

26th Sunday(C) "Proclaiming Good News to the poor"

Homily at the Mass for the 144th Missionary expedition

Am 6:1a.4-7; Ps 145; 1 Tm 6:11-16; Lk 16:19-31

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus,

We are gathered here at Valdocco as the People of God and as the Salesian Family to celebrate God's inexhaustible love, wanting all people to be saved and achieve knowledge of the Truth. This salvation and this encounter with Truth takes place at every Eucharist, where Christ becomes present sacramentally with the power of his new life, and is extended through history to the ends of the earth through the mission of evangelisation carried out by the Church and within it, by Don Bosco's Family.

We are here precisely to reaffirm our willingness to cooperate in carrying out God's marvellous plan. Today in fact we have the new missionary expedition, the 144th, which is evidence that we are and act as Church, evidence of our commitment to the young in the world, especially the poorest amongst them, and shows the missionary dimension of the Salesian vocation.

We gather here at the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, the usual place for sending out Salesian missionaries. We entrust each of our brother and sister missionaries to Mary as well as all our missions around the world.

The Word of God we have just heard could be summed up in the verse which Jesus used when he presented himself at Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me.... *he has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor*" (Lk 4:18b).

In fact, even though the text from Amos and the one from Luke's Gospel present the frank dangers of wealth, of being rich, nevertheless the emphasis in God's word is placed on evangelisation of the poor.

They are the first beneficiaries of the Gospel. For us also it is an invitation to love poverty, like Mamma Margaret lived it and taught

John to; living as poor people and handing over their lives on behalf of the poor and the marginalised.

According to Luke, wealth is a great danger to the salvation of the human being. Firstly because it causes a kind of spiritual short-sightedness which prevents us from seeing and seeking what is truly good, values that really count, ones that survive death. and secondly because it produces hardness of heart that makes us insensitive to the needs of the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, those who are exploited, the migrants, the excluded and marginalised; and thirdly because it makes us idolaters, servants not of God but of money.

In the neo-liberal context we live in today, the parable of the rich man dressed in purple, banqueting every day without any concern for poor Lazarus covered in sores, just wanting the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, takes on macro-cosmic dimensions because there are entire populations of humankind who can barely survive while other groups of privileged people live amidst luxury and vanity of the kind described by the Prophet Amos: "Lying on ivory beds and sprawling on their divans, they dine on lambs from the flock and stall-fattened veal.. They bawl to the sound of the harp... they drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest oil for anointing themselves, but about the ruin of others they do not care at all".

This situation has become more serious because of the unprecedented financial crisis we have been experiencing now for some years. The number of poor in the world has increased because of it; it has brought a loss in quality of life to millions of others, it has set back development in countries bringing immense suffering through unemployment, especially for young people, and so much desperation.

From the outset of his Pontificate Pope Francis has denounced a cultural and economic model that favours individual profit over the common good, that excludes and in fact reduces the elderly and the young to barely nothing in material terms. The elderly are excluded through 'cultural euthanasia', leaving them without anything to say an unable to communicate their vital wisdom. They are marginalised. The young are left without work, so left without any future prospects at all.

The Pope wants a poor Church, a Church for the poor, as Jesus understood his own mission and carried out his public ministry.. He

also wants a missionary Church, one that goes out to the geographical, cultural and existential boundaries. And finally he fosters a culture of commitment and solidarity that helps overcome one of indifference and individualism. This means, dear brothers and sisters that to exit from today's global crisis, we must invest in an evangelisation that knows how to meet the needs of humanity, especially of the very poor, and in a huge educational effort that promotes the formation of a new mentality and new life style, given that the social question has become ever more radically one of anthropology and ethics. It is because of this that our Congregation and Salesian Family, founded by a social saint and involved in a mission on every continent, must know how to discover in Pope Francis' stimuli a renewed message and encouragement to witness to and dedicate itself to the holistic growth of the young.

To change the world we need a new *way of thinking*, the result of evangelisation. There is urgent need for a new model of the human being, society, a new world order. The common mindset is basically tuned into having, into consuming material goods, to worldly success, and to where the ephemeral becomes an absolute. Real ethical and cultural revolutions can be set in motion by people who live by nurturing reason enlightened by love, by a *perception* of the world and ourselves that only the heart can offer.

If the Word of God today strikes home, it must also strike home in the social reality that it denounces. The resurgence of violence everywhere, be it in the form of war, gangs, delinquency, and the unstoppable waves of immigration, in some way find their origins in the situation of injustice and impoverishment dragging down millions and millions of people.

In today's parable Jesus reveals to us the need for conversion and faith before death irreversibly determines human destiny. There are selfish or solid ways of living that mark our destiny at the point of death. Jesus invites us not to live in a carefree way, closed in on ourselves, but attentive to the needs of others, especially the poor and acting like the *good samaritan* who went up to and became the neighbour of the one who had been stripped by brigands. They had beaten him and left him there half dead on the side of the road. "He bound up his wounds, lifted him on to his mount and carried him to an inn where he looked after him" (Lk 10:34).

This world, this society, needs a culture of frugality and solidarity

that can make God's dream possible. As Jesus says in the Gospel, Moses and the prophets are needed for this to happen. To convert our minds and transform social structures the Gospel, Word of God addressed to man for his salvation are sufficient.

So my dear missionaries, here is the wonderful task entrusted to you: cooperating in making the world more human through the dynamics of the Gospel which can convert the minds and hearts of people and transform the social fabric. Changing the world lies at our fingertips. We only need to change the world around us, looking after the hungry, the exploited, the sick.

Today you are sent out from this place where Don Bosco began and developed his work. Today you are called to continue his dream, God's dream. Become missionaries of the young, have the poor at heart, bring them the good news of salvation, get them to experience how close God is to them and the sweetness of his love.

May Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians be your mother and teacher. May she make you “humble, strong and energetic”, guide your life and make your missionary work fruitful. Amen

Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva, SDB
Valdocco, 29.09.'13