

**Monday: "Come on! Preach the gospel! »
with *Blessed Isidore Ngei Ko Lat***

Blessed Isidore Ngei Ko Lat, mission until martyrdom

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Pilgrim friends, in a few hours we will arrive in Chartres. And a few hours later, we'll be back home. Let us ask ourselves the question: is it as missionaries that we will return to the path of daily life tomorrow, transformed by this pilgrimage and the action of the Holy Spirit?



Anonymous painting depicting Father Mario Vergara and Isidore Ngei Ko Lat

During these days of walking, we heard that the mission concerned us. That being a missionary is the duty of every baptized person and that accomplishing this mission is possible. But the first place of the mission is our daily environment: our family, our work, university, school, friends. These are the places that we are most afraid to evangelize, often for fear of the gaze of those we frequent the most.

So to encourage us on this daring path of mission, I propose this morning to meditate on the beautiful figure of a missionary among his own: it is Blessed **Isidore Ngei Ko Lat**, the first Burmese blessed, beatified in 2014 by Pope Francis, and whose feast day is today, May 25: it is he who accompanies our last day of walking to the cathedral.

Some elements of his life

Isidore Ngei Ko Lat (born September 7, 1918) is a Burmese catechist to a family of farmers who converted to Catholicism. He was baptized on the day of his birth. From childhood, he liked to accompany the missionaries. Orphaned of both his parents as a teenager, an uncle and an aunt take care of him. Wishing to become a priest at an early age, he joined the minor seminary and was noticed among his classmates for his zeal and seriousness. He is reputed to be simple, honest and humble, with

a strong religious sensitivity and aptitude for study. He is learning English and Latin very well.

But suffering from chronic asthma, Isidore had to return to his family, and give up becoming a priest. Strongly desiring to serve, he decided to help the catechist in his village. To this end, he opened a free school where he taught Burmese and English. He also gave catechism lessons, and taught the children music and hymns. Testimonies indicate that he is appreciated by all.

In a nearby village, he met Father Mario Vergara in 1946. This missionary was then given the task of setting up a new Catholic mission in the east of the country, and proposed to Isidore that he follow him as a catechist. The latter accepted with alacrity. The mission was difficult with farmers who were often illiterate and hostile to Catholics.

The threats are becoming more and more numerous. The arrest of a catechist in May 1950, James Còlei, provoked a reaction from Isidore and Father Vergara. Wanting to save Còlei's life, they took the risk of going to the district chief on May 24 to ask for his release, but it was a rebel leader who received them, interrogated them harshly and had them arrested. They were dragged at night through the forest, then shot down on the banks of the river at dawn on May 25, 1950. Their bodies are locked in bags, thrown into the river and have not been found.

From this account of the life of Blessed Isidore Ngei Ko Lat, I propose to you to retain four main lessons for progress in the mission:

The importance of the catechism

For at least half a century we have been going through a crisis of the transmission of the faith: a crisis of the catechism. Moreover, it should be noted that the "*traditional*" movement was not born with the liturgical reform in 1969, but with the "*crisis of the catechism*" in the 1950s: it was in fact a question of **defending the traditional catechism**, that is to say a catechism that transmits **the entirety** of faith, against modern catechisms that called into question or suppressed whole sections of the Church's teaching: the doctrine around sin, the Eucharist, the last ends, the oneness of salvation in Jesus Christ, the social reign of Christ... all these truths come to us from Jesus, they must be transmitted in their entirety, because it is in them that we find the way to salvation!

The catechism is fundamental for the transmission of the faith, and therefore for the mission.

Formation through catechism

The Catechism is a synthetic exposition of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, both on faith and on morals. Its main sources are Sacred Scripture and the whole of the Church's Tradition, through which Christ's teaching has come down to us. Through the catechism we have access to the whole doctrine of Christ carried by his Church. And that's exactly what we need! At a time when faith is sometimes confused with a vague religious feeling, when everyone makes a little of a bargain in what he wants to believe and not to believe, the Church needs solidly formed Catholics, who have deepened their faith, who are capable of "*giving an account of the hope that is in them*,"¹ as we said yesterday with regard to apologetics. So why not immerse yourself, at the end of the pilgrimage, in the reading of a good catechism, or in formation courses on one's faith? You will find many clues at the end of your pilgrims' booklet, in the pages "training". This is how a missionary soul is forged!

Educating others

What is very striking today is to see the extent to which people are looking for answers to their questions. There is an aspiration, among those who approach the Christian faith, to a quality formation. The catechism rightly places within everyone's reach the sacred heritage faithfully transmitted by Sacred Scripture and Tradition. So here are a few tips:

- To read and comment on the catechism between Christian and non-Christian friends;
- Take a friend to formation courses on the faith, or even propose to a priest to set up this course if it does not already exist;
- To offer a catechism to the one of our loved ones whom we know that this or that response from the Church can enlighten or question him. Many people have encountered Christ through the reading of his doctrine, which is found in the catechism. This was the case, in the twentieth century, of the Japanese radiologist Takashi Nagai. He converted to Catholicism thanks to the reading of the catechism sent to him by his future wife while he himself was in military service.

1. 1 Pet 3:15.

Human respect, the main brake on our missionary enthusiasm

Human respect refers to an excessive fear of what others will think or say about us, to the point that it influences our choices, even against our conscience or faith.

In concrete terms, human respect is when we act (or don't act) out of fear of the gaze of others, instead of following what we know to be right, good or true.

For example, not praying in public, or not making the sign of the cross or blessing in restaurants, for fear of being judged; following a group in evil (mockery, cheating, unhealthy discussions) so as not to be rejected; hiding one's faith or convictions in order to appear "like the others"; not to defend someone who is a victim of injustice for fear of the group's gaze. These actions and attitudes are forms of human respect.

Human respect is a danger because it makes us slaves to the opinions of others. Above all, it distances us from God, because we choose the approval of men rather than His will. Finally, it weakens our witness of faith and integrity. Let us remember the powerful words of Jesus Himself. "*Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words before this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him.*"² To heal from human respect, several virtues set us free, including the virtue of strength.

Exercising the virtue of strength, supported by the gift of strength

The virtues are often poorly known, considered dusty, synonymous with boring life. In reality, it is quite the opposite: virtues liberate us of our evil inclinations, which are vices: **these are stable dispositions which perfect our souls, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith.** They are acquired by the repetition of morally good acts. They provide ease, control and joy.

To heal human respect, the exercise of several virtues will help, especially **the virtue of strength**, otherwise called the virtue of courage. This virtue "*implies a firmness of soul to bear and repel particularly impressive difficulties*". Strength assures in difficulties firmness and constancy in the pursuit of good. The first vice

2. Mk 8:38.

that is the opposite is **the fear** that makes us flee from what we should nevertheless assume. And like all virtues, strength grows through the repetition of deliberate acts. Thus, the more I voluntarily perform acts of force, the easier and more pleasant these acts will be to perform. Concretely, the more forcefully I act, the stronger I become, and the stronger I am, the more forcefully I act. It's a virtuous circle!

This virtue will be supported by the **gift of strength**. In fact, the whole moral life of the Christian is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. **These are permanent dispositions in the soul, which make man docile to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit.** The gifts of the Holy Spirit complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile to obey with promptitude the divine inspirations. Thus the gift of strength sustains the virtue of strength and brings it to perfection. At this time of Pentecost, let us ask the Holy Spirit to send his strength into us!

The missionary's path necessarily passes through the Cross

You may be familiar with this famous quote from Tertullian: "*The blood of martyrs is the seed of a Christian.*"³ If martyrdom should not be willingly sought for its own sake, it nevertheless constitutes the highest form of the witness of the faith: **this is what is meant by the "martyr" in Greek: witness.** Martyrdom has always been part of the life of the Church, from its origins to the present day: in 2025, the Vatican counted 1,624 martyrs since the year 2000: in twenty-five years! This should make us wonder: how far does our love of Christ go, how far does our love of souls go? Would we be ready, like Blessed Isidore, to lose our lives in order to save and convert a person? What does the Gospel mean to us: "*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for those whom he loves*"⁴? Here we are at the heart of the Gospel: "*Unless the grain of wheat dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*"⁵

Jesus, let us not forget, went through suffering and death for our salvation. So let us not imagine an easier path for the disciples of Christ that we must be: **the path of the missionary passes through the Cross.** If it is not physical martyrdom, it will be, let us be sure,

3. Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, chap. 50.

4. Jn 15:13.

5. Jn 12:24.

spiritual martyrdom: we may one day be singled out, marginalized, because of our faith; we may have to give up a profession, a career, a comfortable place, in order to remain faithful to Christ. What will we do then? Let us listen to the Beatitudes, they fill us with Hope: " *Blessed are you if you are insulted, persecuted, and if all kinds of evil are falsely said against you for my sake. Rejoice, be glad, for your reward is great in heaven! Thus the prophets who preceded you were persecuted.*⁶ It is in the ordeal that the true witnesses manifest themselves.

And this allows us to say a word about a much forgotten element of missionary life : **the place of penance for the conversion of souls**. Suffering is certainly **the least popular way** to convert souls... even Jesus Christ shuddered before his passion in the Garden of Olives, to the point of sweating in blood because his anguish was so intense! But **it is essentially by enduring this suffering, out of love, that Christ saved us**. This is " *salvific suffering* " (according to the name of an encyclical of John Paul II), which allows us to unite ourselves to the passion of Christ and thus to associate ourselves with the salvation of souls. What is it about, concretely?

- To be able, first of all, to endure the difficulties, the sorrows, the illnesses that present themselves to us daily, without having sought them, **and to offer them for the conversion of souls** ;
- But also, following the example of so many great saints, to be able to sacrifice ourselves, to offer voluntary penances, fasts for example, to touch the hearts, especially of our loved ones. After all, isn't that also why we came on pilgrimage? Thus transformed, configured to the Cross of Jesus, suffering is no longer useless, it too becomes the " *seed of Christians* ".

Let us therefore ask Blessed Isodore Ngei Ko Lat **for the courage** to surpass our human respect by small acts of strength; **assiduity** in consolidating doctrinal formation; and **love of the Cross of Jesus**, an indispensable path for every true missionary.

Quote

Extend your charity to the whole world, if you wish to love Christ; because
that the members of Christ are stretched out over the world.

St. Augustine, *Letter to the Parthians*, no. 10

6. Mt 11:12.