

Lesson-9

THE MISSIONARY CHURCH



After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared to his disciples and said: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (Jn. 20:21). “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.” (Mt. 28:19-20). Jesus entrusted the Church with the mission to bear witness to him. Therefore the Church, by her very nature, is missionary (Ad Gentes (AG) No. 2).

Jesus Christ; the One Sent by God

Jesus Christ came on a mission from the Father. He was the first Missionary. God sent his Son into the world; so that the world might be saved through him (Jn. 3:17). To a humanity that had lost the divine life through sin, Jesus gave life again and made them children of God. He said, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk. 1:15). This is how Jesus began

his missionary life. He fulfilled his Father's will by his life, death and resurrection. In order to make available the salvation, which Jesus achieved through his death and resurrection, to the entire humanity till the end of the world he chose the apostles and trained them for this specific work. He gave them the Holy Spirit and laid the foundation for the Church.

The Mission of the Church for Evangelization

The Church's mission is to proclaim Christ and make him known as the only Saviour of the world and lead all peoples to this path of salvation. It is the duty of every Christian to proclaim Jesus Christ to others who do not know him yet. Likewise the members of the Church are bound to deepen their own faith and confirm others in their faith by their words and deeds. The Church performs this God given mission in three ways (1) The Church proclaims Christ to those people who have not heard of him. (2) She instructs those who are already in the Church through faith and baptism, so that they may deepen their knowledge in the mystery of faith. (3) She re-evangelizes those Christians who have become weak in their practice of faith.

The Missionary Work of the Apostles

Jesus chose, trained and commissioned the apostles for the mission of proclaiming the Word of God. But they became really the proclaimers of Good News when they received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. After receiving the Holy Spirit the apostles became bold proclaimers of Jesus' death and resurrection. They were no more afraid of the Jews. They spoke of Jesus to the people in the light of their own experience of Jesus' resurrection and against the background of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus. They became courageous witnesses to Jesus. They proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth is Christ the Son of God and that he is the Lord. Sufferings, persecutions and imprisonment could not stop them from proclaiming Christ and bearing witness to him. Through the preaching of the Apostles, the Church grew and became strong and spread to the other parts of the world.

The Evangelization Work of St. Thomas, the Apostle

The disciples of Jesus spread out to distant places for evangelization. It was St. Thomas, the Apostle who came to India to proclaim Christ. He landed at

Kodungalloor in 52 A.D. During that time, there were some Jewish settlers in South India who spoke the Syrian language. St. Thomas worked among them for some time. Later he preached the gospel and established Christian communities at Palayoor, Kottakavu, Kokkamangalam, Kollam, Niranam and Chayal (Nilakal).

He appointed priests to lead the Church here, and moved on to Tamil Nadu and went to Mylapore. **Knowing that his life was in danger at the hands of those who opposed him at Chinnamala, near Mylapore, he took refuge at Periyamala. But his enemies pierced him with a trident and killed him in 72 A.D.** San Thome Cathedral is constructed at the tomb of St. Thomas, the Apostle. The mortal remains of St. Thomas were transferred to Edesa in the 3rd century. It was again transferred to Kiyos Islands in 1141 and to Orthona, in Italy, in 1257. Eugene Cardinal Tissarang brought a piece of his mortal remains and placed it for veneration at Azhikode Shrine in Kodungallore in 1953.

Evangelization by the Western Missionaries

A group of Portuguese navigators, under the leadership of Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut on 21st May 1498. They wanted to establish trade with India. The Christian Missionaries, who came along with



them, contacted the Mar Thoma Christians and exercised their religious functions in churches of the Mar Thoma Christians. Though the relationship with the local Church was friendly at the start, it got strained later.

Among the western missionaries, who came to India, St. Francis Xavier was filled with zeal for Christ. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit priest, came as the Papal Nuncio for India and Eastern countries on 6th May 1542. His policy was favourable to Mar Thoma Christians. He proclaimed Gospel with great zeal in the western coasts of India. He baptized many. He breathed his last in the Sanchious Island off the coast of China on the 8th of December 1552. His mortal remains are at Bom Jesus Basilica in Goa.



The Missionary Spirit of the Syro-Malabar Church and its Growth

The Christians who received faith from St. Thomas, imbibed his missionary zeal and faith. Many missionaries, both men and women, from the Syro-Malabar Church are engaged in octane missionary work in different parts of India. To this day a considerable member of Indian missionaries belong to the Syro-Malabar Church. This Church has succeeded in maintaining and increasing the Christian faith among the non-Christians.

In recognition of the missionary spirit and zeal of the Syro-Malabar Church and its members, Pope John 23rd entrusted the care of Chanda Mission to the Syro-Malabar Church. Later a number of dioceses in the north, such as Satna, Sagar, Ujjain, Bignor, Rajkot, Jagadapur, Ghorakpur were entrusted to the Syro-Malabar Church by the Holy See. Diocese of Kalyan was established in 1988 to look after the spiritual needs of the members of the Syro-Malabar Church who have settled in Mumbai for job, and trade and commerce. The diocese of Thakkala in the South was established in 1996 and in the North, the diocese of Balthangadi in 1999 comprising the mission territories of Kerala. The diocese of Chanda was divided and the diocese of Adilabad was formed. The diocese of Chicago in USA is a part of the Syro-Malabar Church.

Every Christian is a Missionary

One is called to participate in the mission of proclaiming Christ by virtue of his baptism. To bear witness to Christ by leading a life in accordance with the gospel values is the fundamental mission of every Christian. This mission is carried out differently by the members of the Church depending on the state of life each one has chosen. Those who are in the priesthood and those who are in religious life are set apart exclusively for sharing the mission of the church. They have accepted a call and are set apart to go to any part of the world to proclaim the gospel. The laity are also called to participate in the mission of the Church. They bear witness to Jesus Christ by their words and actions, particularly when they live out their lives in the midst of people who are non-Christians.

Word of God to Read and Meditate

Mk. 16:14-20

Word of God to Remember

Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.

(Mark 16:15)

Let us Pray

Jesus, who came on a mission from the Father, we pray to you to give the gifts of the Holy Spirit to all those who follow their vocation in life so that they become the missionaries of love and service in the Church.

My Resolution

I will help the missionary activities of the Church through my prayer and sharing.

To Think with the Church

Mission" is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. These undertakings are brought to completion by missionary activity and are mostly exercised in certain territories recognized by the Holy See (Vat. II, Ad Gentes, No 6).

To Know the Mother Church

The Synod of Diamper which began on 20th June 1599 was a decisive one for the Mar Thomma Christians. After the Synod of Diamper the Angamaly Archdiocese of the Mar Thomma Christians, which had the status of metropolitan diocese, was reduced to the status of a diocese under the jurisdiction of Goa Archdiocese, and later it was suppressed. The rights and the privileges of the Archdiocese of Angamaly were also suppressed. This Synod also paved the way for the westernization of the Church of the Mar Thomma Nazranies. Again, it caused many changes in the administrative system of the Nazranies.

Questions

1. The Church is missionary by her very nature. Explain.
2. How does the Church perform her missionary function?
3. Every Christian is a missionary. Illustrate.
4. Write notes on : The missionary endeavors of the Syro-Malabar Church.
5. How can we participate in the mission of the Church as its members?