

# Hearts on fire, feet walking along the path to Hospitality



**Missions Week  
16–22 October 2023**



**For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.**

# Hospitaller Mission Week

16 to 22 October 2023

## Monday 16 October

Social divisions, poverty, forced migration... all these are continuing to grow. It seems impossible to stop the deterioration of the environment caused by the models for producing goods and lifestyles propagated by globalising consumer capitalism. War continues unabated and are even breaking out in places where they seemed to have disappeared as an alternative means of conflict resolution. Global politics has not matured sufficiently to govern the world in the common interests of humanity.

We have been reminded of how structural injustice is giving rise to divisions and discord. The challenge facing the mission we have been given is to take effective steps to foster fraternity and peace. **Developing opportunities to encounter others in different cultural environments where we can find meaning in our lives therefore becomes essential, if we are to move forward.** The 'encounter' is the cultural instrument to help overcome injustice, transform society and reconcile us as individuals and peoples, and the environment in which life is lived.

It is through cultures that individuals and peoples give and discover a meaning in their lives. **The Vatican Council's Apostolic Constitution *Gaudium et spes* provides a clear description of what is included in the word 'culture'.** It explains the nature and importance of cultural pluralism in the past, present and future of humanity.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is presented as the light for all human cultures. Jesus was born, grew up and lived in a particular culture, yet his Gospel transcends all cultural boundaries. He and his disciples understood, not without effort, that the Word of God is addressed to every human being and every human culture. It is possible to embody the Gospel in each and every human culture. Like the leaven that penetrates the dough, the Gospel imbues cultures and opens up the possibility of an having an encounter with God, with our brothers and sisters and with nature. All cultures need this healing encounter in order to grow in humanity. Faiths are an important part of the sense, the symbols and the meanings given to the life of a human group through culture.

Human relations are historical and therefore dynamic and changing. Cultures consequently move, and do not exist by themselves, nor are they part of a kind of social genetics that is passed on unchanging from one generation to the next. A culture is both personal and shared. **Each person, unique and unrepeatabe as they are, identifies themselves through culture.** At the same time, it is a socially shared identity with other human beings, each of whom is also unique and unrepeatabe.

Multiculturalism recognises cultural diversity as human enrichment, favouring coexistence between different cultures and promoting their preservation. **Multiculturalism is a complex and fruitful experience of encountering culturally diverse human beings.** At the same time, it reflects the necessary tension between the local roots of each human being or social group and the universal outlook that generates global identity and universal citizenship.

La Civiltà Cattolica

**Tuesday 17 October**

### **Challenges to the mission of the Church**

Mgr Mario Iceta has said that **the presentations of this Missiology Week will try to respond to the main challenges facing the mission of the Church today**, in a time marked by pandemics and war. "In the paper '*The people of God, a migrant people*', we see that one characteristic of our world today is the movement of people, the great migratory movements that are changing the configuration of societies. Another communication, entitled '*The frontiers of the mission ad gentes and the mission inter gentes*', we read that today's societies are not homogeneous, and that they are intermingled with others, and this is also a second characteristic of today's societies that requires us to reflect, to go deeper".

### **Bearing witness as the best pedagogy for the mission**

Lastly, Mgr Mario Iceta pointed out the nature of the **pedagogy we need today for the mission** and the ways we need to take the Gospel to others. "**The Pope is always telling us that it is not by proselytising, but by 'contagion'**, by witness, by attraction, by showing the pathways that lie within the human heart. So what might the new pedagogies be, and the new type of pedagogy that the other cultural configurations require to be able to fully and joyfully receive the seed of Christ."

He has also told us that **it is a very important challenge to awaken our missionary awareness of being heralds and witnesses of Our Lord**, and see how we can acquire and shape this awareness, **not only for the mission ad gentes, but for our own daily witness in our normal daily lives.** "Pope Francis again tell us that 'it is not that your life has a mission, but your life is mission'. We must therefore awaken that missionary awareness that was born and grew in our hearts from the day of our baptism, that day we were made Our Lord's disciples. To be with Him, to learn from Him, to acquire His mind, to allow ourselves to be transformed by Him and by the gift of His Spirit. At the same time, being with Him and sending them out to preach is not something that comes afterwards, but is the other side of the same coin, the disciple is always a missionary.

That is why **we must rekindle this missionary awareness**, as the Second Vatican Council said in Dei Verbum, and just as Our Lord made the Kingdom present through his words and deeds, our lives must be do likewise and bear witness to Our Lord's presence in us, humbly like little insignificant servants, as the Gospel says, but also as that leaven in the dough that is capable of leavening a civilisation and a society.

## **The joy of being Our Lord's witnesses**

Bishop Mario **has sent a message to all the missionaries in the world.** "A very simple sentence spoken by Our Lord, "I am with you always; yes, to the end of time," and His words in the Gospel, "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven," **are for us a source of healthy pride in our missionaries, we are with them, we admire their work we want to accompany them, support them, help them in everything they need** and help them to feel they are in good company, animated and by all the people of God and of course above all encouraged and sustained by the power of the gift of the Spirit, who is the One who sends them, sustains them, and who fills them with peace and hope".

Mgr Mario Iceta. Bishop of Burgos.

## **Wednesday 18 October**

### **Missionary synodality**

Missionary synodality takes a systemic approach to our pastoral work: we are not simply invited to take into account some aspects of our existence and mission, but we are called to adopt an alternative and prophetic way of living in the world and working together as Church. Our young people have asked us insistently for this fraternal and missionary conversion, where moving forward together is already a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God in our midst. Because it is precisely on the journey together that people are healed, and converted.

Synodality, if we think about it, is a game between three parties. The explanatory note on "missionary synodality" in *Cristus Vivit* spells it out clearly: synodality does not mean we are not pursuing some democratic version of the Church, nor are we questioning authority in the Church. What it does mean, on the positive side, is that synodality brings into play an authentic vision of the Church as the "people of God" called to "communion with a missionary approach".

Here is the game between three parties: all of us, that is to say, all the members of God's people who have received the gift of the Spirit in baptism, some of us who have been called to the service of authority in the local Church, and one of us – the successor of Peter – who has been called to preside in charity for the good of one and all.

### **Let us move forward with courage and conviction**

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realises that listening "is more than simply hearing".(12) It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he "says to the Churches" (Rev 2:7) [...]

Synodality, as a constitutive dimension of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand that "Church and Synod are synonymous", as St. John Chrysostom put it, since the Church is nothing more than the "walking together" of God's flock along the roads of history to meet Christ the Lord, we shall also understand that within the Church no-one can be "elevated" above the

others. On the contrary, in the Church it is necessary for some to "lower themselves" in order to be at the service of their brothers and sisters along the way.

This is the only direction we must take, because it is precisely the path of synodality that God is expecting from the Church of the third millennium!

*Pope Francis' programmatic speech, taken up in the Final Document in n. 118.*

**Thursday 19 October**

### **Consecrated and sent for mission**

Source: Misioneros de habla hispana.

All of us, members of the Church and driven by the same Spirit, are consecrated, in different ways, to be sent forth: by baptism we are entrusted with the Church's own mission. We are all called and we are all obliged to evangelise, and this front-line mission given to all Christians, must be a real daily "spur" and a constant concern of our lives.

It is wonderful and stimulating to recall the life of the early Christian communities when they opening up to the world which they viewed, for the first time, with new eyes: they viewed it as people who understood that the love of God had to be translated into service for the good of their brothers and sisters. Recalling their life experience also leads me to reaffirm the central idea of the recent encyclical: "Mission renews the Church, strengthens faith and the Christian identity, gives new enthusiasm and new motivation. Faith is strengthened by giving it" (n. 2). Yes, mission offers us the extraordinary opportunity to rejuvenate and beautify the Bride of Christ and, at the same time, it enables us to experience a faith that renews and strengthens Christian life, precisely because it is a gift.

But the faith which renews life and mission that strengthens the faith cannot be hidden treasures or exclusive experiences of isolated Christians. There is nothing further from mission as Christians closed-in on themselves: if their faith is solid, it cannot failed to grow and it must open itself to the mission.

If all members of the Church are consecrated for mission, all are co-responsible for bringing Christ to the world with their own personal contribution. Participation in this right and duty is called "missionary cooperation" and is necessarily rooted in holiness of life: only by being grafted onto Christ, like the shoots on the vine (cf. Jn 15:5), shall we bear much fruit. Christians who live their faith and observe the commandment of love expands the horizons of their action to embrace all people through spiritual cooperation, made up of prayer, sacrifice and witness which enabled St Thérèse of the Child Jesus to be proclaimed co-patroness of the missions, even though she was never sent on mission.

Prayer must accompany the journey and the work of the missionaries so that divine grace can make the proclamation of the Word fruitful. Sacrifice, accepted in faith and suffered with Christ, has salvific value. The witness of the Christian life is a silent but effective form of preaching the Word of God. People of today, apparently indifferent to the search for the Absolute, actually

feel their need for it and are attracted and impressed by the saints who reveal it by the way they live their lives.

Spiritual cooperation in missionary work must aim above all at promoting missionary vocations. For this reason, I once again invite today's young men and women to reply "yes" if the Lord calls them to follow Him with a missionary vocation. There is no more radical and courageous choice than this: to abandon everything to dedicate themselves to the salvation of their brothers and sisters who have not received the inestimable gift of faith in Christ.

## **Friday 20**

Pope Francis: I would like a mission-oriented Church, where we walk together to evangelise

Conference: "Pastors and the laity called to walk together".

The path that God is indicating to the Church is precisely that of practising communion more intensely and tangibly, and walking together. He is inviting the Church to move beyond acting autonomously or like parallel railway tracks which never meet: clergy separated from the laity, consecrated men and women separated from the clergy and the faithful, the intellectual faith of some élites separated from the people's popular faith, the Roman Curia separated from the particular Churches, the bishops separated from the priests, the young separated from the elderly, married couples and families with little involvement in the life of the communities, charismatic movements separated from the parishes, to name but a few. This is the most serious temptation facing the Church today. There is still a long way to go for the Church to live as one body, as a true People, united by the one faith in Christ Our Saviour, animated by the same sanctifying Spirit and oriented towards the same mission of proclaiming the merciful love of God the Father.

This last aspect is decisive: *a People united in mission*. And this is the insight we must always guard: the Church is the *holy and faithful People of God*, according to what [\*Lumen Gentium\*](#) affirms in nn. 8 and 12; it is not populism or *élitism*, it is the holy and faithful People of God. This is not something we learn theoretically, it is understood by living it. Then it is explained, the best we can, but if it is not lived it cannot be explained. A People united in mission. The origin and ultimate goal of Synodality is mission, it is born of mission and is oriented towards mission. Let us remind ourselves of how it began, when Jesus sent out the apostles and they returned back very happy, because demons "fled from them"; it was the mission that created this ecclesial sense. For sharing the mission brings pastors and laity closer together, gives them a common purpose, manifests the complementarity of their various different charisms and, therefore, arouses in everyone the desire to walk together. We see this in Jesus himself, who from the beginning surrounded himself with a group of disciples, men and women, and performed his public ministry with them. But never alone. And when he sent out the Twelve to proclaim the Kingdom of God, he sent them out "two by two". We see the same in St Paul, who always evangelised together with other co-workers, also lay people and married couples; never alone. And so it was at times of great renewal and missionary momentum in the history of the Church. Pastors and lay faithful together. Not isolated individuals, but an evangelising People, the holy faithful People of God.

## **21 Saturday**

### **Witness and proclamation**

The link between Christian witness and the explicit proclamation of the Gospel is perhaps best expressed by the words attributed to St Francis of Assisi: "preach the Gospel all the time, if necessary using words". As Paul VI wrote, "the first means of evangelisation is the witness of an authentically Christian life" (41); and the DP document insists that proclamation "is the summit and the centre of evangelisation" (10). Witness and proclamation go hand in hand. "Action without words is mute", wrote David Bosch; "words without action are empty".

The witness of the church is of at least four types. On the first level, there is the witness of individual Christians: famous ones like Albert Schweitzer or Mother Teresa, or ordinary ones, such as parents, teachers, or workers. Secondly, there is the witness of the Christian community: its vitality, its welcoming spirit, its prophetic or counter-cultural attitude on certain issues. Thirdly, we can speak of the institutional witness of the church in its schools, hospitals, social services, and orphanages. Finally, there is the "community witness" of Christians from different traditions living and working together in continuous dialogue. As the Manila Manifesto also puts it: "If the task of evangelisation is ever to be accomplished, we must accomplish it together".

John Paul II spoke of the express proclamation of Jesus' lordship and his vision of the Kingdom of God as "the permanent priority in mission" (RM 44). However, this prophetic proclamation has to be made in a climate of dialogue, taking into account the situation of those to whom the good news is addressed. It can never be done apart from witness, for "no matter how eloquent our verbal proclamation, people will always believe first with their own eyes". Moreover, proclamation must always be an invitation, respecting the freedom of the hearers. "The church proposes," insisted John Paul II, "it does not impose anything" (RM 39).

Missiology today is a very exciting field of reading and study. In a globalised and globalising world where people are on the move, religions are experiencing a renaissance, multicultural societies are proliferating... In a world threatened by violence and terrorism... theology and pastoral care are recognising that they need to be fully missiological. Mission is not something that a few special people do in exotic lands. It is not something distant. On the contrary, it is the daily reality of the church today. Missiology has become the everyday reality of a theology and pastoral ministry that seeks to serve the church in a credible manner in the contemporary church.

(A paraphrase of the words of Stephen Bennett Bevans, SVD, priest and theologian).

## **Sunday 22nd**

### **Christian mission in the 21st century**

Xavier Pikaza

This is a good time for the bearers of the Gospel to recover the experience that lies at the heart of Jesus' mission narratives (cf. Mt 10 et seq.), recounting that he sent his disciples out with no other power than his word and the gift of his human presence (the gift of healing). He sent them out radically naked, with no power other than the power of believing persons, to share life with

those who would welcome them, without imposing structures, dogmas or ready-made truths on them.

Well, today we can find ourselves facing a special time of ecclesial emergence, in the key of the Gospel. The collapse of earlier forms and structures is allowing us to open up the message of Jesus in all directions, so that believers in every culture and place can express it as they wish, creating their own church, in dialogue with Christians of other churches and cultures.

We no longer want to convert the "unbelievers", nor to extend the present institutions of the church throughout the globe (as if we had the answer to all problems), but to offer the witness of the Kingdom, with a narrative and not a demonstrative word, with an example of fraternal solidarity and Easter celebration, which brings together the various groups of Christians in the form of communion. We want to offer the great treasure of Jesus, and we have to do it in a humble and generous way, because a treasure that is imposed becomes an obligation, while truth that is demonstrated becomes banality or media dictatorship. In this context we can and must offer an active missionary witness, undoubtedly assuming the structures of the ecclesial order, but generously overflowing them.

Certainly, the church has done an admirable job of globalisation with those past structures, so that it could be said to have been the first worldwide system in terms of law and sacred administration. But this triumph as a system has become a great weakness: the church has run the risk of understanding unity as uniformity, and communion in Christ as a sacred imposition, as a dictatorship where everything is imposed from above, without enabling individuals and communities to express the gospel in a creative way, based on their own cultural and social choices.

What matters is not mere external tolerance. Tolerance without solidarity and personal communication ends up being an experience of death. Therefore what really matters is the capacity to create life: that men and women may discover themselves as being enriched by God's gift (by his Presence), to enable them to expand and share it, opening up a pathway of humanity, in this age threatened by death.

The old paradigm of a sacral Christianity, tightly focused on its dogmatic truths and led by a hierarchy that presented itself as a sign of the Christ of glory was beautiful, but it has now ended. That is why the current structure of the Catholic Church, culminating in the pyramid of the hierarchy, does not seem the most appropriate way of expressing the experience of Jesus and of expanding a way of life of communion and tolerance. It is not to say that it was false or lacking in values. But what has happened is that it seems to have lost its capacity to announce the Kingdom of Jesus in the new period of history. It can and must continue to carry out its function for a time, but the waters of life and of the Gospel are flowing in other directions. This is why new models of communication and Christian faith are necessary and are emerging (perhaps they have already emerged).

But beyond this church-system, a church that is free in Jesus is rising in triumph, a church that is founded on the grace of Easter and is expressed in the form of creative joy and free communication, open to all men and women.

Xavier Pikaza, theologian and philosopher



