

Year A 29th Sun OT (2020) Mission Sunday)

When I used to preach mission appeals on a regular basis, I would use the following story:

A young man in Papua New Guinea wanted to get a new phone but didn't have enough money saved up. Well, in PNG the custom is that you don't ask anyone for something unless you do them a favor first. The young man knew that his parents wanted to put in a new garden on a section of their land that had become overgrown. So he decided to ask his father if he could clear the land for them (figuring that when he finished he would approach his dad for the money he needed).

His father accepted his offer. So the young man got his tools, cut the overgrown grass, cut down the brush with his bush knife (machete), and began clearing the piece of ground for the new garden. For the first couple of days everything went as planned. But right in the middle of what was supposed to be the new garden he found a big rock. He went and got a shovel and a crowbar, dug around the rock and tried levering it out. He went and a sledgehammer to try to break the rock into smaller pieces. No go. Then he built a fire on top of the rock with the brush he had cut, figuring to heat up the rock, then pour cold water on the heated rock to see if that would split it. Again, no go. (He could see his smart phone disappearing.)

After about a week of trying, he went see his father. He told his father that he had cut the grass and brush, had dug up part of the ground for the garden, but had run into this big rock right in the middle, and no matter what he tried, he couldn't budge it. "Papa, I've done everything I could think of to move that rock, but I can't move it."

His father laughed and replied, "Son, you haven't tried everything. You forgot to ask me to help you." With their combined strength they moved the rock, and the garden was ready for planting." (And, yes, the young man got his new phone.)

Why do I use this story?

Today is World Mission Sunday. I used to think that I became a real missionary when I was **sent** to serve in Papua New Guinea. But I soon learned that your vocation and mine as a missionaries started when we were baptized. We are all **sent**.

This is what it means to be a missionary.

To love Jesus, to love the faith, and to want to bring that faith to others, even in the most dire of circumstances.

This is what it means to have a mission — this is what it means to be **sent**.

And, most challenging of all: this is what all of us are called to do.

Pope Francis writes:

The mission that God entrusts to each one of us leads us from fear and introspection to a renewed realization that we find ourselves precisely when we give ourselves to others.

*In the sacrifice of the cross, where the mission of Jesus is fully accomplished (cf. Jn 19:28-30), God shows us that his love is for each and every one of us (cf. Jn 19:26-27). He asks us to be personally willing to be sent, because he himself is Love, love that is always "on mission", always reaching out in order to give life. Out of his love for us, God the Father sent his Son Jesus (cf. Jn 3:16). Jesus is the Father's Missionary: his life and ministry reveal his total obedience to the Father's will (cf. Jn 4:34; 6:38; 8:12-30; Heb 10:5-10). Jesus, crucified and risen for us, draws us in turn into his mission of love, and with his Spirit which enlivens the Church, he makes us his disciples and **sends** us on a mission to the world and to its peoples.*

"The mission, the 'Church on the move', is not a programme, an enterprise to be carried out by sheer force of will. It is Christ who makes the Church go out of herself. In the mission of evangelization, you move because the Holy Spirit pushes you, and carries you". God always loves us first and with this love comes to us and

calls us. Our personal vocation comes from the fact that we are sons and daughters of God in the Church, his family, brothers and sisters in that love that Jesus has shown us. All, however, have a human dignity founded on the divine invitation to be children of God and to become, in the sacrament of Baptism and in the freedom of faith, what they have always been in the heart of God.

*The very name of the liturgy we celebrate right now, the Mass, is drawn from the same root word as mission. "Missa." It means "to be sent." **At the end of this Mass, we are sent into the world, to bring Christ into the world, to "go in peace, glorifying the Lord by our lives," to bring a message of hope and freedom to a world that is often imprisoned.*** (Pope Francis message for Mission Sunday 2020.

There's a story about the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven. When the grand welcome ceremony was over, the Archangel Gabriel approached Jesus to resolve his doubts. He said, "I know that only very few in Palestine are aware of the great work of human salvation you have accomplished through your suffering, death and resurrection. But the whole world should know and appreciate it and become your disciples, acknowledging you as their Lord and Savior. What is your plan of action?" Jesus answered, "I have told all my Apostles to tell other people about me and preach my message through their lives. That's all." "Suppose they don't do that," Gabriel responded. "What's your Plan B?" Jesus replied, "I have no other plan; I am counting on them."

On this World Mission Sunday, the Church reminds us that Jesus is counting on each one of us to make him known loved and accepted by others around us.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" "Here I am," I said; "send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)