

Lesson 1

CHURCH: MISSIONARY BY NATURE



Following the special direction of Jesus after resurrection, the eleven disciples of Jesus went to the mountain in Galilee. There, He told them “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28 : 19-20).

The Commandment of the Lord

On the paschal feast day, after instituting the Eucharist, Jesus said: “Do this in remembrance of me” (1Cor. 11:24). It is the same Jesus who commanded us to celebrate the memory of His death and resurrection entrusted us with the mission of



proclaiming the Gospel. At the time of ascension Jesus said: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mk. 16:15). Proclamation of the Gospel, is the mission which Jesus entrusted to the Church through the apostles. The Church which offers the greatest worship to God through the Holy sacrifice of the Mass and receives God experience, cannot but proclaim this experience. The faith of the faithful becomes meaningful only when the faithful participate in the God experience of the Church and proclamation of the Gospel.



Activity -1. Find out the Gospel passages where Jesus hands over the missionary mandate to His disciples and discuss the message they impart.

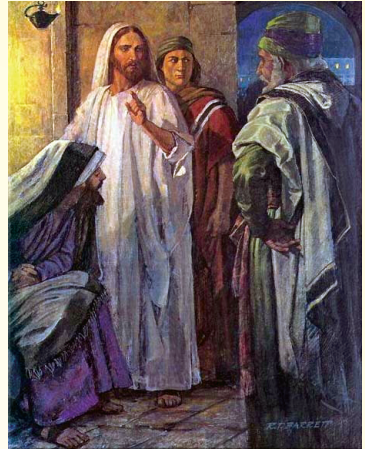
The Father Sends His Son

The word of God was made flesh and came down into the midst of human beings. Thus, Jesus, the Son of God, was born on this earth. This was the divine plan for the salvation of humanity. As St. John says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3: 16-17). God the Father sent His Son into the world ‘to rescue us from the power of darkness’ (Col. 1:13) and ‘to make all mankind His friends through Christ’ (2 Cor 5:19). The missionary task of the Son was to do the will of His Father (Jn 5:30)

Jesus: The First Missionary

Jesus is the Gospel of God the Father. The beginning of all missionary activity is the sending of Jesus to the world. Jesus is the primary spokesman of the Gospel.

(Evangelii Nuntiandi- 7). Jesus, who revealed the love and compassion of God the Father through His words and deeds, is the most important spokesman and the first missionary. The origin of the words 'mission' and 'missionary', comes from the Latin word 'mittere' which means 'to send'. The word 'mission' refers to the task of the one who is sent. 'Missionary' means 'the one who is sent'. Jesus, the first missionary declared this missionary task at the synagogue in Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"(Lk 4: 18-19). Jesus declared that His mission is the salvation of the world and the days of His salvation have already commenced: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21). On another occasion Jesus makes it very clear that He has come to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God everywhere. "I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose" (Lk. 4:43)



The message of Jesus was about the Kingdom of God and salvation of man. For this, He adopted and proclaimed a new life style based on God's love and charity. Jesus fulfilled His mission through His birth, life, teachings, miracles, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension.

Activity -2. Jesus was sent by the Father - find out two Bible passages from the Gospel of St. John that makes this truth clear.

Missionary Action of the Holy Spirit

God sent the Holy Spirit to help man to own the salvation which Jesus gained for us. He dwells in the Church and gives life to the Church. Proclamation of the Gospel is impossible without the action of the Holy Spirit. Jesus begins His public life



with the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:17). It is the Holy Spirit who led Him to the desert to pray. When Jesus sent His disciples for the proclamation of the Gospel, He breathed into them and gave them the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminded them that only after receiving the Spirit, they were to go on their mission and said: “So stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24 - 49).

On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in the form of tongues of fire, they were empowered to proclaim the Gospel. Immediately St. Peter the apostle stood up and proclaimed Jesus, the Saviour. As a result 3000 persons received baptism in the name of Jesus. Thus the Church was inaugurated.

It is the Holy Spirit who prepares the listeners to accept the Gospel. Gospel is accepted among all the peoples and cultures by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit makes the Church grow even today and confirms her in the teachings of Jesus.

In short, Holy Trinity is the foundation of the missionary nature of the Church. As the Vatican Council declares, the origin of the Church arises from the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit according to the plan of God the Father (Missionary Activity. Ad Gentes. AG.2).

Church: Sent by Christ

Jesus came with the message of love and mercy from God the Father. He realised the salvation of the world through His birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. the Church is the continuation of Christ. And the Church has to continue the mission of Jesus. She is called and sent for that. Jesus said to His disciples: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn. 20:21). the Church who received this mission from Jesus co-operates with Him in this salvific plan and leads people to salvation. Hence the Church is the sacrament of universal salvation.

Missionary Church

Just as Christ was sent by the Father, the Church is sent by Christ. The missionary task entrusted to the Church by Jesus through the apostles is to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples, baptise them, teach them to obey whatever He has commanded and be witnesses to His love (Mt. 28: 18-20). It is the vocation and duty of the Church to sanctify the people of the world, to lead them as a community and make them members of the kingdom of God through proclamation of the Gospel, baptism, forgiveness of sins and the Holy Eucharist. Since the Church participates in the same mission of Jesus, the nature of the Church is missionary. Obeying the commandment of Christ and inspired by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Church continues this mission: She leads people to faith and freedom and peace of Jesus Christ through the teachings, sacraments, other means of grace and her own life - witness (AG. 5)

By the term 'mission' we mean proclaiming the gospel to peoples and communities who have not yet heard of Christ and instituting the Church there. Missionary activity is proclaiming the salvific plan of God and its fulfilment in the world and in history. (Redemptoris Missio-RM-41). The purpose of all the ministries of the Church is this proclamation itself. Hence, in a broad sense, all the ministries of the Church are missionary activities.

All are Missionaries

Since the Church is missionary by nature, all the people of God are missionaries. The duty of proclaiming the Gospel to others is done by the sons and daughters of the Church. Each one of the faithful takes up this mission through baptism and anointing when this missionary consciousness becomes very strong, St. Paul said: "If proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16). Filled with this conviction, if each of the faithful becomes a living witness to the gospel through one's life and activities, the presence of the Church will become salvific to the world. The Church fulfils her missionary task by proclaiming the gospel and living as a loving community centred on the Holy Eucharist.

The salvific plan was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We are the sons and daughters of the missionary Church. Let us become aware of our missionary duty which we received through baptism and anointing. When we fulfil that duty, we will become true children of the Church which is missionary by nature.



Let us Read the Word of God and Meditate

Jn. 20: 19-23

A Word of God to Remember

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn. 20:21).

Let us Pray

Jesus, our Lord, bless us to live according to our missionary call and task and be your witnesses.

My Decision

I will thank my God daily for giving me participation in the missionary task of the Church through baptism and anointing.

Let us think with the Church

Once Jesus preached and fulfilled the Gospel for the salvation of whole humanity. It is necessary to preach and spread this Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Thus, the salvation which Jesus once gained for all should become effective in all in the process of time. (AG. 3)

Let us find out the answers

1. Why do we say that proclamation of the Gospel is a command of Jesus to the Church ?
2. Illustrate that the foundation of the proclamation of the Gospel by the Church is the Holy Trinity.
3. Explain the statement that the Church is missionary by nature.
4. Why do we say that all ministries of the Church are missionary activities?
5. How can we participate in the missionary task of the Church ?