



The Holy See

VESPERS FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE MISSIONARY MONTH

PAPAL CHAPEL

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Tuesday, 1st October 2019

[Multimedia]

In the parable we have heard, the Lord appears as a man who, before leaving on a journey, *calls* his servants and entrusts his property to them (cf. *Mt 25:14*). God has entrusted us with his greatest treasures: our own lives and the lives of others. He has entrusted any number of different gifts to each of us. These gifts, these talents, are not something to be stored in a safe; they are a true vocation: the Lord calls us to make our talents bear fruit, with boldness and creativity. God will ask us if we stepped forward and took risks, even losing face. This extraordinary Missionary Month should jolt us and motivate us to be *active in doing good*. Not notaries of faith and guardians of grace, but missionaries.

We become missionaries by living as witnesses: bearing witness by our lives that we have come to know Jesus. It is our lives that speak. Witness is the key word: a word with the same root as the word “martyr”. The martyrs are the primary witnesses of faith: not by their words but by their lives. They know that faith is not propaganda or proselytism: it is a respectful gift of one’s life. They live by spreading peace and joy, by loving everyone, even their enemies, out of love for Jesus. Can we, who have discovered that we are children of the heavenly Father, keep silent about the joy of being loved, the certainty of being ever precious in God’s eyes? That is a message that so many people are waiting to hear. And it is our responsibility. Let us ask ourselves this month: how good a witness am I?

At the end of the parable, the Lord describes the enterprising servant as “good and trustworthy”,

and the fearful servant as “wicked and lazy” (cf. vv. 21.23.26). Why is God so harsh with the servant who was afraid? What evil did he do? His evil was *not having done good*; he sinned by *omission*. Saint Albert Hurtado once said: “It is good not to do evil, but it is evil not to do good”. This is the sin of omission. This could be the sin of an entire life, for we have been given life not to bury it, but to make something of it; not to keep it for ourselves, but to give it away. Whoever stands with Jesus knows that we keep what we give away; we possess what we give to others. The secret for possessing life is to give it away. To live by omission is to deny our vocation: *omission* is the opposite of *mission*.

We sin by omission, that is, against mission, whenever, rather than spreading joy, we think of ourselves as victims, or think that no one loves us or understands us. We sin against mission when we yield to resignation: “I can’t do this: I’m not up to it”. How can that be? God has given you talents, yet you think yourself so poor that you cannot enrich a single person? We sin against mission when we complain and keep saying that everything is going from bad to worse, in the world and in the Church. We sin against mission when we become slaves to the fears that immobilize us, when we let ourselves be paralyzed by thinking that “things will never change”. We sin against mission when we live life as a burden and not as a gift, when we put ourselves and our concerns at the centre, and not our brothers and sisters who are waiting to be loved.

“God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7). He loves the Church on the go. But let us be attentive: if it is not on the go, it is not Church. The Church is meant for the road, meant to be on the move. A Church on the go, a missionary Church is a Church that does not waste time lamenting things that go wrong, the loss of faithful, the values of the time now in the past. A Church that does not seek safe oases to dwell in peace, but longs to be *salt of the earth and a leaven in the world*. For such a Church knows that this is her strength, that of Jesus himself: not social or institutional relevance, but humble and gratuitous love.

Today we begin the Missionary Month of October in the company of three “servants” who bore much fruit. Saint Therese of the Child Jesus shows us the way: she made prayer the fuel for missionary activity in the world. This is also the Month of the Rosary: how much are we praying for the spread of the Gospel and our conversion from omission to mission? Then there is Saint Francis Xavier, one of the great missionaries of the Church. He too gives us a jolt: can we emerge from our shell and renounce our comforts for the sake of the Gospel? Finally is the Venerable Pauline Jaricot, a labourer who supported the missions by her daily work: with the offerings that she made from her wages, she helped lay the foundations of the Pontifical Missionary Societies. Do we make a daily gift in order to overcome the separation between the Gospel and life? Please, let us not live a “sacristy” faith.

We are accompanied by a religious woman, a priest and a lay woman. They remind us that no one is excluded from the Church’s mission. Yes, in this month the Lord is also calling you, because you, fathers and mothers of families; you, young people who dream great things; you, who work in

a factory, a store, a bank or a restaurant; you who are unemployed; you are in a hospital bed... The Lord is asking you to be a gift wherever you are, and just as you are, with everyone around you. He is asking you not simply to go through life, but to give life; not to complain about life, but to share in the tears of all who suffer. Courage! The Lord expects great things from you. He is also expecting some of you to have the courage to set out and to go wherever dignity and hope are most lacking, where all too many people still live without the joy of the Gospel. "But must I go alone?" No, that is wrong. If we think about doing missionary work like business organizations, with a business plan, that is wrong. The Holy Spirit is the protagonist of our mission. Go with the Holy Spirit. The Lord will not leave you alone in bearing witness; you will discover that the Holy Spirit has gone before you and prepared the way for you. Courage, brothers and sisters! Courage, Mother Church! Rediscover your fruitfulness in the joy of mission!