

"Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! »

Pilgrim friends!

After this first break which did us good, the time has come to stop for a few moments, but this time in pilgrimage to Chartres: The Mission!



Part of Masaccio's mural (Brancacci Chapel, Florence)

You know that the Notre-Dame de Chrétienté association rests on three pillars, like three columns, namely **Tradition, Christianity and Mission**. If it is a question of looking during this 2nd meditation on the importance and necessity of the Mission, let us nevertheless try to keep in mind, in the corner of our soul, that the Mission is in solidarity with the Tradition and the spirit of Christianity. These three pillars are indeed holding each other together. To shake one, to neglect the other, is to endanger the whole edifice!

What exactly is it? This is referred to as the **mission "ad gentes"** (from "gentiles", the pagans), that is, of the apostolate turned towards non-believers, or towards those who have lost the Catholic faith, or who no longer practice this faith. By choosing this theme, the pilgrimage wants to respond to the call of Pope Leo XIV, who on October 5, 2025 proclaimed "*a new missionary era in the history of the Church*." Fellow pilgrims, we must let ourselves be touched by the "*urgency of the mission*", understand that this responsibility falls on us, and fight with all our strength against the very easy and quiet temptation of withdrawal into ourselves, of a cozy self-isolation, or of the pusillanimity that leads us to believe that we are incapable of being missionaries, on the pretext that we are not Saint Francis Xavier. As St. John Chrysostom said: "**There is nothing colder than a Christian who does not save others.**"¹ "So there is nothing better than a pilgrimage, nothing better than Pentecost, to inflame our hearts once again with zeal for the mission!

1. St. John Chrysostom, in Act. Apost., Hom. 20, 4 ; SC 272, p. 339.

Being a missionary is not an option, but a requirement of the Gospel

To reflect on the great principles of the Mission, let us begin by reaching out to Jesus, our Lord. Let us take our places around him, among the apostles. It is Ascension Thursday: Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, both dead and risen, Jesus our Redeemer and Savior, is about to go to Heaven. To do this, he invited his disciples to the Mount of Olives. What interests us here is his final message. Imagine, dear friends, the price of his last words, his last piece of advice! He looked at each one of them, and with all the love of his divine heart, he said to them: "*When the Holy Spirit descends upon you, you will be clothed with strength **and you will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.***"² These words are crucial, because they are still addressed, almost 2000 years later, to each of us. It is Jesus who asks us to do so! Fellow pilgrims, are we ready to "*become witnesses of Christ to the ends of the earth*"?

At the very end of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, we find again this request, this very command, explicit and unequivocal: "***Go therefore and teach all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . »*

Saint Paul, the Apostle with a capital "A", is in line with this pressing invitation of Christ. In his first letter to the inhabitants of Corinth, he made it clear that his zeal for spreading the message of Jesus was in some way imposed on him. **No, talking about Christ is not an option. Spreading his teaching is not a choice but a requirement of life, a requirement of the Gospel:** "*Proclaiming the Gospel,*" he says, "*is not for me a title of glory; it is a necessity that falls to me. Yes, woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel*"⁴! »

Thus, it is Jesus himself who sends his Church on mission. The popes have often reminded us that the mission is not incidental to the life of the Church, it is the very reason for its existence. In the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II reaffirms the permanent value of the missionary precept. A baptized person who is not a missionary could not consider himself an authentic Christian.

2. Acts 1:8.

3. Mt 28:19.

4. 1 Cor 9:16.

To be a missionary is to proclaim Christ!

One aspect of the grave crisis that is unfortunately going through many members of the Church – and perhaps ourselves! – is the pitiful temptation **to reduce Christianity to a purely human wisdom, to a "simple humanitarian sentiment"** ⁵, in a way a science for living well here below. The Church would be an NGO and the Gospel a kind of charter of human rights. We are thus witnessing what could be called a "*progressive secularization of salvation*". One or the other, with a good heart, fight for man, certainly, but for a man reduced to his only horizontal dimension. But missionary zeal is quite different! On the contrary, it is to remind men that Jesus has an unheard-of message for them. The mission is to open one's neighbour to the marvellous prospect of divine sonship⁶.

Let's do a little etymology. Did you know that "mission" comes from the verb

"*mittere*", which means "to send" in Latin? (as in *Ite Missa is* at the end of the Mass: *go, it's the sending*). This is the same as the word apostle ("*apostellein*" means "to send" in Greek). This sheds light on Jesus' crucial sentence: "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you*"⁷ **Christ is the first sent, the first missionary of the Father**; it is he who gives the movement, and the tone. Now, why is he sent? "*I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom, for this reason I was sent*",⁸ he says to Saint Luke. "Good News" in Greek is called "*evaggelion*": Gospel. Thus, *to evangelize* is to proclaim the Good News. But what is this Good News? St. Luke sums it up in an essential sentence: "***The Son of Man came to seek and to save those who were perishing***"⁹; and St. John says the same thing:

"*God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him*"¹⁰**The Good News is Salvation!**

5. As John Paul II denounced on August 20, 1989.

6. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 46: "Today, the call to conversion that missionaries address to non-Christians is questioned or passed over in silence. It is seen as an act of "*proselytism*"; It is said that it is enough to help people to be more human or more faithful to their religion, that it is enough to build communities capable of working for justice, freedom, peace and solidarity. But we forget that every person has the right to hear the Good News of God, who makes himself known and who gives himself in Christ, in order to fully realize his vocation. »

7. Jn 20:21.

8. Lk 4:43.

9. Lk 19:10.

10. Jn 3:17.

And more precisely, salvation in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, true man, true God, dead and risen for all men. There it is, the news that must be announced to the world! In other words, the Good News is the person of Jesus Christ himself, whose very name means: Savior.

What is Salvation? " *For a purpose of pure goodness, God created man to make him a partaker of his blessed life.* It is for this reason, which is a reason for love, that every little man is born. Only, this blessed life can be attained by oneself: it is a gift from God, it must be received. And original sin has broken man's relationship with God. This is why man needs a Salvation, a Saviour, to reach his blessed end, to reach Heaven: and this Saviour is Christ. But what applies to me, also applies to others, to all others! Who is going to tell them, who is going to show them the way to happiness? This is why Saint Charles de Foucauld said:

" *Every Christian must be an apostle. It is not a piece of advice, it is a commandment, the commandment of charity.* To proclaim to men salvation in Jesus Christ is the most beautiful act of love that can be done to them.

You may be familiar with the words of Saint Paul: " *For me, to live is Christ!*"¹¹ well, here we are exactly at the heart of the missionary's *raison d'être*. **The missionary is convinced that a life fully lived is a life configured to Christ.** " *In him, and in him alone, we are freed from all alienation and error, from submission to the power of sin and death ,*" wrote John Paul II. And the intensity of our missionary zeal will be measured by the intensity of our faith, of our attachment to Christ, **of our conviction that Christ is the essential.** If Christ is truly " *our peace* " (Eph 2:14), and if " *the love of Christ really urges us* " (2 Cor 5:14), then we will have only one desire, only one urgency: to communicate this peace, this liberation, and this love around us.

The "holy restlessness" of the salvation of souls

Jesus Christ is therefore the Good News par excellence, the way to eternal happiness, and it is to proclaim it to the whole world that we are missionaries. But we must have the courage to tell **the whole truth**: Jesus Christ is the **only savior** of men. That is to say, without

11. Phil 1:21.

Jesus Christ, men are condemned. And this gives the mission all its demands, its urgency, its necessity. Yes, *"the charity of Christ urges us"*, not because it would be **"just a pity"** for people to live without knowing Christ, but because it would be **terrible** if they were cut off from him to the end. Jesus Christ is not only a *"plus"* in a man's life: he is the only way to true happiness. It's not me who says it, it's Scripture! *"There is no salvation in **any other**: for there is no **other name** under heaven given **to men** by which we must be saved"*¹²

Cardinal Ratzinger, on the eve of his accession to the Supreme Pontificate, recalled this: *"We must be animated by a holy anxiety: the anxiety to bring to all the gift of faith, of friendship with Christ"*¹³ **This anxiety is that of Saint Paul:** *"Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel"*¹⁴ **This anxiety is that of Saint Maximilian Kolbe**, who burned with zeal when he said: *"Save souls, all souls, quickly, very quickly! **This anxiety is that of St. Dominic**, whom his brethren heard crying out in the solitude of his prayer: *"Lord, what will become of the souls of poor sinners? **This concern is that of the popes**, such as John Paul II, who recalled: *"The number of those who are ignorant of Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly increasing, and has almost doubled since the end of the Council. With regard to this immense number of men whom the Father loves and for whom he has sent his Son, the urgency of the mission is obvious."*¹⁵ **This anxiety is above all that of Christ,** *"moved with compassion at the sight of the languishing and dejected crowd, like sheep without a shepherd"*¹⁶. In each of them, this anxiety is the fruit of a Love that goes back to God the Father himself: *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*¹⁷**

Yes, dear pilgrims, There is an urgency of the mission, because there is no neutrality possible: Heaven is not simply a bonus for those who want it, it is the ultimate goal of every man, and if it is missing, it is Hell! And Jesus Christ alone is the door, the holy text is irrefutable:

12. Acts 4:12.

13. Homily for the Mass of April 18 *pro eligendo Romano Pontifice*.

14. 1 Cor 9:16.

15. Saint John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*.

16. Mt 9:36.

17. Jn 3:16.

*"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"*¹⁸;

*"I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved "*¹⁹;
*"Whoever is not with me is against me."*²⁰ To refuse the mission, dear pilgrims, is to commit a spiritual crime: a crime of non-assistance to a person in danger. For if it is criminal not to help people in case of physical danger, is it not even more criminal not to assist souls in spiritual peril? Is not a soul infinitely more precious than a body? Eternal salvation infinitely more precious than physical security? May it please God that we do not hear, on the last day, our neighbors, our relatives, our friends, say to us: *"I was hungry for the truth and no one evangelized me, I thirsted for true happiness and you did not show it to me, I was a stranger to the things of God and you did not welcome me, I was naked in the face of the assaults of evil, I was sick and a prisoner of my vices, and no one helped me... »*

Am I concerned by the mission?

Does this shake, dear pilgrims? That's the goal! But I can already see some who would like to evade it, saying: *"This, the mission, is the work of priests, of trained people... I already have enough to do to save my soul, educate my children, and then I don't know what to say!* So it is true that Christ's sending on mission is addressed **first of all to the apostles and their successors, the bishops,** " the only holders of the **power** to teach"²¹ Their mission is called "*hierarchical*". Priests, but also religious, are associated with it, through the consecration of their lives.

However, Jesus is very clear: **it was to everyone**, and not only to the apostles, that he said: *"You are the salt of the earth [...] you are the light of the world."*²² Recently, the Second Vatican Council recalled that the Lord himself sends **every lay Christian** to the mission because **of his baptism and confirmation**²³. And the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes this sentence of St. Thomas Aquinas: *"To teach someone to bring him to the faith is the task of every preacher and even of every believer."*

18. Jn 14:6.

19. Jn 10:9.

20. Mt 12:30.

21. Pius XII, at the 2nd Congress of the Lay Apostolate, October 5, 1957.

22. Mt 5:13-16.

23. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, No. 3.

24. *Summa of Theology*, III, q.71, art 4, cf. CEC 904.

There can be two kinds of missions for the laity: one is officially entrusted by the Church, within a diocese for example, or in a constituted movement. But you don't have to wait for someone to think of you and call you! As **Pius XII affirmed**, *"the initiative of the apostolate of the laity is perfectly justified even without an explicit prior 'mission' of the hierarchy"*²⁵, it is a *"true apostolate"*. The laity could even organize among themselves, and the Second Vatican Council thus evoked those *"apostolic initiatives which owe their origin to the free choice of the laity, and whose management is a matter of their own prudential judgment"*²⁶: this is the case of the pilgrimage to Chartres, for example. What for? **Simply because the Christian "lives from Christ", and Christ continues his mission in him. Every Christian is therefore a missionary by nature.** And the serious shortage of vocations is an imperious invitation to lay Catholics to be even more missionary. And this imperious invitation the popes have addressed in particular to young people, as Pope Francis recently did: *"The Church needs you, the enthusiasm, creativity and joy that characterize you... Do you know what is the best instrument for evangelizing young people? Another young man! This is the road that all of you have to travel"*²⁷! »

Conclusion

*"I have come to bring a fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled ! Dear friends, only inflamed souls, those who deeply love God and neighbor, can feel the urgency of the mission. As Pius XI explains, "Whoever truly loves his neighbor can do no less than desire his eternal salvation and work to secure it for him. This is the foundation of the apostolate, which is nothing other than the exercise of Christian charity which binds all men." So let us ask, on this pilgrimage of Pentecost, for the grace to receive the Fire that comes from Heaven. In the evening of our life, it is by this fire, by this love, that we will be judged. **We will be judged on what we have said to God and on what we have said about God, out of love.** Fellow pilgrims, "if you are what you ought to be, you will set the world on fire"*²⁹

25. To the World Union of Women's Organizations, September 29, 1957.

26. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, No. 24, confirmed in the *Code of Canon Law*, c. 225.

27. Pope Francis, Rio, 28 July 2013.

28. Lk 12:49-53.

29. John Paul II, at WYD in 2000.

" Quotes

Whoever meditates on the history of the Church will undoubtedly be struck

by the fact that, from the earliest ages of Christianity, the Roman Pontiffs have constantly turned their thoughts to the peoples seated in darkness and in the shadow of death, and have had as their principal concern to bring them the light of Christian civilization. In this work, they never allowed themselves to be discouraged by any difficulty, by any obstacle. **The Church, in fact, has the sole mission of leading all men to participate in the salvation of the Redemption by extending the kingdom of Christ to the whole earth.** Whoever, therefore, by the will of God, he may represent him in this world of Jesus, Prince of Shepherds, he must not limit himself to defending and preserving the flock whose direction the Lord has entrusted to him; **he would fail in the principal of his duties if he did not endeavour, by all the means in his power, to win to Christ those who live far from him, to incorporate strangers into the Church.**

Pius XI, Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae*

No! The external apostolate of the laity is not an optional thing, a luxury, but an obligation, an imperative necessity. When you think of the poor who are dying of hunger, of the victims of disasters and murderous wars, your heart sinks, your purse opens. Your heart must tighten even more when souls die of spiritual hunger, by the millions. Jesus thirsts for these souls.

Father of Elbée, *Believing in Love*



The Apostle Paul, by Rembrandt (1657)