

Homily – 29th Sunday of the Year B
(World Mission Sunday 2009)

“Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” Dear brothers and sisters, today we celebrate World Mission Sunday 2009. These words of Jesus from our Gospel passage anticipate the challenges of missionary work. Jesus received the mission from the Father; he was sent into the world to bring us to repentance and salvation. Jesus in turn sent Church through his apostles, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21). Missionary work is no bed of roses. But the Holy Spirit helps us fulfill God’s work in spite of all odds. St Paul talks about his missionary exploits:

Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches (2Cor 11:24-28).

Missionaries face very stringent conditions in different parts of the world, even from dictatorial regimes and anti-Christian countries. Some were sent to certain parts of Africa and died from Malaria as quickly as they arrived. Yet many, drawing grace from God, surmounted the obstacles and spread the good news of the kingdom of God. Christians who did not go directly supported mission work indirectly through their contributions as we shall do today during the second collection for Mission Sunday. You also do this through your generous response to the respective Mission Appeals during the year. We’re all partners in progress.

Mission is all about sacrifice, making sacrifice with a complete sense of total surrender in love. The First Reading (Isa 53:10-11) demonstrates the great sacrifice God made for us. Ordinarily, it makes one uncomfortable: “The LORD was pleased to crush him in infirmity... through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he

shall bear.” God’s love is simply amazing.

In the recent Diocesan Priests’ Retreat, our retreat moderator gave us this story concerning his early seminary days: A famous lady and author approached them and asked, “So you’re seminarians? They responded ‘Yes’. She asked, ‘Do you have a heart big enough to become a priest?’ The seminarians were not sure how to respond. So the lady told them, ‘You don’t’. They were all surprised, apparently asking themselves, “What kind of woman is this that is judging us? But the woman continued, ‘Priestly life is not easy; there’ll be many challenges; more and more people from different walks of life, diverse age groups, cultural backgrounds and education will come to you and you’ll almost collapse. Some will misunderstand you; and some will confront you. You’ll begin to say to Jesus, “Why is the world tumbling around me?” The lady then asked, “But do you want to have the heart of Jesus?” The seminarians answered, ‘Yes’; and she told them, “Certainly! Pray to Jesus to give you his heart and then you’ll have a heart large enough to become a priest and be a priest.” What a beautiful message!

Finally, in mission work, as is evident in our Gospel passage (Mk 10:35-45) God sets the terms. Never give God any conditions as James and John, the sons of Zebedee, tried to do, saying "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus told them, "You do not know what you are asking". Rightfully so! We may think we’re too special and that we have done so much for God and his Church. No! No! No! Think again! We’re not even worthy of the calling. Hence at Mass the Church prays, “We thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you.” It is a privilege to work for God and his Church. All that we are and have, come from God. So it will be out of place to say, “God I’ve done this for you, now do something for me.” That’s precisely the attitude of the elder brother in the Story of the Prodigal Son. He said to his father, “All these years, I’ve slaved for you ...” Salvation is all about a gift; we cannot earn it. Someone may say, “God, you gave me this gift but I worked for it; I earned it.” Not at all! For men it is impossible but for God all things are possible.

May God give us the grace to cooperate to overcome the obstacles on the path of missionary endeavor and find favor in his sight through Christ our Lord, Amen.