

Celebrating Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019...

Tuesday, 1 October 2019
Feast of Saint Therese of Lisieux
Fr. John Peter Muringathery CMI

St. Therese who had never gone out of the compound walls of the convent is considered the patroness of missions. It might appear strange. What is the secret behind! She wanted to go to far-off countries like Japan... We are familiar with the wild dreams of the Saint from her autobiography. The Gospel reading for the feast is about spiritual childhood which she lived. Like a child she always had dreams, wild dreams. Though she was a contemplative nun, she had dreams for going to far-off countries to proclaim the Gospel.

Whatever be the form or method of sharing the message of Christ we undertake, Therese shows us the attitude or the motivation that can make our way of life and the work we do a way to spread the message of Christ Without this attitude whatever we do is vain in the eyes of God as St. Paul says: "If there is no love..." (1 Cor 15).

Pope Francis in his apostolic letter proclaiming the Year of Mercy "*Misericordiae Vultus*," Face of Mercy (2015-2016) shows the basic motivation we should have for whatever we may undertake to share the message of Christ with others. The opening words of the Bull run: Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy... By his word, his actions and his entire person he reveals the mercy of God." As his disciples through baptism we are called to continue the mission of Jesus, to reveal the face of the Father. On the cross Jesus said: "I thirst!" What was his thirst? It was his thirst to continue his mission of revealing to the world the nature of the Father and the Father answered the prayer by sending the Spirit on the disciples and strengthening them to continue the Master's mission.

Whatever we do, can be our way of carrying on the mission of the Master. The Saint's autobiography gives very concrete and touching examples how she made everything in her life, personal and community life ways to witness to the merciful love of God. Thus she became a great missionary and patroness of missions.

I thought of highlighting three ways or models of spreading the Good News. Cardinal Newman who will be canonized along with Mariyam Thresia on October 13 has shown the first way. We can continue the mission, not through words but through our attitude reflected in our way of life and our dealing with others. In his beautiful prayer which Mother Theresa said after Holy communion Newman prays: Let me preach You without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force of the sympathetic influence of what I do the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You"

Through our way of life and the manner of our dealing with people we can witness to the love and mercy of God. There is a beautiful prayer attributed to St. Teresa of Avila: "Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people.

Bl. Rani Maria and St. Mother Teresa both represent two very important areas of mission work especially in our country. Rani Maria, a Clarist nun who was killed by

Samundar Singh, an agent in the hands of land lords who exploited the poor tribals in Madhya Pradesh. She helped the poor people to become conscious of their condition, how they were exploited, educated them to stand on their own legs. This angered the money lenders. They accused her of converting these people and hired Samunder Singh to kill her. She was killed in 1995. The CMI Father Swami Sadanand visited the jail several times and prepared him to ask forgiveness from the parents of Sr. Rani Maria and Swamiji accompanied Samunder Singh to meet the parents in Kerala.

Mother Teresa and Rani Maria were motivated by the words of Jesus “Whenever you did this to the least of my brethren you did it to me” (Mt 25). Mother Teresa said, I receive Jesus in two forms: in the Holy Communion and in the poor whom I serve. (When I visited the Mother House in Calcutta I had the chance to see what the Saint did). Immediately after the Holy Communion she prostrated for some time. After the mass she along with other sisters would take the bucket with a towel in her hand to wash the leprosy patients. We know this is the most suitable way, the way people will easily understand for witnessing to the mercy of God and bringing Christ to the people. India recognized her service and honoured her with the highest civil award, Bharath Ratna!

The third form of witnessing to Christ is the way we relate with people of other religions. This form of witnessing to Christ is most urgently needed in our country when concerted efforts are made to create divisions in the society in the name of religion and spread suspicion and hatred towards others. Extreme nationalism based on one particular religion, Hinduism, is the prevailing situation in our country. Christians who form a small minority are very much threatened. Daily stories are appearing in the media how believers in Christ are threatened to disown their faith. But we are asked by the Church to respond to this situation in a Christian way. Vatican II in its teaching on the Church’s relation with other religions speaks about what our response should be: “Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith, acknowledge preserve and promote the values in other religions...” This teaching asks us to maintain positive relation with the followers of other religions while witnessing to our own faith, respecting their festivals and the positive values in their life. Irrespective of their religion all men are the children of God who sends His rain and His sun on all! (Mt 5: Sermon on the Mount).

Thus, we have several ways to witness to the mercy of God as Pope Francis teaches. When we hear about mission we think of a far off country. If we value our faith in Christ we will find mission in our neighbourhood, the place where we work. The decisive point is that we should value our faith. Then we will find opportunities to witness to the mercy of God revealed in Christ. In addition to all these different ways of mission work we have to pray for those who spread the message of Christ and for those who are persecuted for their faith.

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