

30th Sunday (C)

23rd October 2016

'Mission & humility'

Ecc 35: the humble man's prayer pierces the clouds.

Ps 32: the Lord is

close to the broken hearted.

2Tim 4: The Lord stood by me and gave me

power. Lk 18:9-14: the Pharisee and the publican.

Today is World Mission Sunday: the day in the Church's year when we particularly remember that the Gospel still has far to go, many still to reach, many lands and peoples still to evangelize. It's marked, in a way, by the travels of the Pope ... (in recent months he's been to Poland, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). As he engages in his mission, he travels far and wide, the whole world over, explaining and encouraging the faith. But the Gospel still has a long way to go. The faith may have reached every corner of the earth, but still, after 2000 years, it has not penetrated as far as it needs to. Countless souls are left without the Gospel, and this is a dreadful sadness. Imagine what life would be like if we were not conscious of salvation in Christ!

Yes this was also the task faced by the apostles immediately following on from the resurrection of Jesus. In their day there were about 150 million people in the world ... and the apostles set about evangelising them. Today our

task in fact remains greater than theirs. Maybe it is that 1.3 (2.2) billion of the world's population profess the Catholic (Christian) faith, but still 5.2 billion do not. It is the duty of each of us to preach our faith in Jesus Christ, for there is no other way to God the Father except through Him. The task of spreading the good news is not a job we should be leaving to missionaries in far-flung parts of the world. We pray for and fund mission dioceses reaching out in the more remote regions (that's the purpose of our *Missio* collection next weekend) but we have to have a missionary spirit in each of us. The patron saint of the missions, don't forget, is St Thérèse of Lisieux (an enclosed Carmelite nun), who never left her convent ... and yet supported the missions with her love and prayers, her correspondence and her missionary spirit from within the confines of her little life. Hers is that 'little way' of perfection in daily life, that shows that Jesus is the way for all people. Jesus Christ didn't die and rise again for some of us, but for all. We can't claim Jesus Christ solely as the property of Christians, but as Lord of all mankind, Saviour of the world, king of the Universe.

The challenge of today's Gospel passage about Pharisee & tax-collector is clear as we think about the task of spreading the Good News: HOW DO WE COMBINE MISSION WITH HUMILITY? How do we stand up and preach what we know to be right, without putting others down? How can we present Catholic faith as the one true faith, which it is, and yet avoid the charge of self-righteousness? There is only one answer to that. To do it in the same way as Christ did. *To be a humble servant of the truth.* He preached unfailingly and even in the face of great suffering that He is "the Way the Truth and the Life;" and yet at the same time He let Himself to be taken for a criminal, ill-treated and crucified. Always true to His mission, His preaching; yet always humble. Never giving in to untruth — never admitting that there is any perfect way to God for anyone other than through the one Church of Jesus Christ. And yet always proclaiming that, first of all, with a humility of spirit and a simplicity of life; never with arrogance. A life of prayer and of faith seeking forgiveness will be the surest way to draw others to our blessed Lord.

We must never give up on that. We must never let ourselves be tempted either to giving up on the truth, or giving up on humility. We certainly can't preach the Gospel by 'bolshiness.' Nor can we be true to Christ by saying 'anything goes.' Anything doesn't go! Only Christ is the way to go — and we must grow each day in our being convinced of that ... but as we grow in the love and zeal for Jesus, we have also to grow in His humility.

We all know people around us to whom we can speak a word of truth about our faith. It would take us a matter of a few seconds (if that!) to call to mind someone, perhaps even very close to us, to whom we could spread the Gospel more effectively. Let's have the heart of missionaries; let's have the heart of St Thérèse who practised the missionary love of Jesus just within her small community. *The Lord stood by me, says St Paul, so that through me the whole message might be proclaimed for all the pagans to hear.* Let's want Jesus to be known and loved by all mankind, starting with our family, friends and neighbours. Let's love the Lord SO MUCH that those around us cannot miss it!