



The Holy Spirit Province NEWSLETTER

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THE MISSION OF JESUS THEN AND NOW: 3rd SUNDAY C

Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

A story is told (by Fr. Flor McCarthy S.D.B.) about a people who had never heard of the Gospel. One day a stranger arrived and announced, 'I'm here to bring you the good news.' Unfortunately, he contracted a disease and died before they could learn what he meant. But they found a small book in his rucksack. The title read: *The Good News of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. They concluded that this is what the stranger was talking about, and began to read it. Though the book was old, the message sounded brand-new. The central character Jesus Christ leaped out at them from its musty pages – a man full of vitality, yet possessing great gentleness and compassion. They read accounts of healings he performed on sick and needy people. They read how he went out of his way to mix with outcasts. The beauty and authority of his words made a deep impression on them. 'What a pity the carrier of the book died,' someone said. 'Obviously, he was a follower of this Christ.' 'But there must be more where he came from,' another said. 'Could we not send someone there to see how people live this new teaching? Then he could come back, make a report, and perhaps we could try it for ourselves?'

They chose Francis, a young man of integrity. He travelled widely and observed keenly. He went out of his way to meet as wide a cross-section of Christians as possible. He didn't jump to conclusions or rush to judgment. Finally, the day came when he felt he had seen enough, and so he headed for home. No sooner had he arrived back, than he was bombarded with questions: 'Do the adherents of the book love one another?' 'Do they live in peace with one another?' 'Do they live simply?' 'Are they happy? But all the questions could be reduced to one: 'Do the followers of Christ live according to The Book?' Here, in summary, is the account he gave them of his findings: -

'Basically, I found five kinds of Christians. First, I found some who are Christian in name only. Even though they were baptised, they adhere to none of the observances of Christianity and are not at all committed. Secondly, I found some who are Christian by habit only. Even though they perform outward rituals, it doesn't affect the way they live. As far as I could see, they live according to principles that have nothing to do with the teachings of The Book, and in many cases are contrary to it. Thirdly, I found some who are devoted to the Christian faith. They engage in good works. Yet a vital element seems to be missing. They seem to possess few, if any, of the qualities which made their Master so appealing. Fourthly, I found some whom you might call fully Christian. It seemed to me that they have grasped the heart of what The Book is about. They are very concerned about other people and are not ashamed to be seen as Christians. In some places, I saw them being persecuted. In other places, I saw them meeting

something which is probably worse – the deadly indifference of their fellow citizens. Lastly, I met some, admittedly not many, whom I would have no hesitation in calling the genuine article. They are so deeply spiritual, that in meeting them I felt I was meeting Jesus himself.’

But accepted or not, the gospel stands as good news – good news from God and with the authority of God behind it. It is summed up today in the Vision Statement which is also his Mission Statement that Jesus makes in the synagogue of Nazareth, his home town. There, making his own a text from the prophet Isaiah, he presents himself as the Messiah called by God, filled with God’s Spirit, and sent by God on this mission: - To be an agent of God’s love and healing, wherever needed! To set people free from all kinds of evil, limits, and handicaps!

The mission of Jesus then is also our mission now – yours and mine. To see how it is done today, just look at Pope Francis. He is passionately committed to poor and troubled persons in both his backyard and further afield. He refused to live in the palace provided for him but settled in two rooms of St Martha’s Guest House. He regularly sends a bishop to give food and money to poor persons in substandard houses. He has provided showers and toilets in St Peter’s Square for homeless people. Now and then, he goes to prisons to comfort and encourage persons locked up behind bars. A recent news despatch reports him dropping into a nursing home unannounced, to mix with the residents there, and going on to a facility to visit mentally ill patients.

If we are unable to do all the works of mercy our Pope is managing to accomplish, surely, we can settle for at least one or two. Take, e.g., what Tracey Ryan, a school teacher in a government school, has been able to do with the grace of God. This is her story:

‘One of the new girls in my class is hunched over and her shoulder blade sticks up in the air. The first couple of weeks she had difficulty coming to school. Nobody would talk to her as she looks “different” and, well, you know what kids can be like. They were never verbally unkind; they just didn’t include her in anything. I had meetings with her mother and the principal to try to remedy the situation but nothing worked. Eva, it seemed, was doomed to be an outsider. Then, an idea! There’s a student in my class, Heather, who comes from a very poor economic background, has learning difficulties, but is very popular with everyone. I thought to myself: IF I CAN JUST GET HEATHER TO BEFRIEND EVA, WE MAY HAVE A CHANCE HERE. I put the challenge to Heather and she said: “No problem. I like Eva.” I told Heather what a special person she is and how grateful I am for her support. The next thing I know Heather has worked her magic. These days Eva cannot wait to get to school. She came up and hugged me the other day and said: “Miss Ryan, I LOVE school!” It just goes to show how a little bit of kindness can change a child’s life.’

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