

How We Fulfill Our Christian Destiny

Following are excerpts from a homily given by Pope John Paul II on the "motivation, condition and the strategy of the Church's missionary activity."

What is the first and ultimate motivation of this work?



Here is the first question. And the answer is a simple and peremptory one: the Church is missionary by the express will of God.

Jesus often speaks to the Apostles of their task, their mission, the reason for their choice: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."

Before ascending to Heaven, Jesus gives the Apostles, and through them the whole Church, the mission of evangelizing, in an official and decisive way: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." And the evangelist notes: "And they went forth and preached everywhere."

From that time the apostles and disciples of Christ began to travel over the roads of the earth, to overcome hardships and weariness, to meet gentiles and tribes, peoples and nations, to suffer to the extent of giving their lives, in order to proclaim the Gospel, because it is the will of God, and with regard to God the only decision is that of obedience and love.

St. Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy: "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The trust that saves is only Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, the Mediator between God and men, the one and definitive Revealer of man's super-natural destiny. Jesus gave the Church the mission of proclaiming the Gospel; every Christian takes part in this mission. Every Christian is a missionary by his very nature.

It is sometimes affirmed that it is not possible to impose the Gospel, and it is not possible to violate religious liberty, that it is, in fact, useless and illusory to proclaim the Gospel to those who already belong to Christ in an anonymous way owing to uprightness of heart. Paul VI already replied clearly as follows: "It would certainly be an error to impose something on the consciences of our brethren. But to propose to their consciences the truth of the Gospel and salvation in Jesus Christ, with complete clarity and with a total respect for the free options which it presents, far from being an attack on religious liberty, is fully to respect that liberty, which is offered the choice of a way that even non-believers consider noble and uplifting...The respectful presentation of Christ and his Kingdom is more than the evangelizer's right; it is his duty. It is

likewise the right of his fellowmen to receive from him the proclamation of the Good News of salvation.

These are very serious words, but above all illuminating and encouraging, which state clearly once more what is God's positive will and our responsibility as Christians.

But let us ask ourselves a second question: what is the essential condition for missionary work? It is unity in doctrine.

Before leaving this world, Jesus prayed as follows: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

St. Paul wrote anxiously to his disciple Timothy: "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all."

In fact, if unity in faith is lacking, who and what is proclaimed? How is it possible to be credible, especially when the doctrine is so mysterious and the morality so demanding? Differences and doctrinal conflicts create only confusion and finally disappointment. In such an essential and delicate matter as the content of the Gospel, it is not possible to be overconfident, or superficial, or possibilist, inventing theories and setting forth hypotheses. Evangelization must have as its characteristic unity in faith and in discipline, and therefore love of truth.

Let us meditate on the well-balanced and profound words of Paul VI: "Every evangelizer is expected to have a reverence for truth, especially since the truth that he studies and communicates is none other than revealed truth and hence, more than any other, a sharing in the first truth which is God himself. The preacher of the Gospel will therefore be a person who, even at the price of personal renunciation and suffering always seeks the truth that he must transmit to others. He never betrays or hides the truth out of a desire to please men, in order to astonish or to shock, nor for the sake of originality or a desire to make an impression. He does not refuse truth. He does not obscure revealed truth by being too idle to search for it, or for the sake of his own comfort, or out of fear. He does not neglect to study it. He serves it generously, without making it serve him.

Let us thank Paul VI for these clear indications, and at the same time let us pray fervently that everyone will study, know and proclaim the truth and only the truth, docile to the authentic Magisterium of the Church, because certainty and clarity are the indispensable qualities of Evangelization.

Finally, here is the last question: what is the strategy of missionary work? For this question, too, the answer is a simple one: love!

The only and indispensable strategy for missionary work is precisely deep, personal, convinced, ardent love of Jesus Christ!

Let us recall the joyful exclamation of St. Theresa of Lisieux: "My vocation is love!...In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be love...and so I will be everything!" It must be so for us too!

Love is intrepid and courageous: Jesus is still unknown to three-quarters of mankind! The Church therefore needs, so many, willing missionaries, men and women, to proclaim the Gospel! You boys and girls: be attentive to the voice of God calling! Stupendous ideals of charity, generosity and dedication are in front of you and call upon you! Life is noble and great only to the extent that it is given! Be fearless! Supreme joy lies in love without claims, in the pure giving of charity to brothers!

Love is docile and confident in the action of "grace." It is the Holy Spirit that penetrates souls and transforms peoples. The difficulties are always immense, and particularly today the faithful themselves, involved in present-day history, are tempted by atheism, secularism, moral autonomy. Absolute confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit is therefore necessary. Therefore the Christian in his missionary work is patient and joyful, even if he has to sow in tears, accepting the cross and maintaining the spirit of the Beatitudes.

Finally, love is ingenious and constant, exercising itself in the various types of missionary apostolate: the apostolate of example, of prayer, of suffering, of charity, taking advantage of all the initiatives and means proposed.

I cannot, however, forget some actual situations, which make the missionary duty of the whole Church and of all of us who form her, more compelling today. There are various forms of anti-evangelization in progress which seek to oppose radically the message of Christ: the elimination of all transcendence and of all responsibility for the afterlife; ethical autonomy released from every natural and revealed moral law; hedonism considered as the one, satisfying system of life; and, in so many Christians, a weakening of spiritual fervor, a giving way to a worldly outlook, a gradual acceptance of the erroneous opinions of laicism and social and political immanentism.

Let us always keep in St. Paul's cry: "Caritas Christi urget nos!" (The love of Christ spurs us on!)

The Apostle's ardent exclamation takes on particular eloquence and causes particular solicitude in our times. It is the missionary imperative that must move all Christians, dioceses, parishes and the various communities. Love of Christ urges us to bear witness, to announce, proclaim the Good News, to everyone and in spite of everything!

Precisely in these times you must be witnesses and missionaries of truth: do not be afraid! Love of Christ must drive you to be strong and resolute, because "if God is for us, who is against us?" No one, in fact, can "separate us from the love of Christ!"

Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

Advent: How Should We Prepare?

Sunday's Readings:— (R3) Lk. 3:10-18. (R1) Zep. 3:14-18. (R2) Phil. 4:4-7.

Joy is the theme of next Sunday's readings. They abound with joyful words and expressions: "Shout for joy," "sing joyfully," "be glad," "exult," "rejoice," etc.



We might ask ourselves why this call to joy? Can it be we tend toward sadness and discouragement as naturally as lawns tend to spawn weeds? We need to be reminded to be glad! Strange, isn't it?

But what is the basis for Christian joy — for gladness?

It can never be repeated enough that God is not waiting for some sign of virtue or special effort on our part before He will love us or come into our lives. God's love is a free gift that comes to us with no strings attached. This is good news. This is the foundation of Christian joy. We need not deeds to draw God to us. He comes of His own initiative. He seeks us even when we do not seek Him. God so loved the world that He sent His Son. He loves us. Therefore rejoice!

Advent celebrates the expectation for that coming. I have often had to recommend certain families in my parish as fit to adopt a baby. What joyful expectation I have seen in the faces of the expectant couple. How they wait! How they pray! How they hope! They talk constantly of the baby to come. They think of the baby. Then the baby comes! Up until then, the baby was only a word. Now

it is no longer a word, it is a "word made flesh." It dwells in the family, and the family exults, cries out with joy and gladness.

Advent prepares us for the Incarnation — God's word becoming flesh in the human family. Sin had gouged a rift between heaven and earth. To span it, one bridge was needed — but this bridge needed to touch the shores of both heaven and earth. So One Person of the Holy Trinity — the eternal Son of God, the Word of God, possessing the divine nature — took flesh in the sanctuary of a Virgin's womb. With His divine nature, He reached the highest walls of heaven; with his human nature He touched the distant earth; and in the oneness of His divine Personhood, He could link heaven and earth together. What He could do, He did on the cross — so that now we can walk over on a crossbeam bridge. Therefore, rejoice!

The crowds asked John, "What ought we to do?"

We might also ask ourselves, "What ought we

to do to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord?"

"What ought we to do?"

Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

Remember Paul was in prison when he wrote those words. So he wasn't speaking about some superficial kind of joy, like the silly grin on the face of the Cheshire cat. Paul was writing of a joy deep down within us — a joy that does not depend on physical circumstances, but springs from the knowledge that the Lord is near us. And because nothing can ever separate us from the love of God — neither life nor death, nor suffering — therefore "Rejoice in the Lord always!"

He has come, He will come, but He comes still — at every Mass! He comes even when we don't go to Mass. What ought we to do? Reverse Advent: come to Him at Mass. But come with hearts full of expectancy and hope, and we shall share in the joy of the Lord.

Eastern Churches Share Heritage, Pope Tells Vatican

Vatican City (RNS)— Pope John Paul II said that the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches share a common heritage and are working together to end their centuries-old divisions.

The pope, speaking to 20,000 people in St. Peter's Square at his Sunday noon blessing Dec. 2, commented on his recent three-day visit to Turkey and his meeting with Orthodox church leaders there.

"I want to express joy for the visit I made to the church of Constantinople and Patriarch Demetrios I on the solemn feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, who is the patron of that church," he said. The two religious leaders jointly announced the formation of an international theological

commission to deal with such barriers to reunification as papal authority, different attitudes toward divorce and priestly celibacy, and other matters that have long separated the two churches.

The Pope acknowledged that reunification between Rome and Constantinople would be achieved "at a time known only to God."

He noted, however, that the Western church had inherited "many things in the field of liturgy and spiritual tradition and in the juridical order" from the Orthodox churches in the East.

John Paul II, in his short reign of just over a year, has made journeys to the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ireland, the United States, Poland and now Turkey.