

## Liturgy preparation notes

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### 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A

#### Introduction

On World Mission Sunday we celebrate with our sisters and brothers across the world the universal salvation won by Jesus and offered to all people.

#### Penitential Rite

Lord Jesus, you call us to show our faith in action

*Lord, have mercy*

Lord Jesus, you call us to persevere through hope

*Christ, have mercy*

Lord Jesus, you call us to work for love

*Lord, have mercy*

#### Today's Readings

##### First Reading Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Unwittingly, the pagan king of Persia is being used by God as his 'anointed' agent (almost as if he were a Jewish king or priest!) in order to thwart the Babylonians and bring about the release of the Jews from captivity. However, the object of the divine intervention is not to show favouritism towards the Jews. The liberation of the Jews is only a prelude to a much larger purpose – universal salvation.

##### Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-5a

The first letter to the Thessalonians is probably the earliest of St Paul's writing. Written before the Gospels, it is the earliest document of the New Testament. Unlike many places where Paul addressed his letters, Thessalonica still exists, a large and vibrant city in northern Greece. We can imagine that, even today, there are descendants of those people to whom Paul addressed his letter – the Church in Thessalonica – people who have passed on the faith from generation to generation – people who have helped others see Jesus.

##### Psalm 95: 1, 3-5, 7-10

Give the Lord glory and power

## Gospel Matthew 22: 15-21

Jesus is here in dispute with the Pharisees and the Herodians over payment of tribute to the emperor. Whereas the ordinary copper currency in Palestine lacked the emperor's image, this poll-tax had to be paid with a silver denarius carrying this offensive feature. The Herodians approved of the payment; the Pharisees paid reluctantly. If Jesus opposes payment, the Herodians can denounce him. If he openly approves, the Pharisees will quote the Decalogue prohibition of images and likenesses.

By getting them to handle the coin, Jesus perhaps embarrasses the Pharisees. His reply implies that human beings carry the image of God and should offer their whole lives to him. It certainly puts loyalty to God first. His audience is amazed, either at his cleverness in escaping the trap laid for him, or at the authority of his teaching.

## Application – Sermon Notes

1. That God uses surprising people such as Cyrus to effect his purposes comes as no surprise to the missionary. Isaiah's prediction of human liberation from oppression reminds us of important Christian themes: Christ is the great liberator, the one who breaks down barriers. The divine plan is to unite all things in Christ.

2. Paul shows that the 'theological virtues' of faith, hope and love lie at the heart of Christian living. Our preaching is not about using clever words; what elicits faith is our God-given conviction.

- Faith is not about mouthing a form of words: it has to be shown in action
- Hope is not 'wishful thinking': it requires perseverance
- We are loved by God and devote ourselves in turn to the *kopos* – labour – of loving. Such love does not come easily: it must be worked at

These are the ways to proclaim the Good News and **help others see Jesus**.

3. In his message for World Mission Sunday, Pope Benedict reminds us that St Paul is the Apostle of the Gentiles. To mark the Year of Paul we might integrate the Pauline lectionary readings into the homily. Paul is the ultimate missionary; today we should emphasise the missionary vocation of all the baptised.

4. When Cicero gave his great speeches in the forum, his listeners said, 'Good speech'; when Demosthenes spoke in Athens his hearers said, 'Let's march'. Similarly, the impact of Paul's mission was to change the mindset of the people of the Mediterranean.

5. The homily for World Mission Sunday will challenge us to 'march' – to move beyond the 'comfort zone' of our everyday faith. We carry the image of Christ and we must therefore live as Christ for the world and enable others to do so – **helping others see Jesus**.

6. It is our privilege to support the new Churches as they seek to find Christ in their lives. We do this by our prayer and our action. By sharing in solidarity we follow the example of Paul and the early Church.

## Summary

Using the stories of the Church in India and Africa (which can be found on the back page of the folder), we can show that the challenge of Paul is as relevant to the Church of our day as it was to the ancient world. Paul is the missionary exemplar who prayed, listened, thought, planned and adapted – all for the Good News of Jesus. His teaching and methodology are relevant for us and the new Churches. New and old must stand in solidarity with each other – **helping others see Jesus**.

## Intercessions

### Celebrant

Father of all, confident of your love for the Church and world, we commend our cares and concerns to your generous mercy.

### Intercessions

That our Holy Father, Benedict XVI, might continue to guide the Church to proclaim the compassion of Jesus to a fragmented world.

*Lord, in your mercy ...*

That we may have the insight to recognise the hand of God in the lives of ourselves and others, even in unlikely situations.

*Lord, in your mercy ...*

That the new Churches, especially in Africa and Asia, may continue to build their lives in active faith, persevering hope and self-giving love.

*Lord, in your mercy ...*

That missionaries everywhere may proclaim the Gospel message with courage and sensitivity

*Lord, in your mercy ...*

That the prayers of the sick may be a source of strength and encouragement for missionaries especially in difficult areas.

*Lord, in your mercy ...*

### Celebrant

Father, we thank you for the gift of prayer, of opening our hearts and minds to you. As we pray for the grace to be fervent missionaries, we ask you to grant these and all our prayers in the name of Jesus, who is Lord for ever and ever.

## Final Blessing

May the mission of Jesus be our constant hope

May the Lord bless us with joy and courage

May he grant us the strength to proclaim his Good News

# The Holy Father's message for Mission Sunday 2008

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## Proclaim the Gospel in our times

### Pope Benedict XVI's Message for World Mission Sunday 2008

#### *Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

On the occasion of World Mission Day, I would like to invite you to reflect on the continuing urgency to proclaim the Gospel in our times. The missionary mandate continues to be an absolute priority for all baptised persons. As a model of this apostolic commitment, I would like to point to Saint Paul in particular, the Apostle of the Nations, because this year we are celebrating a special jubilee dedicated to him.

Humanity needs to be liberated and redeemed. Creation itself – as St Paul says – suffers, and nurtures the hope that it will share in the freedom of the children of God. Creation is suffering and waiting for real freedom; it is waiting for a different, better world; it is waiting for 'redemption'.

#### *Mission is a question of love*

In a world in which there is so much violence and poverty, we ask ourselves, 'What will become of humanity and creation? What is the hope for the future?' The answer to these questions comes from the Gospel. Christ is our future and his Gospel gives us hope. St Paul understood well that anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope. It is therefore an urgent duty for everyone to proclaim Christ and his saving message, as a response to God's love for us, and spread the perfume of Christ's love around the world. Despite the difficulties, nothing can justify the slackening of missionary work because Christ's command to evangelise all peoples constitutes the essential mission of the Church. There are countless people still waiting for the proclamation of the Gospel, thirsting for hope and love.

#### *Woe to me if I do not preach!*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us set sail in the vast sea of the world and, following Jesus' invitation, let us cast our nets without fear, confident in his constant aid. St Paul reminds us that to preach the Gospel is no reason to boast, but is rather a duty and a joy.

Bishops, priests and religious all have vital roles in this mission, as do the laity who are called to take part in an increasingly important way. Give witness with your lives that Christians belong to a new society which is the goal of their common pilgrimage, and which is anticipated in the course of that pilgrimage.

I cannot fail to point out with sincere appreciation the contribution of the Pontifical Mission Societies to the Church's evangelising activity. I thank them for the support they offer to all the Churches, especially the young ones. The collection that is taken in all parishes on World Mission Sunday is a sign of our communion and mutual concern.

#### *Conclusion*

Lastly, may prayer be ever more intensified in the Christian people. This is the essential spiritual means for spreading the light of Christ that illuminates the darkness of history. As I entrust to the Lord the apostolic work of missionaries, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to everyone.

**Benedict XVI**

**11 May 2008**

*This is an abridged version of the Pope's message. The full text is available from the APF at the address below and at: [www.missio.org.uk](http://www.missio.org.uk)*

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