

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

World Mission Sunday falls on the second to last Sunday of October. Pope Pius XII established it in 1926, asking all Catholic parishes in the world to pray for and raise funds for the poorest local churches on earth. In our diocese, we add a weekend usually in summer when parishes invite missionaries to preach about their particular situation, for which we collect contributions.

Also locally, this weekend falls while we conduct the Annual Catholic Appeal for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, supporting causes such as schools, governance, and seminary formation. It's good that these appeals come back to back. They remind us that even though we have serious local concerns, other parts of the Catholic world have even greater needs. If everyone contributes locally and globally, we can make quite a difference.

For St. Paul, every day was Mission Sunday. His First Letter to the Thessalonians will supply the second reading at Sunday Mass for the next several weeks. Paul visited Thessaloniki right after Philippi, and later wrote letters to both communities. Last month we heard from his Letter to the Philippians. Now we encounter the first of two letters to the Thessalonians. Paul probably wrote this one before Philippians; in fact, many scholars think this was the very first of all Paul's letters. And since the letters predate the gospels, the second reading of this Mass opens with what are probably the very first written words of the entire New Testament: "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace."

Paul remembers their "work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ." He recalls that the "gospel did not come [to them] in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction." Paul was a missionary in two respects: He traveled to proclaim Jesus Christ; then he wrote back to continue evangelizing.

During the pandemic not many of us are traveling, and if we do, we may do it more to receive enjoyment than to proclaim Christ. But any of us can join the second part of Paul's missionary plan: We can communicate to people with whom we've already established a relationship to share the gospel that comes not in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with much conviction.

Pope Francis similarly is not traveling much, but he did write this message for Mission Sunday: "Understanding what God is saying to us at this time of pandemic... represents a challenge for the Church's mission. Illness, suffering, fear and isolation challenge us. The poverty of those who die alone, the abandoned, those who have lost their jobs and income, the homeless and those who lack food challenge us. Being forced to observe social distancing and to stay at home invites us to rediscover that we need social relationships as well as our communal relationship with God. Far from increasing mistrust and indifference, this situation should make us even more attentive to our way of relating to others. And prayer, in which God touches and moves our hearts, should make us ever more open to the need of our brothers and sisters for dignity and freedom, as well as our responsibility to care for all creation.... God continues to look for those whom he can send forth into the world... to bear witness to his love."