

*Celebrating Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019...*

**Tuesday, 1 October 2019**  
**Therese of Child Jesus (Mt 18:1-4)**  
**The Presence of the Absent**  
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Today begins the mission month. And we celebrate the feast of St Therese of Child Jesus. I wonder why did Pope Pius XI, some 90 odd years ago, on 14 December 1927, decide to proclaim Therese of the Child Jesus the Patron Saint of the Missions? She never went to the missions! Therese died just short of the age of twenty-five, after nine years enclosed in a Carmelite convent. She did some traveling with her family in her younger days, but never *to* or *in* a mission country. And yet, the Pope decided to proclaim her Patroness of the worldwide Missions, alongside Saint Francis Xavier, a tireless and daring Jesuit missionary in India and Japan.

In spite of the admiration that Paul has for the feet of the evangelizers in his words, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom 10:15), what makes a real missionary are not the *feet* but the *heart*! A missionary is a person whose heart burns with love for Christ and zeal for souls and therefore answers to the call of Jesus: "Go, teach and baptize!" The feet might or might not be involved in the process.

A missionary shares Jesus' mission of expanding the reign of God and pushing the boundaries of the Kingdom of God. In the process, whatever is opposed to the reign of God will have to be pushed out of the boundaries. Physical disabilities, intellectual darkness, spiritual blindness, hunger, insecurity... are the forces that the evangelizers in the field battle against.

Means of engagement in this mission of Jesus might differ. Just as there are thousands of evangelizers working tirelessly in the missions all over the world, there are as many of them working with a similar intensity through prayer, writing, penance, counselling and other means. Everyone fulfils one's mission in one's own way. Being the mission of Jesus, in all these, the goal and the motive are the same: the expansion of the Kingdom of God where love reigns supreme. This is a different mode of the presence in the mission of those, like St Therese of Child Jesus, whose vocation is love and are otherwise physically absent in the field.

Jesus instructs us to turn and become little like children. In order to reflect Jesus in evangelization, we need to stop inflating who *we* are so that we can deflate the self and become small as God wants us to be and let the face of the Lord be reflected to the world in our mission.

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