

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
(Isaiah 45:1.4-6 / Matthew 22:15-21)  
22.10.2017

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate Mission Sunday. It is Pope Pius XI who, ninety-one years ago, set aside a Sunday in October in order to give an annual opportunity to all Christians throughout the world to pray for missionaries and to make an offering for the missions and Christian communities in need.

Obviously we pray for and support those who have left their families and homelands to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. But the mission also belongs to each one of us who have been baptised in Christ and are called to bear witness to Jesus, making him known wherever we are. On this Mission Sunday we are all invited to renew our commitment to the missionary dimension of our baptismal vocation.

Today's gospel passage invites us **“to give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God”**. This verse has to be understood correctly. It is not a guideline for Church-State relations. It does not invite us to keep religion and politics strictly separate. On the contrary, this verse is about the kingdom of God. It invites us to live our daily lives keeping an eye – and even both our eyes – fixed on the gospel seeing it as a reference for our lives, as “the” reference for our life. We are invited to refer to the Christian revelation as a means of discernment to help us to live our lives in accord with the gospel. In the perspective of Mission Sunday, this gospel verse should help us to live our missionary vocation in today's world in the right perspective, that is to say in an open, loving and respectful way, in a spirit of solidarity and communion, but without confusion, with our conscience deeply rooted in the gospel. Let me explain.

We live in Ireland. Ireland is no longer Christendom, that is to say a country in which all inhabitants are Christian. On the contrary, Ireland is a multifaceted society made up of people from different cultures, belonging to different Christian denominations, to different religions and even people without any religious affiliation at all. We cannot impose our gospel values to the Irish society. That would be abusive. We have to respect the legitimate differences of each one of the inhabitants of Ireland. We have to respect others without imposing our point of view and even our faith upon them. Proselytism should not be on our agenda.

But, at the same time, we have to be ready to give an account of our faith to those who ask for it. Beyond that, our lives are meant to reflect our Christian faith by our example of love, respect, service and forgiveness for all our brothers and sisters in humanity. We have to be present in every social debate, making it known where we stand in faith and following the voice of our conscience. We are called to respect others but also to respect ourselves. Our faith in God and in Christ is a gift that we have to receive and share. We have to expose and propose our faith without imposing it. At the end of the day, everyone should be able to live according to his or her enlightened conscience.

Let us come back to our missionary vocation. Our baptismal vocation implies that we live our faith to the full. Those who look at us should discern the presence of the Lord with us. The Lord is on our left, his right hand on our shoulder as is depicted on the famous icon of Christ standing beside St Menas. This vision of things should be the foundation of our baptismal missionary work, a missionary endeavour accomplished through the concrete reality of our lives before being made known through any form of preaching or teaching.

The presence of the Lord by our side is also the teaching of the psalms:

“I keep the Lord ever in my sight:

since He is at my right hand, I shall stand firm...

Lord, at your right hand happiness for ever.” (Ps 15)

Or again “Your right hand holds me fast...” (Ps 62)

The Lord is not only beside us; the Lord is also within us. The Holy Spirit dwells within us. The Father and the Son also dwell within us: We read in St John’s gospel: “Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make a home in him” (Jn 14:23).

In other words the three persons of the Blessed Trinity dwell within each one of us, in our hearts, living their life of relationship within us and with us, and inviting us to live a life of relationship with God and with others, a life composed of respectful listening and service, a life in which mutual forgiveness is shown. This is a sure way for us to implement our missionary vocation in the world today: to bear witness to the presence of the Lord beside us and within us, and to live a loving and respectful relationship with one another, and so become an icon of God the Trinity for the world. This is the way we are called to be missionaries without words, our lives being our living proclamation.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to be more and more attentive to his presence. May the Lord’s presence make of our lives a testimony, a living witness to God’s love for our brothers and sisters in humanity!