110 YEARS OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSIONARY UNION

ONE IN CHRIST
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Mission

100 YEARS OF WORLD MISSION SUNDAY

*One in Christ, United in Mission*

# Meditations on the Biblical Readings of the Holy Mass for the Missionary Month October 2026

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TO GIVE A FUTURE WITH HOPE

*At the request of the Pontifical Missionary Union, the following national PMS directions collaborated in the preparation of these meditations:*
*Italy, India, and the United States.*

## Thursday, October 1, 2026[1]

*Memorial of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church*

Job 19:21-27; Ps 27; Lk 10:1-12

The liturgy immediately introduces us to the theme of mission that will engage us throughout the entire month of October, in the year in which we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the World Mission Sunday and the 110th anniversary of the foundation of the Pontifical Missionary Union.
In the first reading, the cry of Job is significant: in the height of his suffering, he expresses the desire to see God at work, that is, to be set free, already on this earth, from his afflictions. Jesus responds to this expectation of liberation. In the Gospel passage, he urges his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest, and immediately afterward he sends seventy-two of them on mission. In fact, shortly before, Luke had already mentioned—referring to the Gospel of Mark—a first sending of disciples, numbering twelve, those who, in his view, could be fully considered apostles. Now instead, drawing on another tradition, he recalls the sending of an additional seventy-two disciples.
By playing with numbers, he wishes to show that Jesus, after sending the Twelve to the twelve tribes of Israel, also had in mind the other nations which, according to the Book of Genesis (in its Greek translation), were precisely seventy-two. To both groups, Jesus entrusts the task of proclaiming the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God. This means the beginning of a new world, in which so much suffering will be alleviated, and peace will finally prevail, together with justice and solidarity.
This is the ideal that those who are sent must now proclaim, potentially to the whole world, illustrating it first of all with their own lives. Therefore, they must behave like lambs in the midst of wolves, thus rejecting the temptation to establish a better world through violence. Moreover, they must be content with the food offered to them, avoiding those dietary scruples that hinder relationships among people. Finally, Jesus grants the apostles the power to heal those who are sick not only in body but also in spirit.
The sending of the seventy-two disciples touches us closely. Pope Francis writes: “Following Christ the Lord, Christians are called to hand on the Good News by sharing the concrete life situations of those whom they meet, and thus to be bearers and builders of hope” (*Message for the 2025 World Mission Sunday*). And missionaries carry out this task also in our name.

[1] The commentaries from October 1 to 7 were provided by the National PMS Office in Italy (Missio Italia), to whom we express our sincere gratitude, especially to the author of the texts, Rev. Fr. Alessandro Sacchi, a missionary of the PIME.

## Friday, October 2, 2026

*Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels*

Ex 23:20-23; Ps 91; Mt 18:1-5,10

The first reading of today's liturgy does not speak of guardian angels, but of a messenger (angel) who, strikingly, bears the very name of God. This is a typically biblical image: God dwells in the heights of heaven, yet at the same time is present in this world. This apparent contradiction is resolved by understanding that God remains above, yet acts here below through his messenger, who in a real sense is God himself, present and at work in the world.

For Israel, this mysterious presence was revealed above all in the liberation of the people from the slavery to which they had been subjected in Egypt, and in leading them into a land flowing with milk and honey. God accompanied them along that long journey, sustaining them and helping them overcome the difficulties they encountered; above all, he spoke to them and gave them a law of freedom—the Ten Commandments—which ensured relationships of justice and fraternity within the people. If the people were to transgress these norms, they would inevitably fall back into slavery, as in fact happened with the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile.

Jesus too proclaimed his Gospel of freedom, walking along the roads of Galilee and sharing in the joys and often dramatic sufferings of ordinary people. His concern was especially for the least—for those afflicted by repulsive diseases or engaged in despised professions, which pushed them to the margins of society and excluded them from worship. Children, too, were a striking example.

To all of these, Jesus showed particular care and taught that only those who become like little children can enter the Kingdom of God. This is the path followed by many missionaries, who have been able to touch people's hearts by proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God and by making visible, in both word and deed, God's mercy for all, beginning with the poorest and most abandoned.

Pope Francis writes: "Mission, we see, is a tireless going out to all men and women, in order to invite them to encounter God and enter into communion with him." (*Message for the 2024 World Mission Sunday 2024*).

This too is the path that missionaries, by their example, point out to their Churches of origin.

## Saturday, October 3, 2026

Job 42:1-3,5-6,12-17; Ps 119; Lk 10:17-24

Job was a very wealthy man who believed himself to be honest and upright, convinced—consistent with the mindset of his time—that the sheer quantity of his possessions was proof of his righteousness. For this reason, when he was stripped of all his wealth, he had to face the harsh judgment of those who assumed that such suffering must be the consequence of some grave sin he had committed. Job, however, refused to accept being treated as a sinner. He therefore gave way to a fierce protest against God, whom he believed had brought him into this complicated situation.

In the end, God Himself steps into the scene and responds, not by explaining divine justice, but by describing the wonders He has worked in this world—wonders that attest to His sovereign power. And finally, Job understands that God operates in the world not like a judge who simply dispenses rewards or punishments, but as the vital energy that sustains life and is revealed in the yearning for goodness, kindness, and love that dwells deep within the human heart.

The disciples whom Jesus sent out to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God soon realized that God had mysteriously gone before them. It was God Himself who was at work in the signs they performed—signs that revealed His victory over the forces of evil and His mercy toward all who suffered in body, mind, or spirit. Their task was simply to keep alive the hope of a better world, a world in which evil would finally be vanquished.

Thus, God is not the exclusive possession of Jews or Christians; He is present and active in all people and must be sought and discovered in every corner of the world.

This is precisely what John Paul II emphasizes when he writes: «The Second Vatican Council recalls that the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the “seeds of the Word,” to be found in human initiatives-including religious ones-and in mankind's efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself» (*Redemptoris missio* 28).

This is the message that missionaries proclaim to their churches of origin, helping them not to fossilize within their own doctrinal or moral frameworks, but to open themselves to the world outside and to seek there the mysterious presence of God.

## Sunday, October 4, 2026

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 5:1-7; Ps 80; Phil 4:6-9; Mt 21:33-43

According to the Gospel tradition, on the eve of His Passion, Jesus told the parable of the murderous tenants, in which He foreshadowed the dramatic event of His death. The liturgy of this Sunday presents it by highlighting one aspect of His message, namely the fundamental dogma of Israel—its identity as the chosen people. Indeed, as the first reading, the text offers a passage from Isaiah with the allegory of the vineyard, which describes God's love for this people, who, instead of remaining faithful, rebelled against Him: a betrayal that consisted essentially in violating the laws contained in the Decalogue, which formed the basis of the covenant between God and Israel. Without the practice of justice, the covenant could not endure, and Isaiah affirmed this, threatening the destruction of the vineyard.

Jesus takes up this theme, addressing, as Luke had emphasized shortly before, the chief priests and elders, that is, the guardians of the covenant. They considered themselves intermediaries between God and His people, and from this they derived honor, respect, power, and material advantage. By virtue of this prerogative, they interfered in the lives of the people, placing burdens on their shoulders that they themselves were unwilling to bear (cf. Mt 23:4). And to secure these privileges, they allied with the Romans and participated with them in the exploitation of the people. Against this instrumentalization of religion, Jesus had protested by driving out the dove sellers and money changers from the Temple, who acted on behalf of the priests. Now, He compares them to the murderous tenants who rebel against the owner of the vineyard, announcing their ruin and the transfer of His covenant to others.

Matthew implies that Jesus was referring to the Church, which, according to Paul, represents the Israel of the last days, the bearer of the new covenant promised by the prophets. Unfortunately, over the centuries, even the leaders of the Church have often fallen into the same contradictions as the priests and elders of Israel, treating adherence to the Church as the only path to salvation and imposing on believers doctrines and practices not always in accordance with the teaching of Jesus. This is what Paul wanted to avoid when, in the passage from the Letter to the Philippians read in this Sunday's liturgy, he urged them to treasure everything that is true, noble, just, pure, lovable, honorable—in a word, everything that is virtue and worthy of praise, wherever it may be found.

Pope Francis alluded to this directive when, in his *Message for 2025 World Mission Sunday*, he urged Christians to be "missionaries of hope among the nations" and not to confine themselves to closed or self-referential attitudes, but to proclaim the Gospel by reopening dynamics of fraternal closeness, compassion, and service. Many missionaries overcame the temptation to which the Pope refers when they found themselves among non-Christian populations, for whom being priests conferred no privilege and the structures and patterns of the ancient churches no longer applied. Their experience has certainly helped prevent us from conceiving of the Church as the sole ark of salvation, but rather as a community of brothers and sisters at the service of true peace and of shared, solidary progress.

## Monday, October 5, 2026

Gal 1:6-12; Ps 111; Lk 10:25-37

The other gospel that Paul, in his Letter to the Galatians, denounces as a betrayal of the true gospel of Jesus consists in the belief that Gentiles could not be welcomed into the Christian community unless they first accepted circumcision and committed themselves to observing the Mosaic law. For Paul, this is not the case: the Gentile must be accepted in his human reality without discriminatory conditions, because only Jesus is the author of salvation.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus deals with a similar theme in a dialogue with a scholar of the law. This man had asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus agreed with him that one must observe the commandment that enjoins love of God above all else and love of one's neighbor as oneself. At this, the lawyer asked Him another question: "And who is my neighbor?" In response, Jesus tells him a parable that is essentially a real-life event: a Jew was attacked by robbers, who stripped him and left him half-dead on the side of a deserted road.

First a Levite and then a priest happened to pass by, but they did not stop; then a Samaritan came along and gave the unfortunate man the necessary help. This was an act of humanity, but it also reveals an anomaly: the first two were religious people for whom the wounded man, being a Jew, should have been their neighbor, yet they did not recognize him as such. For the Samaritan, on the other hand, he was not a neighbor but distant, since he belonged to a different, hostile, and rival people; by showing concern for him, he thus becomes his neighbor.

The interpretation is clear: love must not be directed only to people with whom one has family ties, friendship, or common interests, but must be open potentially to all those in need. This is how missionaries have interpreted the Lord's teaching: they have known how to become neighbors to distant and unknown people, giving them all the help they could, breaking down every discrimination caused by differences of ethnicity, language, and culture.

The example of the missionaries is especially relevant today for Christians in our ancient communities, who are called to recognize as neighbors to be loved many distant people who, driven by poverty and wars, have reached our coasts.

Mission is a continuous going forth from oneself, a journey that breaks boundaries, transcends barriers, and brings the Gospel where humanity is wounded (Pope Francis, *Message for World Mission Sunday 2022*). In this way the Church becomes an open home, a place of encounter where diverse peoples recognize one another as brothers.

## Tuesday, October 6, 2026

*Memorial of Saint Bruno, Priest*

Gal 1:13-24; Ps 139; Lk 10:38-42

Before coming to Christ, Paul was not an unbeliever. As a Pharisee, he knew the Scriptures well and was certainly familiar with Jesus' preaching. If he persecuted Christians, he may have done so out of fear that the Christian movement, with its strong messianic emphasis, would draw Jewish communities into a dangerous conflict with the Roman authorities. His conversion to Christ and his commitment to proclaiming the Gospel were certainly not the result of a sudden decision, but the culmination of deep reflection. Although he was a man of action, he was also a man of prayer, a mystic who encountered Jesus and understood his central role in God's plan.

The close connection between prayer and action is illustrated by Luke through the account of Jesus' encounter with the two sisters, Martha and Mary. Jesus does not rebuke Martha for her busyness: this was a duty that fell to her as the hostess. He simply says that Mary, an attentive listener to his word, has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her. In our relationship with Jesus, therefore, primacy belongs not to action but to prayer, understood as listening to the Gospel of Jesus, followed by reflection and a personal response; and this not only on special occasions, but as a way of life. This is a principle that is easily grasped. The Gospel that Jesus entrusted to the Church is not a set of doctrines, precepts, or rituals to be learned and transmitted slavishly. Rather, it is a message of salvation that must always be "chewed over," deepened, and applied to the reality of one's own life before being communicated to others.

This need is particularly felt by missionaries who, by virtue of their very vocation, bring the Gospel to environments different from those in which they were born and raised, but it applies to all of us. Pope Francis emphasizes this when he writes: "By praying, we keep alive the spark of hope lit by God within us, so that it can become a great fire, which enlightens and warms everyone around us, also by those concrete actions and gestures that prayer itself inspires" (*Message for 2025 World Mission Sunday*). This, however, is possible only if we avoid limiting prayer to a series of requests or formulas often repeated mechanically.

**Wednesday, October 7, 2026**

*Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary*

Gal 2:1-2,7-14; Ps 117; Lk 11:1-4

The disagreement between Paul and Peter must have been particularly serious if it led to the direct confrontation described by Paul himself in the Letter to the Galatians. According to Luke's account in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter was the first to realize that it was not necessary to require pagans who had come to Christ to observe the dietary and ritual laws of the Mosaic Law. Therefore, as Paul recalls, while remaining personally faithful to these laws, Peter felt free to set them aside in order to share communal meals with Christians who had come from pagan backgrounds.

Paul, too, in his Letter to the Romans, supports this position. If he criticizes Peter, he does so because Peter, at a certain point, out of fear of those Jewish Christians who thought differently, had backtracked, thus creating a rift in the community. The story of the clash between Paul and Peter highlights the importance of always sincerely seeking what truly grounds the unity of believers among themselves and with Christ. Along these lines, in his *Message for World Mission Sunday 2026*, Pope Leo writes: "Being a Christian is not primarily about practices or ideas: it is a life in union with Christ […] This union gives rise to mutual communion among believers, and is the source of all missionary fruitfulness."

If we now wish to know what is essential in Christianity, the prayer taught by Jesus—the Lord's Prayer—as recorded in the Gospel passage can be of help to us. In it, he teaches us to invoke God as Father: naturally, this presupposes the awareness that all human beings are brothers and sisters, endowed with the same rights and duties, and that they must therefore always respect and love one another. The sanctification of God's name expresses, in harmony with the language of the prophet Ezekiel, the hope for a better world, the kingdom of God, for which it is worth striving. Consequently, it affirms the need for a just distribution of bread—that is, the goods of the earth—among all, and for mutual forgiveness of sins; finally, it asks for help to be freed from temptation, that is, from the illusion of being able to make the world better through the exercise of power. This is the fundamental message that Jesus entrusted to his Church and that missionaries bear witness to throughout the world.

## Thursday, October 8, 2026[2]

Gal 3:1-5; Lk 1:69-75; Lk 11:5-13

The Word of God today places mission at the heart of faith itself. In Galatians, Paul confronts the Galatians with a sharp question: "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by believing what you heard?" (Gal 3:2). Mission begins not with human effort or ritual correctness, but with docility to the Spirit. When faith is reduced to external observance, mission withers. When faith remains an encounter with the living Christ, the Spirit continues to act, transform, and send. As *Ad gentes* reminds us, the Church is "missionary by her very nature," born from the sending of the Son and the Spirit (AG 2).

Zechariah's Benedictus (Lk 1:69–75) situates mission within God's saving fidelity. God visits and redeems his people, not to enclose them in privilege, but to free them "from the hands of enemies" so that they may serve without fear, in holiness and righteousness. Mission is liberation for service. As recent missionary reflections insist, the Church does not proclaim herself but bears witness to God who remains faithful to his promises and attentive to the cries of humanity (cf. Pope Francis, *2024 World Mission Sunday Message*; see also 2 Cor 4:5).

In the Gospel (Lk 11:5–13), Jesus presents prayer as bold, persevering trust. The missionary disciple is one who knocks tirelessly, confident that the Father gives not stones but the Holy Spirit. Mission is sustained not by strategy alone, but by prayer that dares to ask. As *Ad gentes* affirms, the Spirit is the principal agent of mission, preparing hearts and guiding evangelizers (cf. AG 4).

In a world marked by fatigue and fear, today's readings call the Church to renew her missionary zeal: to trust the Spirit, to serve freely, and to pray persistently. Only a Church rooted in faith, prayer, and hope can truly proclaim Christ to all nations.

[2] The commentaries from October 8 to 16 were provided by the PMS National Direction in India, to whom we express our sincere gratitude, especially to the author of the texts, rev. prof. Yesu Karunanidhi, Missionary of Mercy of the Archdiocese of Madurai.

## Friday, October 9, 2026

*Memorial of Saint John Leonardi, Priest, and Saint John Henry Newman, Priest and Doctor of the Church*

Gal 3:7-14; Ps 111; Lk 11:15-26

The readings today reveal the heart of the Gospel as a missionary proclamation of freedom, blessing, and decisive choice.

In the first reading, Paul boldly redefines belonging to God's people: "Those who believe are the descendants of Abraham" (Gal 3:7). Mission is not the expansion of a cultural or legal system, but the widening of faith. Christ redeems humanity from the curse of the law by becoming a curse himself, so that "the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles" (Gal 3:14). Here lies the core of missionary exegesis: the cross is not an obstacle to mission but its source. As *Ad gentes* teaches, the Church is sent to make present this mystery of salvation among all peoples, not by imposition but by proclamation of grace (cf. AG 6).

In Psalm 111 the Psalmist thanks God for his covenantal faithfulness. God remembers his covenant and his people. Mission flows from God's remembering us, and we remembering others. Contemporary missionary teaching insists that evangelization today requires spiritual authority rooted in communion with Christ, not in power or ideology (cf. Pope Francis, *2025 World Mission Sunday Message*).

In the gospel reading, Jesus confronts the accusation that his mission is driven by evil. He responds with clarity: "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Lk 15:20). Mission is spiritual combat. Neutrality is impossible: "Whoever is not with me is against me." The Gospel warns against an empty faith that expels evil but does not welcome Christ. A house swept but uninhabited becomes vulnerable again.

Thus, missionary disciples are called not only to reject evil but to be filled with Christ. As *Ad gentes* affirms, conversion is both turning away from idols and opening one's life fully to the living God (cf. AG 13). Only a Church inhabited by Christ can be a credible sign of the Kingdom for the world.

## Saturday, October 10, 2026

Gal 3:22-29; Ps 105; Lk 11:27-28

The Word of God today proclaims a profoundly missionary vision of faith, identity, and belonging.
In the first reading, Paul announces a decisive turning point in salvation history. The Law, once a custodian, gives way to faith in Christ. Through baptism, believers are "clothed with Christ" and enter a new communion where divisions lose their power: "There is no longer Jew or Greek… for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Mission, therefore, is not about creating uniformity but about revealing a deeper unity rooted in Christ. The Church does not export a culture; she offers a new identity. As *Ad gentes* affirms, those who believe in Christ are incorporated into a people drawn from all nations, cultures, and histories (cf. AG 5).
Contemporary missionary teaching reminds us that evangelization today must be attentive to the signs of the Spirit already at work in peoples, cultures, and histories, inviting collaboration rather than conquest (cf. Pope Leo XIV, *2026 World Mission Sunday Message*).
In the Gospel (Luke 11:27–28), a woman praises Jesus' mother, but Jesus redirects the blessing: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Missionary discipleship is defined not by privilege or proximity, but by obedience to the Word. Mary is blessed not only because she bore Christ, but because she listened, trusted, and lived the Word fully. The Church, like Mary, becomes missionary when she listens before she speaks.
Thus, today's readings call the Church to rediscover her missionary identity: clothed in Christ, animated by the Spirit, and obedient to the Word. As *Ad gentes* teaches, mission is the manifestation of God's plan to gather all humanity into one people in Christ (cf. AG 1). A Church that lives this unity becomes a credible sign of hope for a fragmented world.

## Sunday, October 11, 2026

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 25:6-10a; Ps 23; Phil 4:12-14,19-20; Mt 22:1-14

Today's liturgy unfolds before us like a magnificent vision of God's generosity, a vision that speaks deeply to the Church's missionary identity. At the centre of the Word of God stands a powerful and recurring image: a banquet prepared by God Himself. This is not accidental. The Scriptures use the language of the feast to describe salvation, communion, joy, and fulfilment.

In the first reading from Isaiah, we hear one of the most consoling promises in the Bible: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines." This is not merely poetic imagery; it is theological revelation. God's plan is universal. The feast is prepared not for a select few, not for the perfect, not for the privileged, but for all peoples. Here we encounter the deepest foundation of mission. The Church does not create her missionary vocation; she receives it from the very heart of God, who desires that all humanity be gathered into His life.

Isaiah continues with words of profound hope: God will remove the veil covering the nations, destroy death forever, and wipe away tears from every face. Salvation is described not as escape, but as healing; not as exclusion, but as restoration. Mission, therefore, is participation in God's work of life and consolation. It is the extension of divine mercy into the wounds of the world.

Psalm 23 echoes this same vision through the tender image of the shepherd: "The Lord is my shepherd… You spread the table before me." Even in the valley of darkness, there is no fear. Why? Because God's presence transforms everything. The Christian life is sustained by divine generosity. Gratitude becomes the soil from which mission grows. One who has experienced God's care cannot remain closed in self-concern.

Saint Paul, writing to the Philippians, reveals the interior freedom of the missionary disciple: "I know how to live in humble circumstances; I know how to live with abundance" (Phil 4:12). Paul's secret is not personal strength but Christ-centred confidence: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." Missionary life inevitably passes through hardship and consolation, scarcity and abundance. Yet when Christ becomes the true treasure, circumstances lose their tyranny.

Paul also expresses gratitude for the community's solidarity: "You have shared in my hardship" (Phil 4:14). Mission is never an isolated enterprise. It is sustained by prayer, generosity, sacrifice, and communion. Here we hear the constant teaching of the Popes, especially in their messages for World Mission Sunday. Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us that mission belongs to the entire Church. Some are sent, others support, but all are involved. The Gospel advances through a network of faith and charity.

Pope Francis speaks of a Church that "goes forth," a Church that refuses to remain enclosed in comfort or self-preservation. Mission, he insists, is born from encounter with Christ and expressed through compassion. Evangelization is not propaganda; it is the sharing of joy. It is the natural overflow of a heart touched by mercy.

Pope Leo XIV, continuing this missionary vision, calls the Church to rediscover hope as the driving force of evangelization. Mission is sustained by the certainty that Christ is alive and active in history. We are not spreading an abstract message but witnessing to a living Lord. Hope gives courage. Hope generates perseverance. Hope makes mission possible even in a weary world.

In the Gospel, Jesus presents the parable of the wedding banquet. Once again, the image of the feast. But now we encounter a dramatic tension: those who are invited refuse to come. The tragedy is not hostility but indifference. They are distracted, preoccupied, absorbed in their own concerns. How contemporary this sounds. Mission today often encounters not direct rejection but quiet forgetfulness, a life crowded with noise and urgency.

Yet the king does not cancel the feast. He widens the invitation: “Go therefore into the main roads and invite everyone you find” (Mt 22:9). This is mission in its purest form. The Gospel moves outward. Boundaries dissolve. Unexpected guests are welcomed. Here we see the Church’s missionary mandate: the invitation of God must reach all, especially those who never imagined they were included.

But the parable ends with a sobering reminder: the guest without the wedding garment. This is not about external propriety but interior transformation. God’s mercy is universal, but it is never superficial. To accept the invitation is to accept conversion. Mission is not merely inclusion; it is participation in a life reshaped by grace.

Both Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV emphasize this essential balance. The Church proclaims boundless mercy and calls to genuine discipleship. The Gospel consoles, but it also transforms. Divine love welcomes us as we are, yet it never leaves us unchanged.

These readings speak directly to our lives. We are invited to the banquet. The Eucharist we celebrate is already the foretaste of Isaiah’s feast. Here Christ gathers His people. Here heaven touches earth. Here gratitude becomes mission. Each Mass ends with a sending, reminding us that faith must move outward into witness.

Let us ask ourselves: Do we live as those who know they are invited? Does our faith radiate joy? Does our hope become visible to others? The world longs, often silently, for meaning, for healing, for hope. The Church is sent as a sign of God’s banquet — a sign that communion is possible, that mercy is real, that life triumphs over death.

Isaiah’s words become our prayer: “This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad” (Is 25:9). Mission is ultimately this rejoicing shared.

## Monday, October 12, 2026

Gal 4:22-24,26-27,31-5:1; Ps 113; Lk 11:29-32

The readings today illuminate the missionary drama of Christian freedom, faith, and responsibility.
In Galatians 4:22–5:1, Paul contrasts slavery and freedom through the symbolic figures of Hagar and Sarah. The message is unmistakable: "For freedom Christ has set us free." Mission begins in this interior liberation. A Church that lives in fear, legalism, or self-protection cannot proclaim the Gospel convincingly. Freedom is not independence from God but life in the Spirit. As *Ad gentes* teaches, the Church is sent to announce "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (cf. AG 8). Evangelization is therefore not the imposition of burdens but the proclamation of liberation in Christ.
Psalm 113 praises the name of the Lord. The name of the Lord guides the people. Missionary witness is born not from anxiety but from confidence. As emphasized in the recent missionary message, unity with Christ generates courage, serenity, and generosity — qualities essential for evangelization (cf. Pope Leo XIV, *2026 World Mission Sunday Message*). A fearful disciple cannot be a joyful messenger.
In Luke 11:29–32, Jesus rebukes the demand for signs. The only sign given is Jonah — the call to conversion. Missionary proclamation always carries this prophetic dimension. The Gospel is not spectacle but invitation to transformation. Nineveh listened and changed; the Queen of the South sought wisdom. The tragedy of unbelief lies not in lack of evidence but in resistance of the heart. As *Ad gentes* reminds us, conversion is the essential response to the missionary announcement (cf. AG 13).
Together, these readings call the Church to rediscover the essence of mission: freedom in Christ, trust in God, and openness to conversion. Evangelization flows from a liberated heart, sustained by faith, and oriented toward transformation. Only such a Church can become, in every age, a credible sign of hope and salvation for the world.

## Tuesday, October 13, 2026

Gal 5:1-6; Ps 119; Lk 11:37-41

The Word of God today calls us to rediscover the inner truth of Christian freedom and the integrity of missionary witness.

In Galatians 5:1–6, Paul's proclamation is both liberating and demanding: "For freedom Christ has set us free." Freedom, however, is not a return to self-centred living, nor is it bondage to external observances. Circumcision or uncircumcision — symbols of religious identity — no longer define the believer. What truly matters is "faith working through love." Missionary life flows precisely from this dynamic. Evangelization is credible when faith becomes visible in charity. As *Ad gentes* teaches, the Church's mission is not merely doctrinal transmission but the manifestation of God's love in the world (cf. AG 11).

In Psalm 119 the psalmist praises God and wishes to keep the word of the Lord for ever. Praise becomes a form of witness. A heart anchored in God's fidelity radiates hope. Christian joy itself becomes missionary, for it reveals the living presence of God more eloquently than many words.

In Luke 11:37–41, Jesus confronts the Pharisee's preoccupation with external purity. The critique is sharp: "You cleanse the outside… but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." The Gospel exposes a perennial temptation: religious correctness without interior conversion. For missionary disciples, this warning is decisive. The credibility of proclamation depends on the coherence of life. As *Ad gentes* reminds us, the Church evangelizes first by witness — by what she is before what she says (cf. AG 6).

Jesus' instruction is strikingly simple: "Give alms, and behold, everything will be clean for you" (Lk 11:41). Charity purifies. Love restores integrity. Mission is not sustained by appearances but by transformed hearts.

Today's readings invite the Church to examine herself: Is our freedom rooted in Christ? Is our faith alive in love? Is our witness marked by authenticity? Only a Church purified within — living faith through love — can become a convincing sign of God's Kingdom in the world.

## Wednesday, October 14, 2026

*Memorial of Saint Callistus I, Pope and Martyr*

Gal 5:18-25; Ps 1; Lk 11:42-46

The readings today place before us a fundamental missionary truth: the Gospel transforms not only belief, but life itself.

In Galatians 5:18–25, Paul draws a stark contrast between the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit." This is not merely a moral catalogue; it is a missionary diagnosis. A life governed by jealousy, discord, selfishness, and excess cannot reveal the Kingdom of God. Mission is not sustained by words alone but by visible transformation. The Christian becomes a sign of God's presence when the Spirit bears fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. As *Ad gentes* teaches, the Church's mission is to manifest and communicate the charity of God to all humanity (cf. AG 10). The fruit of the Spirit is therefore missionary by nature — it makes God's love perceptible.

Psalm 1 deepens this vision. The blessed one delights in the law of the Lord and becomes like a tree planted near running water. Stability, fruitfulness, and resilience — these are missionary qualities. The disciple rooted in God becomes a source of life for others. Mission requires interior grounding. Without deep roots, witness dries up.

In Luke 11:42–46, Jesus offers a penetrating critique of religious hypocrisy. The Pharisees observe tithes meticulously but neglect justice and love. The lawyers impose burdens yet fail to touch them with compassion. Here the Gospel exposes a danger that always threatens believers: external religiosity without interior conversion. Such religion does not attract; it alienates. As *Ad gentes* reminds us, the Church must witness through a life that reflects the Gospel she proclaims (cf. AG 11). Jesus does not reject the law but restores its heart: justice, mercy, love. Missionary discipleship demands coherence. The Spirit's fruit must shape relationships, priorities, and attitudes.

Today's Word calls the Church to examine her authenticity. Do our lives bear the fruit of the Spirit? Does our religion liberate or burden? True mission flows from a Spirit-filled life, rooted in God, radiating justice, and marked by love. Only such witness makes the Gospel credible in the world.

## Thursday, October 15, 2026

*Memorial of Saint Teresa of Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church*

Eph 1:1-10; Ps 98; Lk 11:47-54

Today's readings open before us the great vision of God's saving plan. In Ephesians, Saint Paul tells us that we are chosen in Christ even before the foundation of the world. God's purpose is clear: "to sum up all things in Christ." Mission begins here — not in our activity, but in God's initiative. We are part of a divine plan that seeks to gather a divided humanity into unity and communion.

As *Ad gentes* reminds us, the Church is missionary because she shares in this very plan of God (cf. AG 2).

Psalm 98 gives this plan a voice of joy: "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God." Salvation is not meant to remain hidden. It must be proclaimed, celebrated, and shared.

Pope Francis often insists that the Gospel spreads through joy — a joy that attracts and draws others to Christ. Mission is born from gratitude and expressed through witness.

In Luke 11:47–54, Jesus exposes a tragic contradiction. The religious leaders honour the prophets outwardly while perpetuating the same resistance that led to their rejection. The critique is severe because the stakes are high. Here lies a danger for every believer: to preserve religion without allowing conversion. Mission is blocked not only by rejection, but by hypocrisy and closure.

When religious structures defend themselves rather than welcome God's voice, the Word is silenced. Jesus' lament reveals a perennial missionary warning: one may preserve tradition yet resist conversion.

*Ad gentes* reminds us that evangelization always involves renewal and purification (AG 5). The Church must remain open to the prophetic Word she proclaims. The credibility of mission depends on coherence between memory and obedience, doctrine and life.

Pope Leo XIV calls the Church to renew her missionary zeal through hope and inner conversion. A Church that listens to Christ becomes a Church that opens doors.

Today we are invited to respond: to recognize God's plan, to rejoice in His salvation, and to remain open to His Word. Only a Church that listens, is transformed, and goes forth with joy can truly become a sign of unity and hope for the world.

**Friday, October 16, 2026**

*Memorial of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, Virgin*

Eph 1:11-14; Ps 33; Lk 12:1-7

The Word of God today unveils the deep foundation of Christian mission: identity, trust, and fearless witness.

In Ephesians 1:11–14, Paul speaks of the astonishing dignity of believers: chosen, destined, sealed with the Holy Spirit. Mission begins here — not in activity, but in identity. The Christian is not first a worker, but an heir. The Spirit is given as a "seal" and "guarantee," marking believers as belonging to God and orienting them toward the fullness of redemption. Mission, therefore, flows from gratitude. As *Ad gentes* reminds us, the Church is missionary because she is born from God's saving plan, not from human initiative (cf. AG 2). Evangelization is the joyful expression of what we have already received.

The Responsorial Psalm presents a vision of including everyone into the covenantal love of God.

In Luke 12:1–7, Jesus addresses fear — the great obstacle to mission. He warns against hypocrisy, that subtle division between appearance and truth. Everything hidden will be revealed. Missionary integrity requires transparency of life. But Jesus' central message is consolation: "Do not be afraid." Divine providence extends even to the smallest sparrow; how much more to those entrusted with the Gospel.

Fearlessness is not self-confidence but trust in God's faithful care. As *Ad gentes* teaches, missionaries must carry the Gospel with courage, sustained by the certainty that God's grace precedes and accompanies them (cf. AG 24).

Together, these readings shape a missionary spirituality. We are heirs, sealed by the Spirit. We are forgiven, sustained by mercy. We are sent, liberated from fear.

Mission is not driven by anxiety or compulsion. It is the natural radiance of a life rooted in God's election, strengthened by grace, and upheld by providence. A Church that trusts this identity becomes a fearless and credible witness to the world.

**Saturday, 17 October 2026**[3]

*Memorial of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop and Martyr*

Eph 1:15-23; Ps 8; Lk 12:8-12

Jesus tells us very directly in today's Gospel: "Everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God."

At first, this might sound like it is only about words—about whether we speak publicly about Jesus. But it goes much deeper. It is about whether our whole life acknowledges him or subtly denies him.

Jesus speaks these words as he prepares his disciples for mission. He knows they will face pressure, opposition, even persecution. He tells them not to be afraid. The Father cares for them. The Son will stand with them. And the Holy Spirit will give them the words they need.

They should not be afraid, in other words, because as he sends them out, he goes with them.

But there is still a choice to make: Will we acknowledge Christ, or will we remain silent, especially when it costs?

Fear can lead us to hide our faith, to compromise, to keep Jesus at the margins of our lives. Faith, instead, gives us the courage to live openly as his disciples, trusting that our life is in God's hands.

Today the Church gives us a powerful example in St. Ignatius of Antioch. On his way from Smyrna (modern Izmir, Turkey) to his martyrdom in Rome, he took advantage of the pulpit of his chains to witness to the first Christians by seven letters. In one, he wrote that he wanted to become "God's wheat," ground like bread for Christ. He understood that following Jesus meant giving uniting oneself to the Lord's Eucharistic self-giving, to go the way of the grain of wheat, to "lose" one's life to save it.

Most of us will not be asked for martyrdom. But all of us are asked for witness—daily, concrete, and often quiet. In our families, in our work, in our conversations, in the way we love. In that testimony, God does the heavy lifting. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his *2009 World Mission Sunday Message*, "Evangelization is the work of the Spirit; before it being an action, it is a witness and irradiation of the light of Christ."

Today, through the intercession of St. Ignatius of Antioch, let us ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to reflect the light of Christ and acknowledge him with our lips and our life.

[3] The commentaries from October 17 to 31 were provided by Msgr. Roger Landry, the PMS National Director in the United States, to whom we express our sincere gratitude.

**Sunday, October 18, 2026**

**100th World Mission Sunday**

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 45:1,4-6; Ps 96; 1Thes 1:1-5b; Mt 22:15-21

On this World Mission Sunday, as we pray for missionaries across the globe and all those to whom they are striving to bring Jesus and his saving work, we have in the Gospel a reminder of the heart of the Gospel: that God has made us out of love in his own image and likeness, that we are his, and he calls us to life with him.

These truths are revealed in Jesus' contentious conversation with the Pharisees and Herodians.

These two groups — rigorists and laxists respectively, and therefore generally opposed to each other— co-conspire to trap Jesus. Their question seems simple, but it is malevolently calculated: "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?"

If Jesus answered in the affirmative, he risked alienating the people. If he said no, he could be accused of inciting rebellion against Rome. But Jesus did not allow himself to be trapped. Instead, he asked for a coin and posed a deeper question: "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" When they replied, "Caesar's," he responded, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Jesus' response is more than a brilliant escape from a political dilemma. He was leading us beyond a question about taxes to the truth of our identity.

If the coin bears Caesar's image and belongs to Caesar, then what bears God's image belongs to God. As the first chapter of the Bible attests, we have been created in God's image and likeness. Through baptism, that created reality has been intensified: we have been united to Christ, made children of the Father, and temples of the Holy Spirit. We do not belong partially to God. We belong entirely to him. He claims us lovingly as his own.

This is the foundation of our Christian life and our Christian mission.

Mission does not begin with what we say or do, but with who we are. When we recognize that our life is a gift from God and ultimately belongs to him, everything changes. Our time, our relationships, our work, our resources—all become part of a self-offering back to him with gratitude and love.

Pope Leo XIV, in his message for *2026 World Mission Sunday*, wrote that "the more united we are in Christ, the better able we will be to carry out together the mission that he entrusts to us." From that union with God, and in him with each other, flows all missionary fruitfulness.

This is why the Gospel challenges us today.

Many of us try to live divided lives. We compartmentalize. Perhaps we give something to God, or even a lot to God, but we hold things back for ourselves. Jesus, however, calls us to a total gift, to love God not just with some, or even most, of our mind, heart, soul and strength, but all.

To "render to God what is God's" means to give him what he has given us — and he has given us our life, our time, our talents, our relationships, our material resources, all that we are and have. It means to treat him not just as part of our life but as its source, summit, root and center.

It likewise means living in the image of the Trinity, in a loving communion of persons with our brothers and sisters. This is the heart of mission, as we and the whole Church seek to proclaim to the world in whose image they've been made and seek to bring them to have true communion with God and with us.

On this *World Mission Sunday*, we remember that God is interested in 100 out of 100, in 8.1 billion out of 8.1 billion. As St. Paul VI wrote for this celebration *in 1971*, "If there was ever a time when Christians, more than ever in the past, are called to be a light that illuminates the world, a city located on a mountain, a salt that gives flavor to the life of men, this, undoubtedly, is our time. We, in fact,

have the antidote to pessimism, dark omens, discouragement and fear, from which our time suffers. We have the Good News!”

Today, then, the Lord invites us to look again at our lives, not as something we possess or own, but as something we have received as a gift and for which we are stewards. He asks us to return that gift to him, freely and fully, especially by the way we use the gift of life to help bring others to him.

The way we most reflect the divine image is by imitating the missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and cooperating with God the Father’s plan of saving love, so that none of his children perish but come to eternal life.

**Monday, October 19, 2026**

*Memorial of Saints John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, Priests, and Companions, Martyrs*

*Memorial of Saint Paul of the Cross*

Eph 2:1-10; Ps 100; Lk 12:13-21

A man approaches Jesus in today's Gospel with what seems like a reasonable request: "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." He is asking, it seems, for justice, but Jesus seeks to lead him and the crowd to a much more important consideration. He warns everyone to "Take care to guard against all greed, for one's life does not consist of possessions."

St. Paul would say that the root of all evil is "love of money," or avarice (1 Tim 6:10). Jesus would elsewhere insist that we cannot serve both God and mammon (Mt 6:24); either we will use money to serve God or, like the man in today's Gospel, we will strive to use God to seek money.

Jesus, to illustrate this crucial point in the spiritual life, gives us a parable of a rich man who has had a very successful harvest. His grain bins are too small to store the produce, so, rather than sharing with those who are hungry, he builds larger barns, thinking it would secure his life for the foreseeable future and allow him selfishly and self-centeredly to "eat, drink and be merry."

Yet Jesus calls him a fool because that very night he would die and not be able to take any of his riches with him. Jesus underlines the moral of the story: "Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God."

Jesus raises the question about whether we're foolishly seeking to become wealthy in worldly things or wisely striving to become rich in what truly matters.

We know what matters ultimately to God. Jesus revealed it by everything he taught about the Kingdom of God, which he said was a treasure worth selling everything else in life to obtain (Mt 13:44). St. Paul himself attested to this when he described that faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest thing of all is love toward God and others (1 Cor 13:13). The ultimate thing that matters is sanctity, a life that becomes a perfection of divine love.

We see that perfection in the great missionaries the Church celebrates today: the North American Martyrs, St. Jean de Brébeuf, St. Isaac Jogues and their companions. Filled with the love of God, they left their native France to bring the Gospel to the new world in what is now Canada and the northeastern United States. They endured long and brutal winters, often hostile and unreceptive natives, captivity, torture and savage martyrdoms. But they did it to enrich others with the life and love of Christ.

"The history of the Missions of these last centuries demonstrates it, as an era full of risk, adventure, heroism, martyrdom," St. Paul VI wrote for *World Mission Sunday in 1968*. "Faith has become what it must be: dynamic, uncontainable, even reckless. The joy of spreading the Gospel has repaid for every effort, every sacrifice."

St. John Paul II added *in 2005*, "We who nourish ourselves with the Body and Blood of the crucified and risen Lord, cannot keep this 'gift' to ourselves; on the contrary we must share it. Passionate love for Christ leads to courageous proclamation of Christ; proclamation which, with martyrdom, becomes a supreme offering of love for God and for mankind."

The type of dynamic and passionate love we see in the great missionary martyrs we're supposed to witness routinely in all those who receive the Eucharistic Jesus to full effect. Those of us who treasure him and enter each Sunday or even each day into his passion, death and resurrection at the altar, are summoned to allow those riches to overflow on mission.

Out of love for God we seek not to build higher grain bins, but to fill the Father's house with more and more of those for whom Jesus gave his life and sent out the Church to invite to the banquet.

**Tuesday, October 20, 2026**

Eph 2:12-22; Ps 85; Lk 12:35-38

Jesus gives us a simple but striking image in today's Gospel: "Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return."

It is an image not of anxiety or fear but of readiness, of a life lived awake, attentive, prepared and dressed to go out to meet the Master as he returns.

This readiness flows from a love that begins with the experience of being loved. St. Paul tells the Ephesians in today's first reading that we who were once "far off have become near by the blood of Christ." Through his Cross, Jesus has broken down the walls that separated us — between Jew and Gentile, between humanity and God — and has made us "one."

Before we go out, we are first brought near. Before we are sent, we are united.

The Church is not a collection of individuals pursuing separate paths. She is a people made one in Christ, "built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." That unity is not something we create; it is something we receive, and something we are called to live and share.

In his *Message for the 2026 World Mission Sunday*, Pope Leo XIV focused on the connection between unity and mission, highlighted by the theme of "One in Christ, united in mission."

"Being a Christian," he underlined, "is not primarily about practices or ideas; it is a life in union with Christ, in which we share in his filial relationship with the Father in the Holy Spirit. It means abiding in Christ, like branches on the vine, immersed in the life of the Trinity. This union gives rise to mutual communion among believers and is the source of all missionary fruitfulness."

We do not go out as isolated individuals. With lamps lit with the light of Christ and loins girt ready to move, we are sent as members of one Body, united in Christ, carrying his presence into the world. The more deeply we live that communion with Christ and each other, the more credible our witness becomes. As we see in the early Church, the collective witness of an evangelizing community is stronger than the sum of the witness of individual evangelized evangelizers.

Today, the Lord invites us to live with lamps lit and loins girt — not only waiting for his return, but living in his presence now and eager to bring others to him, so that we may live as one by the Blood that has brought us near and the one Body the Eucharist makes us.

**Wednesday, October 21, 2026**

Eph 3:2-12; Is 12:2-6; Lk 12:39-48

In today's Gospel, Jesus describes a servant entrusted with responsibility whose master returns at an unexpected hour. He concludes with a line that is meant to stay with us: "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much."

This is not fundamentally meant to be a warning, but a reminder of our dignity, our potential, and the sacred responsibilities with which God has entrusted us.

St. Paul was aware of his God-given worth, capacities and duties. In the first reading, he speaks of the "mystery… now revealed" that had been hidden for generations: that all peoples are called to share in the same promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. What once seemed reserved just to the Jews is now offered to all.

St. Paul understands his life in light of that gift. He has been entrusted with this mystery, not to keep it, but to proclaim it.

This is key to understanding what Jesus says to us in today's Gospel. A servant is judged, not on what or how much he possesses, but on how he uses what has been entrusted to him. A good and trustworthy servant distributes prudently what the master has given; the unfaithful and untrustworthy one uses the master's goods for himself and abuses others poorly. What type of steward are we of the Lord's mysteries and gifts?

We have received the incredible gifts of knowing Christ, of faith, of the Word of God, of the Sacraments, of the communion of the Church. And those gifts all have a corresponding task: transforming us they are meant to transform the world. What we have freely received, we're called freely to give.

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his message for *World Mission Sunday in 2012*: "Faith is a gift that is given to us to be shared; it is a talent received so that it may bear fruit; it is a light that must never be hidden but must illuminate the whole house. It is the most important gift which has been made to us in our lives and which we cannot keep to ourselves."

Mission, therefore, can never remain an optional dimension of the Christian life. It is its natural expression. To know and love Christ involves wanting to make him known and loved. We have been privileged to encounter Jesus earlier than others have the sweet task of seeking to help others to come to know him.

One of the tests as to whether we relate to Jesus rightly is the zeal we have to distribute to others the food of the Gospel, of every word that comes from the mouth of God, and ultimately the food of the Holy Eucharist, at the proper time. That's what good and trustworthy servants strive to do.

But Jesus today likewise highlights that there are those who — seemingly unsupervised by Jesus because of a lack of awareness of his presence — begin to behave sinfully, focused only on themselves and their pleasures, even to the point of harming others.

The Lord wants us all to be good and trustworthy servants. He wants us to remember that we have been given "much" and "even more," and wants us, buoyed by that trust, and alert to his presence and blessing, generously to share what we've been given with others.

## Thursday, 22 October 2026

*Memorial of Saint John Paul II, Pope*

Eph 3:14-21; Ps 33; Lk 12:49-53

Jesus summarizes his life, mission, and hopes in today's Gospel when he says, "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!"

God had revealed himself to Moses as a burning bush that never consumed the branches. He sent the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire so that the apostles first, and us in our own age, might proclaim the Gospel with ardor. Fire is a symbol of love and Jesus wants to ignite the whole world with that love.

When St. Paul prays in today's first reading that we may come to know "the breadth and length and height and depth" of the love of Christ, he is interceding that we might come to know the intensity and temperature of the living flame of divine love and of God's desire for it to spread in every dimension.

St. John Paul II, whose feast the Church joyfully celebrates today, who defined himself as a "pilgrim pope of evangelization" and who summoned the whole Church to "put out into the deep" (Duc in altum) as fishers of men in the third millennium, said in his *1997 World Mission Sunday Message*, that whatever our state of life or situation, "what counts is that the heart burn with that divine charity that — alone — is able to transform into light, fire and new life" all of human existence.

He himself burned with that fire, as have other recent popes.

St. Paul VI, commenting on today's Gospel in his *1974 World Mission Sunday Message*, stated, "God is Love and, as such, he very much desires to communicate with men. Have not these words sprout from the Heart of Christ, burning like the lava of a volcano: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth.'" (Lk 12:49).

Pope Francis in 2023 commented, "One cannot truly encounter the risen Jesus without being set on fire with enthusiasm to tell everyone about him. Therefore, the primary and principal resource of the mission are those persons who have come to know the risen Christ in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist, who carry his fire in their heart and his light in their gaze" (*2023 World Mission Sunday Message*).

Pope Leo XIV last year in his homily for the Jubilee of the Missionary World, prayed that we would all be renewed in "the fire of our missionary vocation" (Oct 5, 2025).

Today, we can ask ourselves: has this fire taken hold in us? Is it being stirred into a flame or being extinguished by lack of oil in our lamps or by the prevailing winds

Today let us ask for the grace to know the "the breadth and length and height and depth" of the burning love of Christ and, lit anew by the fire of the Holy Spirit, go one by one as contagious spiritual arsonists to light the world ablaze.

## Friday, October 23, 2026

Eph 4:1-6; Ps 24; Lk 12:54-59

Jesus points out in today's Gospel how easily people can interpret the weather, but often fail to read the spiritual signs of the times, like the multiple signs testifying to his own coming as Messiah and the inauguration of his kingdom.

"You hypocrites!" he says in the hope not to insult but convert: "You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Far more important than the weather is discerning what God is doing. Jesus wants us to focus not so much on wearing the right clothing for the temperature or being prepared for rain, but rather on heeding his words to repent and believe for the kingdom of God has come.

Jesus encourages us not to delay what needs to be addressed. He speaks about reconciling with others while we are on the way to the judge, of becoming peacemakers, taking responsibility, and acting with urgency.

So often, even when we recognize what is right, we procrastinate. We delay asking for or giving forgiveness. We avoid difficult conversations or fraternal corrections. We fail to take advantage of various openings to share our faith. We think tomorrow, not today, is the acceptable time and day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2).

The Church's mission depends on this kind of urgency, attentiveness, and responsibility. The fields are ripe for the harvest (Jn 4:35).

St. Paul VI, in his *World Mission Sunday Message in 1970*, stated clearly that one of the signs of the times we must read today is the urgency for sharing our faith. He wrote, "To the duty, to the need to spread the Word of salvation are added today particular circumstances, which seem to Us 'signs of the times' for a vigorous resumption of renewed missionary activity. The word of Jesus to the disciples comes to Our lips: 'I say to you: look up and see the fields that are already white for the harvest."

St. John Paul II made the same note in terms of preparing the Church and the world for the third millennium of Christ's birth. "How many times during my Apostolic Visits," he stated, "have I seen the harvest ripening and yet I have been told that missionaries, priests, brothers, sisters, persons consecrated for the Gospel are lacking!" (*1996 World Mission Sunday Message*).

We know that if fruit is ripening and is not harvested, it soon withers and dies in the fields. Mission, therefore, is incompatible with procrastination.

Jesus shows us that urgency in his words about the Good Shepherd immediately leaving the 99 and going in search of the lost sheep.

Many will die today without ever having heard the Gospel. So many more will live today without a friendship with Christ. How is that going to impact our priorities? How would we hope it would impact others' priorities if we were the ones who hadn't yet come to know Jesus?

Today, no matter where we are and no matter what the weather, Jesus calls us to look up and see the fields that are white and ripe. He similarly asks us to look up and see him and the way he looks with love and longing toward those who have not yet heard his words or received his salvation. Then he asks us, on the journey of life, before we meet the judge, to help reconcile as many as we can to him and to us.

## Saturday, October 24, 2026

Eph 4:7-16; Ps 122; Lk 13:1-9

People come to Jesus in today's Gospel with troubling news about a massacre in the temple, where Pontius Pilate had had killed some who had gone up to offer sacrifices. They were seeking an explanation — perhaps some were hoping to turn him against Pilate and the Romans — but Jesus does not offer an explanation Instead, he shifts the focus, asking whether those who died were greater sinners than those whose lives were spared.

He answers his own question, saying "By no means!" He doubles down by saying that the 18 who had died when the tower of Siloam had tragically fallen on them were not cursed or someone guiltier of sin that those still alive.

Then he said something direct and unsettling: "I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did." He didn't mean that they were all going to die in some random attack or freak accident, but that, with conversion, they would all die unprepared.

He reinforces this call to conversion with a parable about fig tree. For three years, the owner came looking for fruit and found none. Normally if a fig tree doesn't bear fruit by the third year, it never will. Nevertheless, the tree is given one more year to be cultivated, cared for, and given every chance to bear fruit, in the hope that it might.

It's an image of God's mercy and patience. It's also a message of his expectation that we will bear fruit. That fruit cannot be understood merely as generic acts of faith hope and love, but just as fig trees bear figs, so Christians must beget Christians.

In today's first reading, St. Paul reminds us that Christ has given gifts to his Church "to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." Each of us has received something from the Lord, not just for ourselves, but so that the Church may grow and mature.

Fruit is not simply personal improvement. It is a life that, like Christ's and the saints', contributes to the spiritual growth of others and strengthens the Church.

St. Paul had realized this much earlier, that conversion for him meant not just stopping the persecution and killing of Christians and personally living the faith. Instead, he wrote, "The love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all. … He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:14-15).

So for us, conversion means not just excising bad habits and acquiring good ones. It means no longer living for ourselves, but living for Christ and for what Christ lived and died: the salvation and sanctification of others. It means taking seriously the mission Christ has given and seeking to bear fruit that will last. Just as a vine does not bear fruit apart from the branches, so Christ the Vine cannot bear fruit apart from the Church, apart from you and me (Jn 15:1-8).

So the first thing we need to bear fruit and learn the lesson of the fig tree is to remain in Christ. And Pope Leo, in his message for *2026 World Mission Sunday*, reminds us, "Being a Christian … is a life in union with Christ. … It means abiding in Christ, like branches on the vine, immersed in the life of the Trinity."

The second lesson is that if we really remain in Christ, we will bear fruit. St. John Paul II wrote in his *1991 World Mission Sunday Message*, "Only one who is grafted onto Christ like the branches to the vine can produce much fruit" and he says that that's the secret of the fruit of the great missionaries and all those who support them by prayer and sacrifice.

The Lord Jesus has cultivated the soil with care so that we might bear abundant fruit. Let's pray that we and our brothers and sisters in the Church will not be like barren fig trees but instead correspond to the time we have to try to bear as much fruit for him as we can. That way, no matter when our earthly life ends, we will not be caught unawares, but meet the Lord at his coming with continuous conversion and apostolic fruitfulness.

## Sunday, October 25, 2026

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ex 22:20-26; Ps 18; 1Thes 1:5c-10; Mt 22:34-40

A scholar of the law approaches Jesus in today's Gospel with a question that asks about the single most important thing we must do in life. "Teacher," he queries, "which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

This was not an easy question, since there are 613 precepts in the Old Testament.

Jesus' answer, however, is clear and synthetic: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Then he adds two things. "The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And: "The whole law and the prophets," in other words all that God commands, "depend on these two commandments."

Everything in the Christian life flows from love of God and love of neighbor, not as two separate realities, but one interrelated movement. Jesus doesn't tell us, "Love me as I have loved you," but "love one another as I have loved you." Our love for Jesus will be shown in our love for our neighbor, who he calls us to love with unrationed mind, heart and soul.

The first reading from the Book of Exodus makes this very concrete. God speaks with urgency about the treatment of the vulnerable: the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the poor. Our care for them reveals our love for God. It shows whether our relationship with God is real. Jesus would make this abundantly clear later when he would say that the way we treat the hungry, thirsty, naked, stranger, ill or imprisoned is the way we treat him (Mt 25:31-46).

If sharing God's love of our neighbor is so essential to the Christian life, why is it sometimes so difficult? The answer is found in the second reading, when St. Paul reminds the Christians in Thessalonika how their faith began: not simply as a teaching they received, but as an encounter that changed them. "Our Gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit," which helped them turn "from idols to serve the living and true God."

We cannot really love as Jesus commands unless we have first encountered his love for us. We are loved first, and from that love, we learn how to love.

This is the foundation of the Church's missionary activity.

In his message for *2026 World Mission Sunday*, Pope Leo XIV underlined that love is the "essence" of the Church's mission. He said, "The mission of the disciples and the Church as a whole is to continue the mission of Christ in the Holy Spirit: a mission born of love, lived in love, and leading to love. … Impelled by the love of Christ, the Apostles then went out to evangelize for Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). In the same way, throughout the centuries, multitudes of Christians — martyrs, confessors and missionaries — have given their lives to make this divine love known to the world. Thus, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, the Church's evangelizing mission will continue until the end of time."

He praised the love of God and neighbor found in missionaries past and present, who sacrifice in order to share the love of God with people who once were strangers. Like St. Francis of Assisi, who once lamented, "Love is not loved," he urged us, like St. Therese of Lisieux, "to love Jesus and make him loved."

Jesus in today's Gospel makes it plain that loving God and neighbor — or in St. Therese's word's, loving him and making him loved — is the single most important thing we need to do. Everything else the Church does hinges on this two-fold command, which flows from the experience of Jesus' having loved us enough to give his life for us and then to become our very food in the Sacrament of Love — the efficacious sign of divine love — on the altar. Let us receive that love anew, be transformed by it even more, and then let that love overflow for the evangelization and transformation of the world.

## Monday, October 26, 2026

Eph 4:32-5,8; Ps 1; Lk 13:10-17

In today's Gospel, Jesus encounters a woman who has been bent over for eighteen years, unable to stand up straight. He sees her, calls her forward, and says, "Woman, you are set free of your infirmity." Then he lays his hands on her, and immediately she stands upright and begins to glorify God.

It is a moment of healing and restoration. She is not only freed from a physical burden but returned to her full dignity. She can stand again—before God, before others, fully herself.

The reaction of the synagogue leader to this miracle is astonishing. He strongly objects that the miracle happened on the Sabbath, as if the Day of the Lord was one on which works of love for others were somehow forbidden.

Jesus responds firmly. He reveals the deeper truth, that God has made the Sabbath for an encounter with God, for the life he gives, for the freedom he imparts, for the restoration and redemption of his children. Jesus' mission involved helping his people recover that sense that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It was made for love of God and for neighbor — which can never truly be placed in competition — and God is glorified when we use the Sabbath to love him and those he loves.

St. Paul, in the first reading, urges the Christians in Ephesus to live in a way that reflects the new life Christ brings and seeks to reset every Sabbath: "Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ," adding, "Live as children of light."

The mission of the Church begins in that love and is meant to be advanced, not stifled, on the Lord's Day. The day on which each week we come together as brothers and sisters to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is meant to be kept holy, to be consecrated to God, precisely so that, together with his other spiritual children, we can love him and love others. It is a day of the Church. It is a day of charity. It is a day of mission.

As St. John Paul II wrote for *World Mission Sunday in 2005*, "When the ecclesial Community celebrates the Eucharist, especially on Sunday the Day of the Lord, it experiences in the light of the faith the value of the encounter with the Risen Christ and is ever more aware that the Sacrifice of the Eucharist is 'for all' (Mt 26:28). We who nourish ourselves with the Body and Blood of the crucified and risen Lord, cannot keep this 'gift' to ourselves; on the contrary we must share it. Passionate love for Christ leads to courageous proclamation of Christ; proclamation which, with martyrdom, becomes a supreme offering of love for God and for mankind. The Eucharist leads us to be generous evangelizers, actively committed to building a more just and fraternal world."

In the face of so many who are bent down by the weight of various difficulties, the Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, seeks to reach out to them and help them raise their minds, hearts and eyes to God who looks on them with healing love. Every Eucharist, in which we recognize Jesus under the humblest appearances of what seems to be bread and wine, helps us to recognize him in those in need, for as St. Teresa of Calcutta reminds us, the same one who says to us, "This is my Body," says, "I was hungry and you fed me."

The Christian sabbath — and every celebration of the Holy Eucharist — impels the Church's mission of charity, in which we care for people's spiritual, emotional and bodily needs. It helps us to see people, like the woman in the Gospel, not as interruptions, but as subjects of Jesus', and the Church's, unceasing attention and care.

## Tuesday, October 27, 2026

Eph 5:21-33; Ps 128; Lk 13:18-21

Jesus gives us two very simple images in today's Gospel: a mustard seed and a small amount of yeast. Both seem insignificant. Both can easily be overlooked. And yet both have a hidden power to transform.

The mustard seed is meant to become a large bush, offering shelter to the birds of the sky. The yeast, mixed into flour, quietly leavens the whole batch of dough. In both cases, the transformation is real, though not immediate, and not always visible at first.

Jesus uses the parables to illustrate how the Kingdom of God grows. We often think that God's work should be dramatic, obvious, and unmistakable. But Jesus points us instead to something small, hidden, and patient. The Kingdom begins in ways that can seem almost fragile, and yet it carries within it a power that far exceeds what we can see.

St. Paul, in the first reading, writes about the Sacrament of Marriage, one of the ways in which Jesus sends out his apostles two-by-two. As we see in the life of Saints Priscilla and Aquila in the New Testament, so often the kingdom of God grows one marriage at a time, because marriage and family are able to participate in and transmit something of the love of God, which is the heart of the Gospel.

In a famous passage in his 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, St. Paul VI described the history of evangelization in many places, ancient and modern. It often starts with one Christian, or a couple, or a few.

"Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization."

In various of his messages for *World Mission Sunday*, St. John Paul II focused on how the Church's mission takes place. The "little flock" of Christ, he wrote *in 1999*, "is sent all over the world to be leaven of a new humanity." *In 1994*, he said, "The missionary's sole aim is to proclaim the Gospel in order to build up a community which becomes an extension of the family of Jesus Christ and is leaven for the growth of God's Kingdom."

He never missed the reality that the leaven is baked with the dough in the oven of suffering. Speaking of the sufferings and perseverance of missionaries, he said, "They must know that their efforts and their suffering will not be lost; indeed they will be leaven that causes to germinate in the hearts of other apostles a desire to give themselves to the noble cause of the Gospel" (*2000 World Mission Sunday*).

He called them to hope nevertheless, even when the seed doesn't seem to be growing or the yeast making anything rise. "Even where the preaching of the Word is hindered," he said in 1980, "the mere presence of the missionary, with his testimony of poverty, charity, holiness, already constitutes an effective form of evangelization." He praised those missionaries "who, with immense sacrifices, sometimes, and between difficulties of all kinds, spread the seed of the Word, from which the Church develops and takes root in the world."

So the mission of the Church and the growth of Christ's kingdom happens most often not by great events like the first Pentecost, but through the little deeds and persevering fidelity, charity, and hopeful perseverance of missionaries.

Today, the Lord invites us to trust this hidden work.

## Wednesday, October 28, 2026

*Feast of Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles*

Eph 2:19-22; Ps 19; Lk 6:12-19

In today's Gospel, we see Jesus at prayer. He spends the whole night in communion with the Father, and from that prayer, he chooses his twelve first missionaries. Among them are two apostles we know relatively little about: Saints Simon and Jude.

They do not stand out in the Gospel narratives. They leave no recorded words. Yet they are chosen, called by name, and entrusted by Jesus with the mission of proclaiming his kingdom.

Notice whom Jesus chooses. He didn't turn to the ascetical Pharisees, whose whole life was dedicated to trying to live the law to its perfection. He turned to ordinary folk. He raided wharves and tax offices, found people under fig trees, and summoned those who were lousy private investigators trailing him to find out where he lived.

God chose the weak so that the mission would clearly be his work, not ours. What matters is not worldly status or training, but fidelity. Jesus did not choose the apostles because they were qualified as Scripture scholars or powerful orators. He called them so that they may be with him, learn from him, and then send them out to announce him (Mk 3:14).

Every Christian is first called to be with Christ, to enter into communion with him, and then sent out in tandem with him. We, too, are the fruit of the Lord's prayer, called by name to be his disciple and commissioned by him to be sent out.

St. Paul, in the first reading, describes the Church as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone." This is not only a statement about the past; it is a living reality. The faith we have received has come to us through the witness and work of the apostles —including Simon and Jude, whose lives were given in service to the Gospel, and who from heaven continue their work for the Church.

But we need to build on the foundations they themselves set on Christ the Cornerstone and Peter the Rock. Saints Simon and Jude ultimately gave their lives for Christ in martyrdom. Now it's our turn to give our life in witness.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his *2006 Message for World Mission Sunday*, said, "After his Resurrection, Jesus gave the Apostles the mandate to proclaim the news of this love, and the Apostles, inwardly transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, began to bear witness to the Lord who had died and was risen. Ever since, the Church has continued this same mission, which is an indispensable and ongoing commitment for all believers."

St. John Paul II, in his mission messages, urged us to depend on the same Holy Spirit that emboldened them. "The fervor of the apostles," he wrote *in 2003*, "must not be allowed to weaken, especially in regard to the mission ad gentes." *In 1996*, he stressed, "Just as the Spirit transformed the first band of disciples into courageous apostles of the Lord and enlightened preachers of his word, he continues to prepare witnesses to the Gospel in our times."

Each of us has been called by name, just as much as Simon and Jude were. Each of us has a place in the Church, a role in her mission, a way of bearing witness to Christ in the circumstances of our lives, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us. May that Holy Spirit help us to be faithful and fruitful to the end, like the saints we celebrate today.

**Thursday, October 29, 2026** Eph 6:10-20; Ps 144; Lk 13:31-35

In today's Gospel, some Pharisees come to Jesus with a warning: "Go away, leave this area because Herod wants to kill you."

But Jesus is not deterred.

"Go and tell that fox," he replied, "Behold, I cast out demons and I perform healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I accomplish my purpose."

Jesus is clear about who he is and his mission, and he does not allow fear to redirect him. Free and determined, he continues forward, completing the work the Father entrusted to him.

St. Paul, in the first reading, instructs the Christians in Ephesus and all of us to "draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power" and to "put on the armor of God" so that we may stand firm. The Christian life, and the mission that flows from it, involves a real struggle—not just those we know who oppose us, but often against invisible and diabolical forces that seek to weaken faith, to divide, and to discourage. Jesus came to cast out those demons, heal us, and help us to share in the accomplishment of his purpose "on the third day," the day of his resurrection.

Despite Jesus' determination, mighty power and spiritual armor, however, he still had a human heart beating with human and divine love. Because of that, he was capable of being wounded, and we see his sadness later in today's Gospel. Jesus looks upon Jerusalem and laments: "How many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling."

He came to save but many rejected his redeeming work. He came as light, but many, as St. John describes, preferred darkness. He came as incarnate Love, but many refused to repent from idols and believe in true love. Jesus wasn't indifferent to these rejections. Just like a mom or a dad whose child rejects parental love, Jesus care too much not to care.

Jesus tried to prepare us for similar sadness, rejection, and even persecution and martyrdom. He told us that some would refuse to accept the Gospel, some of our family members would disown and betray us because we put him first, some would hate us and utter every type of calumny against us, others would drag us before civil and religious authorities and still others would think they were serving God as they killed us.

But he also told us what to do and why he would permit it.

He trained us to dust off the rejection and head to the next village not nursing our wounds but announcing the good news. He told us that our sufferings would give us a pulpit where, together with the Holy Spirit, we might give a far more effective witness that he is worth living for and dying for and that we prefer him even to our earthly life.

And he strengthens us with the armor of God to remain faithful in fighting the good fight of faith and keeping the faith by passing it on.

We see that in the early Church, two things helped convert the Roman empire. The first was the example of Christian charity. The second was the witness of the martyrs, that sane people were boldly willing to undergo sadistic tortures and executions out of love for Jesus who had previously given his life for theirs, because they believed that after their death, they would rise with him forever. Sometimes the most powerful way to convert those who stubbornly don't want to accept the Gospel is for Christians to show how much they're willingly to endure out of love.

Pope Francis spoke with admiration about the courage needed to be disciples and apostles in his first *World Mission Sunday message*.

"I wish to say a word about those Christians who, in various parts of the world, experience difficulty in openly professing their faith and in enjoying the legal right to practice it in a worthy manner," he wrote *in 2013*. "They are our brothers and sisters, courageous witnesses — even more numerous than the martyrs of the early centuries — who endure with apostolic perseverance many contemporary forms of persecution. Quite a few also risk their lives to remain faithful to the Gospel of Christ. … I repeat to them the consoling words of Jesus: 'Take courage, I have overcome the world'" (Jn 16:33).

## Friday, October 30, 2026

Phil 1:1-11; Ps 111; Lk 14:1-6

In today's Gospel, a man suffering from dropsy is brought before Jesus on the Sabbath. Those present in the Pharisee's house where Jesus was invited for dinner were watching Jesus closely to see whether he would heal him and break what they thought was the law to keep holy the Lord's day.

Jesus, recognizing the situation, and to expose their hypocrisy, asks aloud: "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath or not?" They refused to answer. So Jesus heals the man and sends him on his way. Then he comments: "Who among you, if your son or ox falls into a cistern, would not immediately pull him out on the sabbath day?" They caught laryngitis once again, but their answer was clear: of course they would immediately rescue their son and even their animal in such a situation.

The issue was, then, not the law and what was permitted by God on the Sabbath Day, but about love. They simply didn't love the man with dropsy, like they really didn't care about the others whom Jesus healed on the Lord's Day.

Jesus had come to show that it is possible to love on the Lord's Day, to do good, to heal.

"Jesus breaks through the narrow limits," Pope Francis wrote in his *2019 Message for World Mission Sunday,* "calling [the disciples] to grow in respect for the dignity of men and women" The law is grounded on love for God and for neighbor. It was given for life, not against it. Mercy is not an exception to the law, but its deepest meaning.

St. Paul, in the first reading, opens his letter to the Philippians praying for them that their "love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value." This is what Jesus is revealing in the Gospel: a love that sees what really matters and acts.

It is possible to follow the rules and still miss the heart of the Gospel. It is possible to be correct, and yet not be merciful. St. Paul says that it's possible to lack love even when one understands all mysteries, has the faith to move mountains and the willingness to give one's body over to torturers (1 Cor 1:1-4).

Jesus, however, shows us that true fidelity to God is never separated from love and various expressions, like mercy, compassion, and care.

The connection between mission and mercy cannot be overemphasized. Christ's whole mission is one of mercy and he sends us out as ministers and missionaries of that merciful love. The truth alone is not sufficient. It has to be "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). Christians are called to give witness to Jesus, who is the "Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6) but who is always merciful as God the Father is Merciful (Lk 6:36) and calls us to sanctity precisely through mercy (Mt 5:7).

Pope Francis, during the 2016 Jubilee of Mercy, wrote beautifully about the connection between the mercy of God and mission. He said that the Church "is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, and to proclaim mercy in every corner of the world, reaching every person, young or old. … The Church, in the midst of humanity, is first of all the community that lives by the mercy of Christ. … It is through this love that the Church discovers its mandate, lives it and makes it known to all peoples" (*2016 Message for World Mission Sunday*)

It is, indeed, not just lawful but laudable to do good on the Sabbath and any day God gives us. The Church lives as the witness and even the sacrament of God's mercy. And the prayer of St. Paul and all the saints is that that merciful love will increase more and more.

## Saturday, October 31, 2026

Phil 1:18b-26; Ps 42; Lk 14:1,7-11

On this last day of World Mission Month, as we continue to pray for missionaries across the globe and all those to whom they are proclaiming the Word of God and bringing the sacraments, today's Gospel has us focus on a virtue that's essential in the life of every missionary: humility.

The scene is very human and familiar to us. As guests arrive at a meal, they choose the best places to sit. Jesus uses the occasion to give a lesson about the spiritual life.

"When you are invited, go and take the lowest place," Jesus says, lest the host approach and ask you to cede your place to someone else but rather invite you to move to a higher position. Then he draws the moral lesson: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus is not simply offering advice about good manners. He is revealing the qualities and logic of the Kingdom of God.

In the world, we are often programmed to seek recognition, to advance ourselves, to get ahead in comparison to others. But the path of the Kingdom is different. It is the path of humility, based on the recognition that our place is something not that we take but receive. The humbler we become, the more God can act greatly and call us to a higher place.

John the Baptist, the proto-missionary of the Lord Jesus, lived this way, saying, "He must increase. I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).

St. Paul, in today's first reading, expressed a similar desire to the first Christians in Philippi. Writing from prison, he reflects on his present condition in comparison to his previous missionary work. He humbly concludes: "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death." He asks, "What difference does it make" — whether he is imprisoned or free, alive or dead — "as long as in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed?"

He is not centered on himself, or his status, but only that Christ be made known.

Humility is not thinking less of ourselves. It is thinking of ourselves less — in fact much less, because our lives are centered on Christ. When Christ becomes our center, we are freed from the temptation to assert ourselves, to compare ourselves with others, to seek recognition. We are liberated to serve.

This is why humility is essential for the Church's mission.

The Gospel is never effectively carried forward by self-promoters who seek prominence, praise, or offices. It's proclaimed by those who are willing to take the lower place—to serve quietly, to give without drawing attention to themselves, to let Christ be seen rather than themselves. This is what Jesus taught James and John and all the disciples when they used to jockey for positions in what they assumed would be his earthly cabinet as the Messiah and Son of David. Jesus, rather, taught them that the first would be last and the greatest would be the one who served the rest (Mt 20:20-28).

In his *2002 Message for World Mission Sunday*, St. John Paul II said that missionaries learn this humility through embracing and proclaiming — with words and body language — the Cross of Christ. "Contemplating the Cross," he said, "we learn to live with humility and forgiveness, peace and communion." On Calvary and in day to day life and mission, we learn how to die to ourselves so that Christ can live.

That impacts the whole culture of the Church and the way we carry out the mission. There's no triumphalism or sense of superiority, but one of authentic service. "In the end, this mission is his [Jesus']," Pope Francis wrote in his *2023 World Mission Sunday Message*, "and we are nothing more than his humble co-workers, 'useless servants.'" In his *Message of 2017*: "Mission reminds the Church that she is not an end unto herself, but a humble instrument and mediation of the Kingdom."

Today, the Lord invites us to examine our consciences to determine, even as we strive to continue his saving work, whether we're doing it with impure motives, partially seeking to the honor and glory that are his alone.

He invites us anew to yoke ourselves to him and learn him who is meek and humble of heart (Mt 11:29), and to strive to carry out the mission he has given us with the same humility that characterized his incarnation, birth, hidden life, passion, death and Eucharistic self-giving.
And as we prepare for the celebration of All Saints, we ask all those in heaven to pray for us, so that as humble disciples and missionaries until the end, we might in fact hear him say, “My friend, come up higher,” to join him and them forever.