likewise, our mission work loses its meaning if it is *not* grounded in prayer, meditation, and reflection. Everything in our lives is *not* under our control. We cannot do anything except through the grace of God. Before we begin our missionary tasks, we must first turn to God in prayer. Rooted in God's love, we can more effectively carry out our mission. In a word, we are to be genuine "contemplatives in action."

Knowing God our Compassionate Father

Christian creeds address God as “the Father, the almighty.” God’s fatherhood is a clear hallmark of Jesus’ life and prayer. Frequently, Jesus prays to his *Abba*. He calls God “my Father” (Mt 11:26; Lk 10:21). His mission is from the Father (Jn 11:41-42). During the last supper he addresses his Father (Jn 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). Jesus turned to his *Abba* in the crisis moments of his life: Gethsemane (Mk 14:36; Mt 26:42), Calvary (Lk 23:34). His dying words are: “Father, into your hands I commend by spirit” (Lk 23:46).

Because Jesus the Lord taught this prayer to his disciples, it is known as the “Lord’s Prayer.” Tertullian called it “the summary of the whole Gospel,” and Saint Thomas Aquinas said it is “the most perfect of all prayers.” When we Christians in faith express our needs to our Father, we are also committing ourselves to making our prayer requests a reality. For example, praying for our daily bread means doing our part and sharing in the Church’s mission to relieve hunger and deprivation in the world.

In a unique way, Pope Francis, the “pope of mercy,” has focused the Church’s mission on the theme of mercy. Recall his document, *Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy)*, wherein he proclaimed an entire *year of mercy*. Francis says: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2).

For Pope Francis, God the Father’s mercy is central to the Church’s life and mission. “All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy” (MV 10). “Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (MV 12).

Praying the Mission Rosary

October, popularly known as “mission month,” includes the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Each of the twenty rosary decades is devoted to a meditation on a “mystery” centered on the life of Jesus or Mary. Here the word “mystery” refers to a truth of our faith, *not* something which is incomprehensible. Thus, when Catholics pray the rosary, they are to *meditate* on twenty particular truths of the faith found in the Bible or in Catholic doctrine. These “mysteries” are grouped into four categories: Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, and Luminous. Indeed, for numerous Catholics the rosary is truly a form of contemplative prayer, a source of profound meditation.

In February 1951 Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, during his *The Catholic Hour* radio address, inaugurated a unique approach to the rosary. He noted: “We must pray, and not for ourselves alone, but for the world. To this end, I have designed the World Mission Rosary. Each of the five decades is of a different color to represent the continents.” Praying the rosary in this manner seeks to aid the Pope and the entire Church fulfill its missionary mandate.

The schema that Sheen proposed (whether or not one has the colored rosary beads) is: first, **green** is for the forests and grasslands of *Africa*; second, **blue** is for the ocean surrounding the *Pacific Islands*; third, **white** is for *Europe*, the seat of the Holy Father, the Church’s shepherd; fourth, **red** recalls the fire of faith that brought missionaries to the *Americas*; and, fifth, **yellow** represents the morning light of the East and *Asia*. This approach focuses on the “mission intention” of each decade; it is easily integrated with one’s customary manner of praying the rosary. We recall that Saint John Paul II encouraged everyone to intensify the praying of the rosary “to obtain from the Lord those graces that the Church and humanity especially need.”

Building God's Kingdom

The central theme of Jesus' preaching focused on the Kingdom of God; it appears again in today's Gospel. While various Kingdom descriptions are possible, personally, I am inspired by the Kingdom description attributed to Saint Oscar Romero, the martyred archbishop of San Salvador (1917-1980). He was an outstanding embodiment of the prophetic Church, a "voice for the voiceless." Romero's reflection on a prophetic building of the Kingdom is shared for your personal enrichment.

"It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom of God is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us."

"No statement says all that could be said. No prayers fully express our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. This is what we are about."

"We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects, far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well."

"It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen."

Who Are Truly Blessed?

Today's short Gospel is only two verses; each verse contains the same word "blessed," *makarios* in Greek and *beatus* in Latin. Commonly translated into English as "blessed," this word also means: happy, blissful, joyful, fortunate, fulfilled. It refers to a state of spiritual well-being; one experiences genuine joy in one's soul. When the word refers to a person, it means that this one is held in reverence and respected. Who are such persons that deserve to be called "blessed"? Jesus' answer is clear and direct: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it." These words open a pathway for a profound reflection on our Christian missionary vocation.

Recent popes have emphasized integrating the "hearing" and "keeping" of God's Word; one must be a "listener" and a "doer"! Evangelization demands both contemplation and concrete action. Recall the challenge presented by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (41): "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."

Pope John Paul II refers to this insight of Paul VI in *Redemptoris Missio* (42): "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories." Pope Francis combines "hearing" God's Word as disciples and "doing" the Word as missionaries in *Evangelii Gaudium* (120): "we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries,' but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples'."

The New Testament reveals that the first person to receive the honor of being called blessed is none other than Mary herself. Pope Francis emphasizes Mary's path of faith as an example for all Christians, inspiring us to live out our Christian mission. We pray: Blessed Mary, Star of Evangelization, strengthen our faith to truly become your Son's missionary disciples!

Jesus' Call to Discipleship

Throughout the Gospels Jesus constantly invites people to follow him (like the rich young man in today's Gospel). What are some basic characteristics of being a disciple of Jesus? Ten items are identified here—all for our prayer and contemplation.

A disciple is **called by Jesus**; this is seen in all Gospels (e.g. Mk 1:16-20, Lk 5:1-11). The call comes from God's initiative; we don't choose (Jn 15:16 – I chose you). A faith response is expected of the follower. This discipleship is **a personal invitation**. Jesus' followers are called by name; we are not anonymous; names are given (e.g. Jn 1:35-51; Mk 3:13-19; Mt 4:18-22; Lk 5:1-11). We enter a **continuous relationship** as “constant companions” of Jesus. Deep friendship develops (Jn 15:14-15; 15:4-8; 15:13).

The disciple becomes a **listener / learner**. The word disciple derives from *discens* (listening). Disciples imbibe the teachings of Jesus; they imitate his outreach to all. They practice Jesus' “barrier-breaking” ministry and participate in “table-fellowship.” One notes the **ordinariness of the disciples** (Matthew the tax collector; Peter the fisherman; Luke the doctor). “Ordinary” also means NOT being perfect (lack faith, blind, argue, seek honors, jealous, weak, sinful) as illustrated in Mt 20:20-28 (Zebedee's Sons).

The disciples need to **form community** though they are very different personalities. They see **Jesus as Master** and seek to follow his example (e.g. foot-washing: Jn 13:1-16). They **become apostles** (*apostolein*), “sent” to preach, heal, comfort, and pray as Jesus did.

Following Jesus means **sharing the cross** (Mt. 10:38-39; 16:24-26; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23-26 [adds “daily”]; Lk 14:27). The cross *always* shocks, scandalizes, challenges us; mission is often accomplished in vulnerability (2Cor 12:7-10). Disciples are **“rehabilitated sinners.”** The disciples are not perfect; they fail their master. Yet, after the resurrection, Jesus speaks of peace and reconciliation. Great saints accept their personal sinfulness, yet are profoundly aware of God's love and grace.

John XXIII: The Joyful Pope

Today we celebrate the life and significant contribution of one of the Church's recently canonized saints: Pope John XXIII. He, along with John Paul II, was declared a saint on April 27, 2014, Divine Mercy Sunday. Over the years of his short pontificate (1958-1963) John XXIII became a beloved figure worldwide; he was popularly known as "Good Pope John."

He is remembered for the convocation of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) with its *aggiornamento* agenda for the renewal and updating of the Church. In fact, John XXIII's annual feast day on October 11 is fixed to commemorate his opening of Vatican II on October 11, 1962. Each year as the Church celebrates this saint, we are asked to recall the pivotal role of Vatican II in renewing the life of the Church.

Of the many gifts that John XXIII left to the Church one was his "Daily Decalogue." The following are some brief excerpts: **(1)** Only for today, I will seek to live the livelong day positively; **(2)** Only for today, I will not criticize anyone; **(3)** Only for today, I will be happy in the certainty that I was created to be happy; **(4)** Only for today, I will adapt to circumstances; **(5)** Only for today, I will devote ten minutes of my time to some good reading.

Pope John's Decalogue continues: **(6)** Only for today, I will do one good deed and not tell anyone about it; **(7)** Only for today, I will do at least one thing I do not like doing; **(8)** Only for today, I will make a plan for myself; **(9)** Only for today, I will firmly believe, despite appearances, that the good Providence of God cares for me; and **(10)** Only for today, I will have no fears. We marvel at John XXIII's wisdom, guiding us in fulfilling our mission!

Paul's Dynamic Mission Vision

The apostle Paul, undoubtedly the greatest missionary of all times, boldly states "I am not ashamed of the Good News" (Rom 1:16) in today's first reading. This brief presentation surfaces ten "mission principles," valid for Paul of Tarsus as well as for all modern-day Pauls.

(1) Depth Awareness of Vocation. For Paul and all missionaries, *mission originates in the call of God.* **(2) Radical Commitment to Christ.** Paul's conversion experience on the Damascus road was only the starting point of a life-long relationship; *mission envisions a totally Christ-centered life.* **(3) Voluntary Acceptance of Suffering.** The Apostle Paul preached the Gospel by his life and example. *Vulnerability and acceptance of the cross authenticate mission.* **(4) Insightful Mission Methods.** Paul employed distinct methods to achieve his purposes. *Mission demands creative, inculturated, ever-renewed approaches to evangelization.* **(5) Urgent Gospel Proclamation.** Paul heralds a message from God that profoundly affects all humanity. *Mission has lost none of its urgency in the contemporary world.*

(6) Deep Love of the Church. For Paul the Church is primarily the local community of baptized followers of Jesus Christ. *Mission and love of the people who constitute the Church go hand-in-hand.* **(7) Close Collaboration with Co-workers.** Paul, though a strong individual, was a team-worker in the task of evangelization. *All apostolic ministry is enhanced through collaborative efforts.* **(8) Commitment to Social Transformation.** Paul's preaching of liberation included a manifest concern for the poor and suffering. *The Gospel message of human dignity leads to social transformation.* **(9) Effective, Exemplary Life-style.** Paul was always careful to live an authentic life-style. *The witness of a Christian life is the first and often most effective proclamation of the Gospel.* **(10) Total Reliance on God's Providence.** Paul asks: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). *Mission always remains "God's project."* Pastors, missionaries, catechists, religious, laity, all ministers of the Church, imitate Paul, the joyful evangelizer!

Mercifully Bearing Other's Burdens

Today's Gospel speaks about the burdens that are often placed on people's shoulders. As followers of Jesus, we seek to lighten the various problems and myriad difficulties people face through our concrete acts of mercy. In his first book, *The Name of God is Mercy*, Pope Francis continually insists that mercy is the very essence of God; he expresses it this way: "we can say that **mercy is God's identity card**, God of Mercy, merciful God. For me, this really is the Lord's identity."

Although a vast amount of "mercy material" from Pope Francis is available, probably the best source is Francis' document, *Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy)*, wherein he proclaimed an entire year of mercy (2015-2016). Francis recalls how Saint John XXIII in his opening speech to Vatican II asserted that the Church wishes to use "the medicine of mercy" in proclaiming the Gospel today; she wishes to "show herself a loving mother to all: patient, kind, moved by compassion and goodness." Francis says: "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man" (MV 2).

Jesus' entire life and "his person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously.... The signs he works, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion" (MV 8). His mercy overflows when he invites Matthew the tax collector to follow him; he looked at Matthew with merciful love and chose him: *miserando atque eligendo* [Francis' episcopal motto] (Mt 9:9). We constantly pray: "Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father.... Let your Church be your visible face in the world."

Mission: Living God's Gift

In today's first reading Saint Paul speaks about the "free gift of grace" we have received through Christ's redemption. When receiving a gift, we seek to manifest our gratitude. A beautiful way of showing gratitude for gifts received is to engage in mission. A "gift missiology" includes three steps that capture mission-as-gift: **Recognize**, **Receive**, and **Reciprocate**. *Recognize* by being aware of the uniqueness of God's gift. *Receive* by personally appropriating God's gift. *Reciprocate* by sharing God's gift with others.

Recognizing the Gift. The first moment in appreciating "gift missiology" is to become deeply conscious of the depths of God's love. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux expressed her awareness of God's gift when she concluded: "My vocation is Love! In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love. Thus, I shall be everything."

Receiving the Gift. A transformed consciousness that fully appreciates God's graciousness will receive the gift of faith with a joyful heart. One is reminded of what the Asian bishops have said: "Without a personal experience of this love received as gift and mercy, no sense of mission can flourish" (FABC V). Saint Paul celebrates God's choice, noting that: "God never takes back *his gift* or revokes *his choice*" (Rom 11:29).

Reciprocating God's Gift. The key New Testament passage that best captures this third moment of "gift missiology" is: "What you have received as a *gift*, give as a *gift*" (Mt 10:8). The logic is simple: if one truly appreciates a *gift*, one wishes to share it with others. In his 1999 apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA) John Paul II notes how the Church in Asia is to "reciprocate" (return, repay) the gifts it has received: "The Church's faith in Jesus is a *gift received* and a *gift to be shared*; it is the *greatest gift* which the Church can offer to Asia" (EA 10).

Called to Missionary Holiness

Every Christian is called to holiness and intimacy with the Lord that characterizes the lives of saints such as Teresa of Avila, whose feast we celebrate today. This same invitation is reiterated by Pope Francis, through his 2018 apostolic exhortation *Rejoice and Be Glad (Gaudete et Exsultate)*. Francis' inviting document bears the subtitle: "On the Call to Holiness in Today's World," echoing the identical invitation found in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (39-42). As missionary-disciples of Jesus, we listen to some pivotal insights from Pope Francis.

The Pope asserts that his writing is meant to be very practical: "My modest goal is to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time" (2). The Lord "wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence" (1). Undoubtedly, there are many forms of holiness. "We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness" (11). Francis praises what he calls "the middle class of holiness" (7); this includes ordinary people such as parents, workers, the sick and elderly. Holiness is often found "in our next-door neighbors" (7).

"This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures" (16). We "need only find a more perfect way of doing what we are already doing" (17). "A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness" (19). "You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission" (23). "Life does not have a mission, but is a mission" (27). "To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world" (33). Francis affirms the challenging words of Leon Bloy: "The only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint" (34). Saint Teresa of Avila would certainly agree!

Popular Piety Serves Mission

Today the Church recalls the life and contribution of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), a French Visitation nun, who received visions of the Sacred Heart and popularized the devotion, guided by her spiritual director, Saint Claude Colombiere. Many Catholics are familiar with the “First Friday” tradition of receiving the Eucharist for nine consecutive months. Margaret Mary asserted that those keeping the First Fridays would not die in sin or without the sacraments; Christ the Sacred Heart would be their refuge at the hour of death.

How can such valid popular piety serve mission? How could a devotion, which sometimes may be limited to a personal, private practice, become more relevant today? Recall the original symbol manifested to Margaret Mary: *a heart afire with love for humanity that was surmounted by a cross*. This symbol clearly implies that devotion to the Sacred Heart is intimately connected with the paschal mystery: the mystery of Jesus’ dying and rising again. In a word, it means that the Sacred Heart calls Christians to mission and a self-sacrificing love for one’s neighbor, a committed love ready to serve and even face the challenges of a widespread pandemic.

Our hearts must be transformed into loving replicas of the Heart of Jesus, who reached out to the lost, lonely, little, least, and last in society. Thus, in contemporary situations, devotees of the Sacred Heart are called upon to concretize their love in face of challenging social realities. Today the Church sees that serving the poor and the disadvantaged involves intelligent effort to change unjust structures in society. Linking the Sacred Heart devotion with growth in heartfelt compassion for the needy would contribute significantly to the renewal of this traditional popular devotion, making it more responsive to contemporary social realities and the need, as Pope Francis notes, to become “a Church which is poor and for the poor” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 198).

True Leadership is Service

Today's Gospel could be described as a drama in several scenes. It forces us to ask ourselves about our vision of "true greatness" and "authentic discipleship." Jesus has just told his disciples that he is going to Jerusalem where he will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes and be put to death. The disciples seem to be totally oblivious; they are more interested in securing positions of honor and glory.

James and John (Zebedee's sons) approach Jesus, asking for positions of privilege, seeking to be at Jesus' right and left sides when he is enthroned in glory. Jesus inquires if they know what they are seeking and if they understand the "price" they must pay. They boldly assert that they are willing to drink the cup of suffering that Jesus himself will drink. Jesus tells them that they will certainly share in his sufferings, but this does not assure them of their desired positions of special glory and honor.

Note that the other ten disciples become angry with James and John; they most probably wanted such "positions of honor" for themselves. Then, in the next scene we see Jesus calling them all together and instructing them on the meaning of "true discipleship." We should note the "earthly ambitions" of *all the disciples* (the two as well as the other ten). Observe how Jesus is trying to teach the disciples what "true greatness" consists of; it is to imitate Jesus who came "to give his life as a ransom for many." Indeed, "authentic discipleship" demands sacrifice, suffering, service, and self-surrender (all in imitation of Jesus' example), who came "not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many." We ask ourselves: How can I respond to Jesus' challenging vision of discipleship in my daily life?

Luke, Mission Evangelist

Saint Luke can validly be called the “evangelist of mission.” Although all four Gospel writers, each in their own way, portray the mission of Christ and the Church, Luke provides the greatest amount of detail, both in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, where one finds numerous accounts of the early Church in mission. Today’s Gospel provides several practical, concrete guidelines for mission engagement.

Luke notes that in Jesus’ public ministry he chooses seventy-two followers and sends them out on mission. We should conclude that mission is for **all** of Jesus’ disciples—**all** baptized Christians, not just the special twelve apostles. All mission and evangelization begins with God’s initiative, with Jesus’ choice. In addition, mission is not a personal or individual project; it is a community endeavor of the Church. We are asked to remember that “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” This was true in Jesus’ time and remains true today. We recognize the great tasks that face us; we turn to the Lord in prayer, asking for additional harvesters.

Jesus gives several brief, yet direct, instructions: “Be on your way.” Do *not* delay! Remember that you will face many challenges; you will be like lambs in the midst of wolves. Jesus advises his missionaries to “travel light.” The missionary is to extend peace to everyone. Be humble and accept what is offered in terms of food and accommodations. Reach out to the sick and needy you encounter (recall Pope Francis’ advice to go to the margins, the peripheries, to the excluded in society). Make the announcement of Jesus’ *Kingdom message* your central emphasis; proclaim that “the reign of God near.” Indeed, as Christians we carry on the mission ministry that Jesus gave us. We appreciate Saint Luke for his beautiful panorama of authentic Christian mission; we also make it our own firm commitment!

Missionary Martyrs Give Faith

Today the Church commemorates six French Jesuit priests and two lay brothers who have come to be known as the “North American Martyrs.” This feast reminds us that the growth of the faith in most parts of the world began with the heroic witness of life by early missionaries—even to the point of giving their lives. These eight missionaries, who had come to North America to teach the Iroquois and Huron peoples about God, were martyred between the years 1642 and 1649 in present-day New York and Canada.

These faith-filled Gospel heralds, in general, were not welcomed by the Native Americans; they were viewed, not as men of God, but as French settlers who had often cheated them and invaded their valued hunting grounds. These missionaries first worked among the Huron tribes, achieving some acceptance as they tried to help them, nursing their sick and showing them new farming skills. They were able to begin teaching the Huron people about Jesus. Father de Brebeuf even wrote a simple catechism in the local language to teach the children. A pivotal problem was the hostilities between the Iroquois and Hurons. As the missionaries befriended the Hurons, the Iroquois viewed them as their enemies.

Over a period of eight years, these brave missionaries were brutally martyred. We know many details about their deaths and their mission experiences among the Native Americans because of the letters and journals they wrote. They were canonized by Pope Pius XI on June 29, 1930. Surely they would have meditated deeply on Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel that they must always be ready to face the master’s return in all their challenging missionary endeavors. We accept that, indeed, we are an *ecclesia martyrum*, a Church of martyrs and witnesses, both in past eras as well as in the present. We thank God for all who bravely—even heroically—witness their faith.

Joyful Evangelizers

Today's Gospel includes an interesting assertion; Jesus says: "Happy is that servant whom his master upon arrival finds him engaged in his mission" (Lk 12:43). Jesus is commending all missionaries who constantly engage in the task of evangelization; they are indeed blessed, happy, and fortunate. Jesus' words prompt us to recall that Pope Francis constantly affirms that missionary evangelization is to be a joyful undertaking; this theme echoes constantly through Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). We listen to some of Francis' insights.

"The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.... With Christ joy is constantly born anew.... I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy" (1). "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since 'no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord'" (3). Francis invites us all to "enter into this stream of joy" (5).

The Pope employs several creative expressions that challenge us to be joyful evangelizers. "An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral" (10). "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter" (6). Evangelizers are not to be "disillusioned pessimists, 'sourpusses'" (85). We must avoid a "tomb psychology ... [that can] transform Christians into mummies in a museum" (83). We do not accept the negativities of those who act like "prophets of doom" (84).

Pope Francis constantly encourages us: "Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization" (83)! Indeed, only *joyful evangelizers* are effective missionaries!

The Flame of Mission

The first verse of today's Gospel captures Jesus' focus on his mission to bring "fire" upon the earth, to accomplish his God-given task of evangelization, the proclamation of his Father's Kingdom. This verse reminds one of the classical statement by theologian Emil Brunner in 1931: *"The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning."*

Brunner eloquently asserts that every Christian who receives the Word of God "receives along with it the duty of passing this Word on.... Mission work does not arise from any arrogance in the Christian Church; mission is its cause and its life.... Where there is no mission, there is no Church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith.... Mission, Gospel preaching, is the spreading out of the fire which Christ has thrown upon the earth. He who does not propagate this fire shows that he is not burning. He who burns propagates the fire."

"This 'must' is both things—an urge and a command. An urge, because living faith feels God's purpose as its own. 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel,' says Paul. Necessity is laid upon him. But also, he ought to preach; with the gift he receives the obligation: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel.' Whether Christ's command was uttered just in these words, we do not know exactly. But there can be no doubt that He had sent out His disciples with the strict order to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the world."

Jesus felt the urgency of his mission to bring "fire" upon this earth. He has shared this mission with every baptized Christian. As fire only genuinely exists when it is actually burning, we are only the Church and Jesus' authentic disciples only when we engage in mission. Are you ablaze? Have you caught Jesus' "Gospel Fire"?

Saint John Paul II: Missionary Pope

The Catholic Church worldwide rejoiced as John Paul II, along with John XXIII, was canonized by Pope Francis on April 27, 2014 in Rome. Catholic and secular media covered the event, emphasizing the many contributions of this 264th pope of the Catholic Church whose pontificate extended over 26 years (1978-2005).

One of the major emphases of John Paul II was his focus on the renewal of the Church in her missionary identity and commitment. When his mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) was published on December 7, 1990, Cardinal Daneels of Brussels wrote: “this document best exemplifies who this pope is; it is the fruit of his mission in every continent. There is nothing better to define his pontificate than to say: he is a missionary pope.”

In RM (1) the pope described his missionary commitment: “From the beginning of my pontificate I have chosen to travel to the ends of the earth in order to show this missionary concern. My direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the *urgency of missionary activity*....” John Paul II echoed his explicit pastoral choice in his Message for World Mission Sunday in 1981: “My trips to Latin America, Asia and Africa have an eminently missionary purpose.” Everywhere he went John Paul II emphasized a central point: “I wish to invite the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*” (RM 2).

Saint John Paul II continually asserted that mission is at the heart of the Church: “the Church here on earth is missionary by her very nature” (AG 2). He was deeply convinced that “missionary activity renews the Church.... *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!*” (RM 2). Pope Francis said of John Paul II: “I think of him as ‘the great missionary of the Church’,” because he was “a man who proclaimed the Gospel everywhere.”

Mercy: Heart of Mission

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about a barren fig tree. The servant pleads with the master to be merciful and spare the tree; the master agrees. The scene reminds this writer of the words and deeds of Pope Francis, truly a "pope of mercy." His 2015 document, *Misericordiae Vultus* [MV] (*The Face of Mercy*) proclaimed an entire year of mercy. Francis says: "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man" (2). We listen to some additional words that express the pope's profound vision!

Scripture clearly affirms that God is "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation" (2 Cor 1:3). Our God is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4). In Jesus of Nazareth, mercy has become living and visible. Jesus' entire life and "his person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously.... The signs he works, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy" (8).

"Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers" (10). "The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel.... Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy" (12).

Mission means "living-in-mercy." Here are some suggestions to translate mercy into concrete deeds. Mercy addresses various types of human suffering; Christians are called to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Mercy is challenging; its demands are often inconvenient and unpredictable. Practicing mercy must spring from God's love in our hearts (Rm 5:5); it is not only giving things, but giving ourselves. Pray that you may imitate the same merciful love that Jesus—and Mary—consistently manifest.

Pope Francis Highlights

Mission

Catholics celebrate World Mission Sunday today; we carefully explore Pope Francis' message written for the occasion. In addition, we can profitably explore numerous profound insights on mission found in *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis' first apostolic exhortation. Here Francis is proposing a profound missionary renewal of the entire Church. He asserts that we need an “evangelizing Church that comes out of herself,” **not** a Church that is “self-referential” and “lives within herself, of herself, for herself” (EG 27).

Pope Francis' writes: “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.... All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (27).

“Missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*.... We need to move ‘from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry’” (15). “I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has programmatic significance and important consequences.... Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’” (25).

A pivotal insight of Pope Francis is that “we are all missionary disciples” (119); through baptism, “all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples” (120). All Christians are “agents of evangelization.” “Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries,’ but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’” (120). Francis asserts: “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor” (109).

October 25

Compassion: The Heart of Mission

The Gospel today narrates how Jesus manifested his compassion for a crippled woman, healing her on a Sabbath day. Reading this passage reminded me of a personal experience I had some years ago as I walked by on my way to the metro station. The highway underpass was crowded, with hundreds of people passing by. The air was thick with dust and pollution from the scores of buses, cars, jeepneys, and trucks clogging the road. It was summertime, and the heat in tropical Manila was intense.

There I saw a young mother; her face beamed as she held her month-old baby in her arms. It was clear that this was the joy of her life. I wondered: “Why were this twenty-something mother and her beautiful baby sitting in such an awful place?” And yet, there they were. The industrious young mother had a small makeshift table where she displayed cigarettes, candy, chewing gum, and a few bananas. Her meager daily income would hardly be sufficient for the two of them. Life had not given her many choices, so she sold her simple wares in the thick of the crowds, pollution, and heat.

“What will become of this little child?” I thought as I stared at the scene before me. My journey on the metro to downtown Manila was uncomfortable, even though I sat in an air-conditioned train. And, I couldn’t hold back my tears. What price the world’s little people pay each day! Indeed, when we meet such experiences in life, we are being challenged to reach out to the needy with Jesus’ own compassion. We all have been recipients of Jesus’ compassionate love and mercy. Thus, one could formulate a simple description of mission and its practice: *compassion received overflows in compassion shared*. Jesus, help me put your compassion into action in my daily life!

Mission has Small Beginnings

Jesus was a “master-teacher.” This is shown in today’s two short “kingdom” parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. Significant Church movements and mission initiatives often result from “the smallest of all seeds” and from “a bit of yeast.” The change begins “from within”: the seed is planted in the ground and the yeast is mixed into the flour.

Growth, change, and transformation in our lives as Christians begins with the small seed of faith, planted at our Baptism. As we cooperate with God’s grace, its transforming power and effects are seen. This fact has been verified in Church history. From a small band of ordinary disciples the Catholic Church has grown into a worldwide community of 1.6 billion people today. Beginning with one person, Saint Mother Teresa proceeded to pick up thousands of destitute people. She has expressed how God uses our littleness to achieve His mission.

Mother Teresa has said: “In this life we cannot always do great things, but we can do small things with great love.” “I am a little pencil in God’s hands. He does the thinking; he does the writing. He does everything and sometimes it is really hard, because it is a broken pencil and He has to sharpen it a little more.”

Mother Teresa’s patron saint was Therese of Lisieux. She, like many people, was attracted to “the little way” of Saint Therese, the Church’s Patroness of Mission and a Doctor of the Church. Her “spirituality” means seeking “holiness of life” in the ordinary aspects of everyday existence. This approach puts holiness within the reach of ordinary people like you and me. Both of these missionary saints are beautiful examples of how God uses “littleness” to achieve His mission. We ask ourselves: How can I live Jesus’ call to missionary discipleship in the simple, daily events of my life?

God's Magnanimous Providence

Saint Paul's words found in today's first reading from Romans are among the most well-known in the Bible: "For those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom 8:28). We need to read that verse frequently: **all things** (both good and bad, pleasant and difficult, including every person) can contribute to fulfilling God's loving plan for humanity.

It is interesting to note that this specific verse was chosen to be the "mission motto" of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. In short, this affirmation of Saint Paul provides a profound insight into the attitude of *all missionaries*—and of all Christians. In God's design **everything** we meet in life (no exceptions) can contribute to the unfolding of God's Kingdom. Because of our deep love of God, we are enabled to see God's hand in everything.

Christian mission is marvelously enhanced by this faith perspective. Often, many initiatives undertaken for evangelization do not meet with immediate success. Difficult challenges and apparent failures can open us up to a deeper relationship with Jesus and a more profound configuration to Christ. Our life—and mission itself—reflects this "paschal paradigm." In our daily lives, we struggle to move through darkness to light, through captivity to freedom, through suffering and brokenness to wholeness, from loneliness to communion, from sin to grace and new life.

We, as faith-filled Christians called to share Christ's mission, struggle to follow the path traced out for us by Christ in his paschal mystery. We reflect on the "divine reversal" that happens at Easter. What appeared as death's victory on Good Friday is reversed by Christ's triumph over the grave. In his paschal mystery Christ takes humanity's pride and sinfulness and changes them into opportunities for grace. Adam's sin that brought death is reversed by Christ's humble obedience—even unto death. Marvel at God's unfathomable love! This is "missionary faith"!

Celebrating the Church's Apostles

After spending the entire night in prayer to His Father, Jesus selects twelve of his disciples, calling them “apostles.” The word *apostle* comes from the Greek *apostolein*, meaning “one who is sent out.” By choosing twelve, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, Jesus indicates that he is establishing a “people,” a new People of God, the Church. Thus, the Church is “apostolic” and “missionary” right from its very origins. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the Church is “missionary by her very nature” (*Ad Gentes 2*).

In the New Testament one finds two primary usages of the word *apostle*. The first specifically refers to the twelve chosen by Jesus; they form the foundation of the Church—with Jesus as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). The second meaning refers more generically to other individuals who are sent out to be messengers, ambassadors, and missionaries of Jesus Christ. In this *general sense* we can be called “apostles.” Indeed, through our Baptism, we are called and sent as genuine apostles of the risen Jesus.

Probably, the closest term to describe an *apostle* today would be the word *missionary*, which, incidentally, derives from the Latin verb *mittere*, meaning “to send.” A missionary is a follower of Christ who is sent out with the specific mission of announcing the Gospel. To employ the words of Pope Francis, we all are “missionary disciples,” followers of Jesus by whom we have been missioned.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (120), Francis is eminently clear: “In virtue of their Baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples.... Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Jesus Christ: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries,’ but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’.” On this feast of the Apostles Simon and Jude we joyfully celebrate our missionary identity.

Authentic Missionary Service

Once again today, our Gospel passage illustrates the priority of merciful compassion in the ministry of Jesus. Notice how Jesus combines his miracle of healing with his teachings about the true nature of his message of the *Kingdom of God*. Jesus also provides a clear, down-to-earth example of practicing compassion: rescuing someone from drowning in a well—even though it may be a Sabbath day. Yes, mission demands “compassion in action.”

Admittedly, I am inspired by the lives of several missionaries of mercy; one of my favorites is “Damien the Leper.” Jozef Damien de Veuster, popularly known as “Damien the Leper,” was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, 2009. Born in 1840 on a small farm near Louvain in Belgium, he left for Hawaii in 1863 and arrived six months later; he was ordained in Honolulu in May 1864. Damien served for nine years on the Island of Hawaii. In early 1873, he was the first priest volunteer who offered himself to serve the lepers who were segregated on the island of Molokai, since there was no known cure for the dreaded disease which was ravaging the island archipelago.

Damien’s assignment letter from Father Modeste, his religious superior, read: “You may stay as long as your devotion dictates.” Damien read the letter over and over again—until his death sixteen years later at age 49. As a missionary on Molokai, Damien wrote his brother in Europe: “I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ. That is why, in preaching, I say ‘we lepers,’ not, ‘my brethren’.” Damien strove to configure himself to Christ. He died on April 15, 1889; it was Holy Week. Damien lived a transformed and transforming life. His example of service of the poor inspires us not to forget the needy right in our midst. Saint Damien, missionary apostle of compassion, pray for us.

A Humble Attitude Serves Evangelization

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus' parable about the wedding feast and how the invited guests were choosing their places at table. He is cautioning his followers to have a humble opinion of their personal importance. Though all have been invited to the feast, it is the wedding host who has the prerogative to properly seat them at table. Jesus then proclaims a clear principle: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14:11).

We are reminded of another parable in Luke's Gospel (Lk 18:9-14). This is the story of the Pharisee and the Publican tax collector going to the temple to pray. Jesus contrasts their attitudes: the Pharisee tells God about his righteousness; the Publican simply pleads: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Note that Jesus also concludes this parable, saying "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 18:14).

Pope Francis provides us with insights on genuine humility. "If God prefers humility it is not to debase us: humility is the necessary precondition for being lifted up again by Him, so as to experience the mercy that comes to fill our emptiness. The prayer of the arrogant does not reach God's heart, but the humility of the wretched opens it up. God has a predilection for the humble and, encountering a humble heart, He opens His own fully" (6-1-16). Again, "in Mary we see that humility is not a virtue of the weak but of the strong who do not have to treat others badly to feel important" (8-13-17).

Indeed, all evangelizers need the attitude of humble servants. Humility is a clear sign of the messenger's authenticity. Humility attracts; humility evangelizes. As Pope Francis noted in his homily at the beginning of his pontificate (3-19-13): "Let us never forget that authentic power is service"!

Exploring Mission Motivation

Why mission? Why evangelize? These questions often come to the mind of any serious Christian, especially as we conclude the Church's "mission month" of October. A creative expression of renewed mission motivation is found in the 1990 FABC V document of the Asian bishops; they present five "core motives" for mission engagement.

1. "We evangelize, first of all from a deep sense of gratitude to God, the Father 'who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing' (Eph 1:3)... Mission is above all else an overflow of this life from grateful hearts transformed by the grace of God.... Without a personal experience of this love received as gift and mercy, no sense of mission can flourish."

2. Christians need to be aware that "mission is also a mandate. We evangelize because we are sent into the whole world to make disciples of all nations. The one who sends us is Jesus.... We cannot fulfill this mission apart from him (Jn 15:4-5)." 3. We evangelize also because "we believe in the Lord Jesus. We have received the gift of faith. We have become Christians."

4. "We evangelize also because we have been incorporated by baptism into the Church, which is missionary by its very nature.... The Church exists in order to evangelize.... Each member ... has received the right and duty to the apostolate from the Lord himself." 5. "And, finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society. Our Asian world needs the values of the Kingdom and of Christ in order to bring about the human development, justice, peace and harmony with God, among peoples and with all creation that the peoples of Asia long for."

October, the "Month of Mission," is a fine time for a little soul-searching: How deep is *my personal motivation* and desire to share my faith with others?

RECEIVING AND SHARING GIFTS

Five Centuries of Philippine Christianity



James H. Kroeger, MM

In 2021 the Church in the Philippines marks half a millennium of Christianity. Statistics in 2020 show that the Philippine population has reached nearly 110 million. The Philippines is the world's third largest local Church (after Brazil and Mexico). Of Asia's 120+ million Catholics over 60% are Filipinos. These significant facts invite deeper exploration of the multi-faceted Philippine Church.

Some may ask: Why celebrate this event? Bishop Broderick Pabillo explains: "This is indeed something to celebrate, for in 500 years the Christian faith in the country has not only survived, but has been a strong influence in the culture and character of the nation, and is still going strong.... The 2021 celebration will be marked with great thanksgiving to Almighty God for the great gift of the Christian faith. In God's providence the Christian faith has come to our shore, took root in it, and bore much fruit among its people." Bishop Pablo David notes that the focus of the 2021 celebration is "not colonialism but the Christian faith" that early Filipinos "welcomed as a gift, albeit from people who were not necessarily motivated by the purest of motives."

In addition, this quincentennial event is not seen to be only a "looking back to the past"; it is also a time of expressing profound gratitude and a looking forward to the future. Having received the gift of faith, it must be deepened, developed, and shared with others through mission. The advice of Jesus to his disciples should be our guide: "What you have received as a gift, give as a gift" (Mt 10:8). Indeed, as the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) logo for the 2021 event asserts: we are all

“gifted to give.” This is a challenge to both celebrate the Christian faith and be vigorously motivated to go and share this precious gift with others.

This presentation will unfold by noting ten gifts Christianity has brought to the Philippines; indeed, more could be mentioned. There will be some brief historical data given to contextualize the gifts. However, more importantly, appreciating these special gifts today demands a commitment to explore how all are called to further develop the gifts and pass them on to others.

1. Gift of Christian Faith. After the introduction of Christianity by Ferdinand Magellan in March 1521, a systematic and organized program of evangelization was begun in 1565 by the Augustinians who accompanied Legazpi’s expedition. They were followed by Franciscans (1578), Jesuits (1581), Dominicans (1587), and Augustinian Recollects (1606) from both Spain and Mexico. Manila became a bishopric in 1579 and an archbishopric in 1595.

The early missionaries often sought to protect the natives from abuses; they had a vigorous leader in Fray Domingo de Salazar, OP, the first bishop of the Philippines. The Philippine Church of the sixteenth century certainly took sides, and it was not with the rich and powerful, but with those who were oppressed and victims of injustice. Church historian John Schumacher notes: “Skeptics have often questioned the reality of the rapid conversion of sixteenth-century Filipinos. If one wishes the answer, it is to be found right here, that the Church as a whole took the side of the poor and the oppressed, whether the oppressors were Spaniards or Filipino *principales*.” Promoting both faith and justice remains a perennial task of every local Church.

2. Education and Social Services. These tasks were almost exclusively the concern of the Church during the entire period of Spanish rule. Before the end of the sixteenth century, Manila had three hospitals, one for Spaniards, another for natives, and a third for the Chinese. The first two were conducted by Franciscans, the third by the Dominicans. In 1595 the Jesuits opened a grammar school for Spanish boys that later developed into the University of

San Ignacio and had attached to it the residential college of San José, founded in 1601 and today the San José Seminary.

The year 1611 saw the beginnings of the Dominican University of Santo Tomás, which continues today as a vibrant educational center. In 1640 the Dominicans also took charge of the College of San Juan de Letrán, started about a decade earlier by a zealous layman for the education of orphans. Various religious communities of women established themselves in Manila; frequently, they undertook the education of girls. Among these sisterhoods, that begun by Ignacia del Espíritu Santo, a Chinese *mestiza*, in 1684 and today known as the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM), deserves special mention. Numerous educational institutions and social action centers operated by the Church continue to play an important role in Philippine life.

3. Development of the Local Clergy. Catholicism had taken permanent root in the Philippines as the religion of the people by the eighteenth century, if not earlier. However, one serious weakness was the retarded development of the native clergy. Apparently, only in the late seventeenth century were native Filipinos ordained. Bishops became increasingly eager for a diocesan clergy completely under their jurisdiction. Archbishop Sancho de Santa Justa y Rufina of Manila (1767-1787) ordained natives even when they lacked the necessary aptitude and training; the results proved disastrous. Some improvement in formation and an increase in vocations occurred after the arrival of the Vincentians (1862), who took charge of diocesan seminaries.

Among the active priest-leaders and social spokesmen were Fathers Gómez, Burgos, and Zamora (GOMBURZA), who were executed by the government for alleged complicity in a mutiny of native garrison troops in Cavite (1872); they are considered national heroes today. Historically, the slow development of the local clergy remained a serious limitation; thus, the departure of a large proportion of Spanish clergy after the transfer of sovereignty from Spain to the United States (1898) left over 700 parishes vacant. Today the Filipino diocesan and religious clergy effectively manage the Church. An interesting historical note is that of the forty-nine bishops from the Philippines who attended the Second

Vatican Council (1962-1965), fully one-third were expatriate missionary bishops; today all the country's bishops are Filipino.

4. Continuing Missionary Presence. The normal life of the Catholic Church suffered disastrously during the years following 1898; from 1898 to 1903 the total number of friars decreased over 75% from 1,013 to 246. This severe shortage of priests and religious was met in part by new, non-Spanish missionary congregations of women and men from Europe, Australia, and America. For example, during the "second wave" of mission personnel (1905-1941), male missionary societies that responded to the pressing needs were: Irish Redemptorists (1905), Mill Hill Missionaries (1906), Scheut-CICM (1907), Sacred Heart Missionaries and Divine Word Society (1908), LaSalle Brothers (1911), Oblates of Saint Joseph (1915), Maryknoll Missioners [men and women] (1926), Columban Missioners (1929), Society of Saint Paul (1935), Quebec-PME Society (1937), and Oblates-OMI (1939). Most of these societies have personnel in the country today. It is important to note that many dedicated female religious came as missionaries to the Philippines, often working in partnership with the societies just mentioned.

5. War and Church Services. Japanese forces invaded in December 1941. Allied forces under General MacArthur returned in 1944, but severe fighting continued until the Japanese surrender in August 1945. The war inflicted heavy damage; 257 priests and religious lost their lives, and losses in ecclesiastical property and equipment were estimated at 250 million pesos (U.S.\$ 125 million). Priests, brothers, sisters, and dedicated Catholic women and men exhibited great faith and heroism during the war; many suffered imprisonment.

The origins of what is known today as the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) can be traced back to February 1945 when Apostolic Delegate William Piani, even as the war was still raging, appointed John Hurley, SJ to take charge of relief work and created the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO). The 1945-1965 period in the life of the local Church in the Philippines is characterized by: quite rapid recovery from the ravages of war, greatly expanded school system at upper levels, involvement of Catholics (laity, sisters, clergy) in social action, and

growing Filipinization of Church structures.

6. Church Action under Authoritarian Rule. Ferdinand E. Marcos, first elected president in 1965, declared martial law in 1972 and imposed a form of “constitutional authoritarianism.” The martial law period posed new, challenging questions for the Church and nation. Among the more pernicious effects of the two-decade Marcos era (1965-1986) were: increased militarization, insurgency, the absence of juridical procedures, the destruction of democratic processes, economic decline, and pervasive fear. The end result, in the words of a Filipino social scientist, was to place the country “on the trembling edge of a social volcano.”

This period proved a time of testing and growth for the local Church. Prophetic stances were often met by military abuse, imprisonment and torture, and even deportation for foreign missionaries. The Church evolved a position of “critical collaboration,” cooperating with the regime on programs beneficial to the populace while criticizing government actions judged harmful. An important 1977 CBCP pastoral letter, *The Bond of Love in Proclaiming the Good News*, sought to enunciate a clear, holistic vision to guide the Church’s mission of integral evangelization.

Pivotal words from this 1977 pastoral letter remain relevant today: “This is EVANGELIZATION: the proclamation, above all, of SALVATION from sin; the liberation from everything oppressive to man; the DEVELOPMENT of man in all his dimensions, personal and communitarian; and ultimately, the RENEWAL OF SOCIETY in all its strata through the interplay of the GOSPEL TRUTHS and man’s concrete TOTAL LIFE.... THIS IS OUR TASK. THIS IS OUR MISSION” (emphasis in original text).

7. Restoration of Democracy. An analysis of the story of the “bloodless revolution” of February 1986 and the roles played by Church people and Cardinal Sin is instructive. The overthrow of the Marcos regime was “a victory of *moral* values over the sheer physical force on which he had relied.” It signaled people’s determination not to shed Filipino blood. The revolution was a “movement for active non-violence which was promoted by Church-related groups.” However, basic social issues of wealth and

power that plagued the nation for generations remained. Many Filipinos still found themselves outside the mainstream of national social, political, and economic life.

Corazon C. Aquino served as Philippine president from 1986-1992. Aquino's main contribution was the reestablishment of a democratically functioning government. Difficult issues faced Aquino; yet, she guided the Filipino people to free and fair elections in May 1992 and the orderly transfer of power to President Fidel Ramos (1992-1998). Aquino, an "icon of integrity," died on August 1, 2009.

8. Emergence of Filipino Missionaries. A definite sign of a vibrant local Church is its mission outreach. In mid-2000 Catholic Filipino missionaries numbered 1,329 women and 206 men from 69 religious congregations serving in some 80 countries. The Catholic bishops established the Mission Society of the Philippines (1965). Maryknoll founded the Philippine Catholic Lay Mission (1977). Cardinal Sin established the Lorenzo Mission Institute (1987), whose goal is serving the Filipino-Chinese, communities of Chinese descent abroad, and China mission.

Aside from these recent groups founded in the Vatican II era, all the major religious societies and congregations of men and women continue to send some of their Filipino members to serve in overseas mission. One must note that a major local Church mission milestone was achieved in the 1991 month-long Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II); it provided a profound rationale and impetus for "renewed integral evangelization."

9. Implementation of Vatican II. The vision of the Second Vatican Council has taken root in the Philippine Church. The presence of strong Base Christian Communities (BECs) provides grass roots structures for spiritual, catechetical, ministerial, and social growth. Important strengths are present in this vision of Church: the inductive and experiential approach of theology; its inculturated social teaching; its spirituality of human development; its renewed ecclesiology and missiology; its concrete service to many Filipinos facing diverse dehumanizing social ills; its engagement in social issues in a non-partisan but active manner; its efforts to promote and practice non-

violent approaches to socio-political crises; its commitment to create structures of participation in Church and society.

The local Church also has its recent witnesses and martyrs (to mention only a few): Malaybalay diocesan priest Neri Satur (October 14, 1991), Bishop Benjamin de Jesus, OMI (February 4, 1997), Father Rhoel Gallardo, CMF (May 3, 2000), Father Benjamin Inocencio, OMI (December 28, 2000), and Scholastic “Ritchie” Fernando, SJ (October 17, 1996). Several foreign missionaries, especially those working in Mindanao, have also been murdered or deported over recent decades. The Philippine Church rejoices in its two canonized saints, Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod, both martyrs and foreign missionaries (Japan and Guam).

10. Emergence of a Genuine Local Church. One may validly assert that over the past five centuries an authentic local Church has emerged in the Philippines; undoubtedly, this is a wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit! This local faith-community exemplifies the vision propagated by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), which asserts that “the local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own” (FABC I: 12).

The FABC challenge to engage in a “triple dialogue” with the local people, their cultures, and their religions as a verified pathway to building an authentic local Church has been guiding Church leadership in this Vatican II era. This “incarnational approach” has proven to be effective in the Philippine context; it must continue to guide all the evangelization initiatives for the next many decades and even centuries. The Philippine Church constantly seeks to listen to “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Conclusion. Undeniably, the most significant local event of recent years was the January 15-19, 2015 pastoral visit of Pope Francis; he told the crowds that when he saw the destructive

effects of the 2013 typhoon on television, he decided to come to comfort his brothers and sisters. Affectionately nicknamed *Lolo Kiko* (Grandfather Francis) by the huge crowds, he won their hearts and souls. He emphatically asserted: “The poor are at the center of the Gospel, are at the heart of the Gospel; if we take away the poor from the Gospel, we cannot understand the whole message of Jesus Christ.” The most moving part of the papal visit was Pope Francis’ presence in Tacloban, the city hardest hit by the 2013 typhoon.

Thanking Pope Francis for his pastoral visit, Cardinal Tagle captured the people’s sentiments and mission commitment; he said: “Every Filipino wants to go with you—not to Rome—but to the peripheries, to the shanties, to prison cells, to hospitals, to the world of politics, finance, arts, sciences, culture, education and social communications. We will go to these worlds to bring the light of Jesus, Jesus who is the center of your pastoral visit and the cornerstone of the Church.”



James H. Kroeger, MM, has served mission in Asia (Philippines and Bangladesh) since 1970, working in parishes and serving mostly in the education-formation apostolate of seminarians, catechists, and lay leaders. Currently he teaches Christology, Ecclesiology, Missiology, and “Asian Theology” at Loyola School of Theology, East Asian Pastoral Institute, and Mother of Life Catechetical Center in Metro Manila. He has written extensively on Asian (FABC) and Philippine theology, mission, interfaith dialogue, and on the Second Vatican Council. His recent books include: *Go, Teach, Make Disciples* (CBCP-ECM and PMS-Philippines), *Exploring the Priesthood with Pope Francis* (ST PAULS – Manila); *Telling the San Jose Story: Historical Perspectives* (San Jose Seminary Alumni Association – Manila); *Becoming Missionary Disciples* (PMS – Manila); *A Vatican II Journey: Fifty Milestones and Walking in the Light of Faith* (ST PAULS – Manila); and *The Gift of Mission* (Orbis Books – Maryknoll, New York). He may be contacted at: jhkroeger@gmail.com

REPORTS



PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES - PHILIPPINES

World Mission Sunday Collection Fiscal Year March 01 - February 28

I. ARCHDIOCESES		2019	2020
1	CACERES	270,725.34	211,378.70
2	CAGAYAN DE ORO	1,296,037.90	258,363.07
3	CAPIZ	191,344.25	46,558.00
4	CEBU	651,716.56	527,100.73
5	COTABATO	125,149.25	19,025.58
6	DAVAO	631,530.35	314,917.45
7	JARO	550,806.33	140,165.44
8	LINGAYEN-DAGUPAN	300,000.00	300,000.00
9	LIPA	519,351.75	-
10	MANILA	6,645,238.90	467,356.85
11	NUEVA SEGOVIA	204,008.55	133,248.00
12	OZAMIS	113,493.57	51,090.00
13	PALO	253,639.61	85,585.00
14	SAN FERNANDO, PAMPANGA	892,968.85	44,003.50
15	TUGUEGARAO	10,000.00	6,777.00
16	ZAMBOANGA	256,499.95	79,573.75
II. DIOCESES			
1	ALAMINOS	141,456.00	26,294.00
2	ANTIPOLO	939,374.79	-
3	BACOLOD	154,956.95	93,876.70
4	BAGUIO	649,182.40	242,393.25
5	BALANGA	71,665.50	5,052.00
6	BANGUED	103,524.00	36,383.00
7	BAYOMBONG	185,846.75	7,000.00
8	BOAC	45,756.10	28,391.25
9	BORONGAN	42,758.00	26,717.00
10	BUTUAN	62,611.00	23,453.00
11	CABANATUAN	1,653,421.00	306,172.00
12	CALBAYOG	83,863.00	15,868.30
13	CATARMAN	84,737.77	24,223.00
14	CUBAO	1,358,391.72	83,081.25
15	DAET	-	26,840.10

II. DIOCESES			
16	DIGOS	526,499.65	95,713.75
17	DIPOLOG	164,802.19	49,633.00
18	DUMAGUETE	232,098.50	243,550.00
19	GUMACA	110,655.00	22,653.22
20	IBA	74,291.00	336,372.50
21	ILAGAN	42,793.74	19,300.99
22	ILIGAN	148,102.00	115,407.83
23	IMUS	654,975.00	366,537.34
24	IPIIL	32,400.00	6,045.95
25	KABANKALAN	84,147.50	22,738.25
26	KALIBO	56,361.95	15,463.15
27	KALOOKAN	184,173.00	26,764.80
28	KIDAPAWAN	59,969.38	29,888.42
29	LAOAG	96,561.90	5,827.80
30	LEGAZPI	103,136.28	52,155.90
31	LIBMANAN	42,100.00	17,000.25
32	LUCENA	858,530.46	178,584.00
33	MAASIN	249,107.07	44,729.05
34	MALAYBALAY	49,036.67	-
35	MALOLOS	976,807.00	345,786.66
36	MARBEL	196,943.70	73,289.95
37	MASBATE	54,126.00	32,982.30
38	MATI	347,580.00	115,607.88
39	MILITARY DIOCESE	25,000.00	4,315.00
40	NAVAL	33,743.00	16,400.00
41	NOVALICHES	229,457.55	43,310.00
42	PAGADIAN	56,744.34	14,334.23
43	PARAÑAQUE	1,174,650.32	-
44	PASIG	589,656.70	24,223.25
45	ROMBLON	-	38,237.60
46	SAN CARLOS, NEG. OCC.	135,820.75	73,838.50
47	SAN FERNANDO, LA UNION	130,851.56	29,827.93
48	SAN JOSE, ANTIQUE	233,248.58	84,286.35
49	SAN JOSE, NUEVA ECIIJA	84,686.25	15,000.00
50	SAN PABLO	733,685.05	322,983.00
51	SORSOGON	67,896.78	39,599.09
52	SURIGAO	65,159.85	24,953.50
53	TAGBILARAN	119,318.25	55,380.00
54	TAGUM	33,592.50	43,665.00
55	TALIBON	192,906.00	59,934.00
56	TANDAG	60,563.30	33,914.75

II. DIOCESES			
57	TARLAC	315,000.00	65,000.00
58	URDANETA	100,693.77	30,292.83
59	VIRAC	41,102.00	24,137.00
III. PRELATURES			
1	BASILAN	60,149.40	-
2	BATANES	110,048.00	75,187.50
3	INFANTA	383,444.84	127,426.50
4	MARAWI	-	24,490.00
IV. APOSTOLIC VICARIATE			
1	BONTOC-LAGAWE	278,201.20	418,425.95
2	CALAPAN	171,064.30	101,243.00
3	JOLO	-	-
4	PUERTO PRINCESA, PALAWAN	197,008.15	98,735.40
5	SAN JOSE, OCC. MINDORO	500,000.00	503,000.00
6	TABUK	151,137.00	41,928.45
7	TAYTAY, PALAWAN	169,810.00	-
TOTAL COLLECTIONS		30,279,893.57	8,280,989.74

LATE/ADDITIONAL REMITTANCE			
1	ANTIPOLO		12,742.00
2	BACOLOD		136,779.05
3	BAGUIO	75,390.36	
4	BATANES	110,148.00	
5	CEBU	575,695.64	
6	CUBAO	80,461.50	
7	DAET		130,000.00
8	DIGOS	44,603.00	11,926.50
9	JOLO		7,764.00
10	KALOOKAN	21,651.91	
11	MANILA	120,661.10	
12	MATI	56,070.72	
13	NOVALICHES	11,160.00	
14	PARAÑAQUE	6,412.25	
15	ROMBLON	50,080.00	
16	SAN FERNANDO, PAMPANGA	23,270.75	270,517.38
17	ZAMBOANGA	16,840.10	2,684.10
TOTAL LATE / ADDITIONAL COLLECTIONS		1,192,445.33	572,413.03
GRAND TOTAL COLLECTIONS		31,472,338.90	8,853,402.77

APPROVED PROJECTS

Subsidized by PMS Philippines

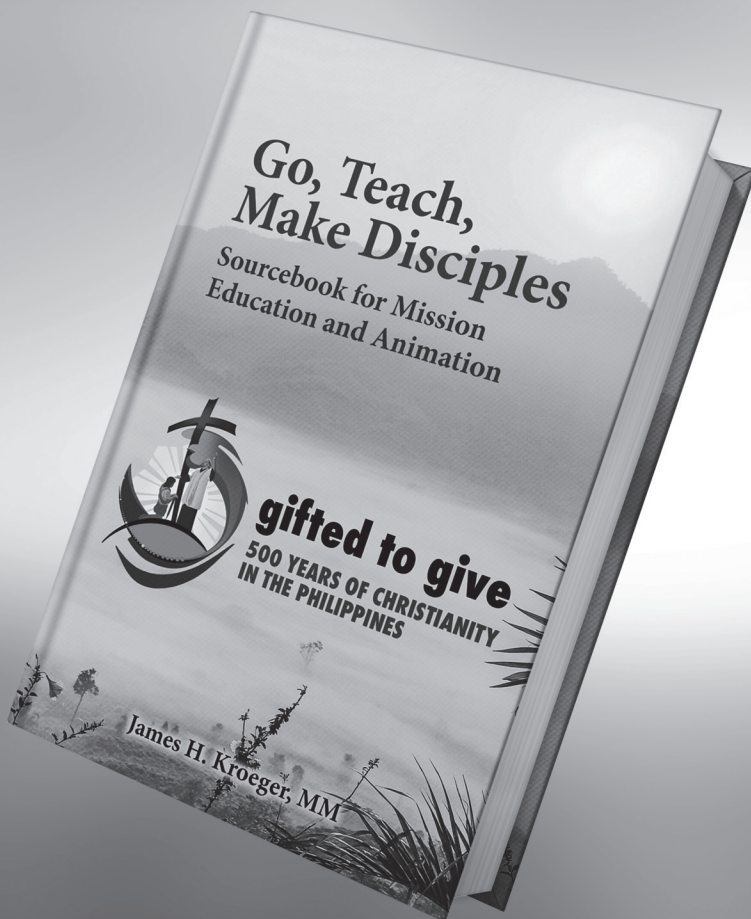
SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH Fiscal Year (March 01, 2020 - February 28, 2021)

ECCLESIASTICAL TERRITORY		PROJECT	AMOUNT (USD)
1	Apostolic Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe	*Ordinary Subsidy	\$ 31,000.00
2	Apostolic Vicariate of Calapan	*Ordinary Subsidy	\$ 31,000.00
		*Catechists' Subsidy	\$ 16,000.00
		Conference Hall Construction	\$ 25,000.00
3	Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo	*Ordinary Subsidy	\$ 31,000.00
		*Catechists' Subsidy	\$ 7,000.00
4	Apostolic Vicariate of Puerto Princesa	*Ordinary Subsidy	\$ 27,000.00
		*Catechists' Subsidy	\$ 25,000.00
		*Completion of Bahay Pari Retirement Home	\$ 50,000.00
5	Apostolic Vicariate of San Jose, Occidental Mindoro	*Ordinary Subsidy	\$ 31,000.00
		*Catechists' Subsidy	\$ 22,000.00
		*Purchase of a Vehicle for St. Joseph the Husband Parish, Paluan	\$ 12,000.00
		*Purchase of a Vehicle for St. Raphael the Archangel Parish, Lubang	\$ 15,000.00
6	Apostolic Vicariate of Tabuk	*Ordinary Subsidy	\$ 31,000.00
7	Apostolic Vicariate of Taytay	*Ordinary Subsidy	\$ 27,000.00
		*Creation of Basic Ecclesial Communities	\$ 3,000.00
8	Episcopal Conference of the Philippines	*Episcopal Commission on Social Communication: Training program to assess the digital communications situation of every diocese or local Church and produce analytics reports in pre and post-capacity-building intervention through education.	\$ 10,000.00
		*TV Maria Foundation Philippines <i>*SIGNIS Philippines: PRODUCTION of a documentary featuring different churches, devotion and their social services and development programmes.</i>	\$ 7,000.00
		*Formation gathering and activities on interreligious dialogue in the year 2020 in the Philippines	\$ 15,000.00
TOTAL			\$ 416,000.00

**FOR
SALE**

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*** Excluding freight charges**



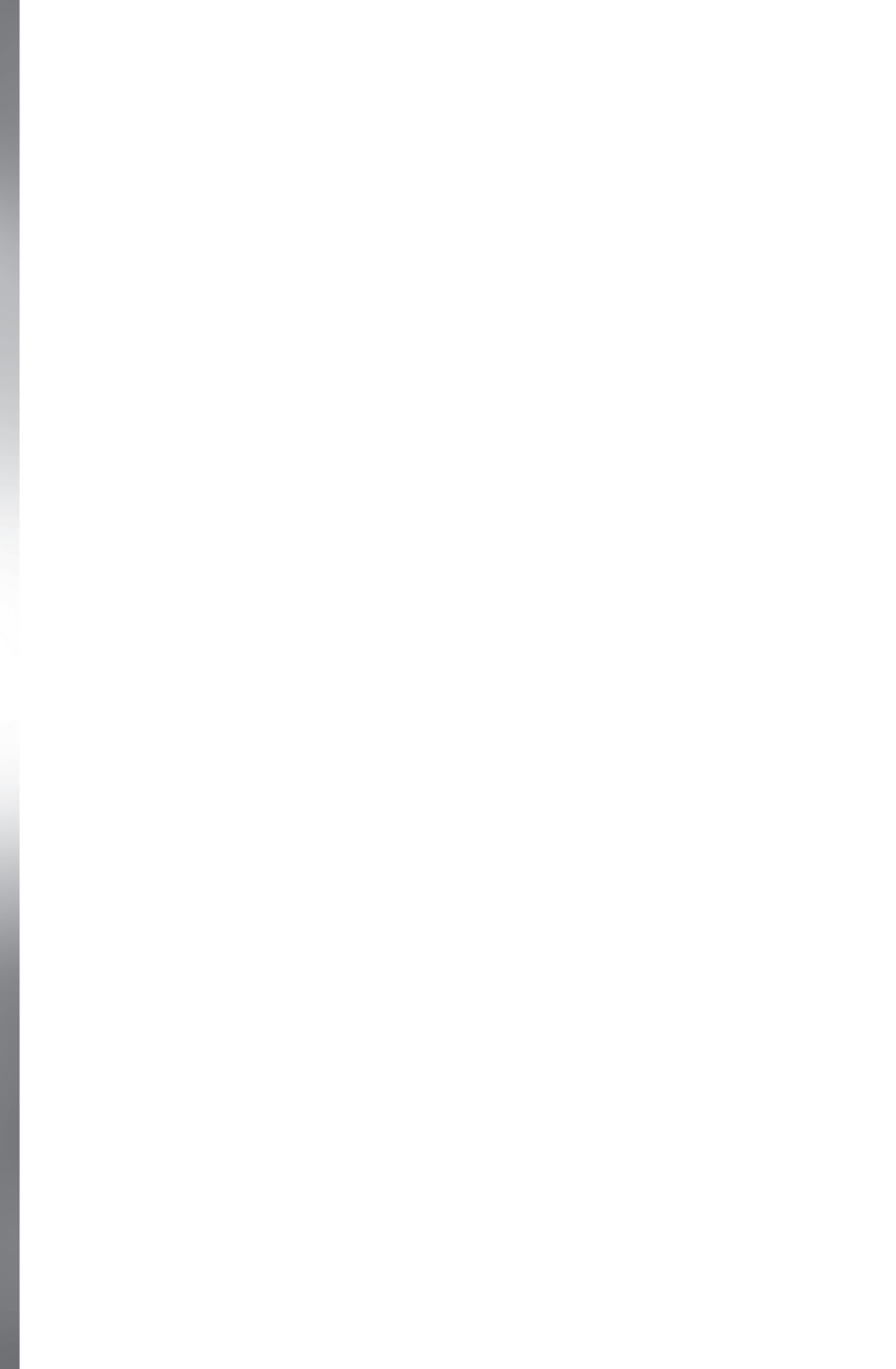
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(Globe) 0995-593-7814



THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

The **Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS)**, known in some countries as *Missio*, is a Catholic worldwide network of missionary action and cooperation that is under the canonical jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome (the Pope). These societies include: ► *The Society for the Propagation of the Faith*, ► *The Society of the Holy Childhood Association*, ► *The Society of Saint Peter the Apostle*, ► *The Missionary Union*.

Since 1922, PMS has been the Catholic Church's official support organization for overseas mission. It raises awareness and fosters prayer and cooperation throughout the whole Catholic Church, bringing the message of Christ to the world, especially in countries where Christianity is new, young, or poor. The societies care for and support the younger Churches until they are able to be self-sufficient. PMS exists through the generosity of Catholics.

At present, Archbishop Giovanni Pietro Dal Toso is the President of the Pontifical Mission Societies.



Pontifical Mission Societies - Philippines

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