



3. December 2024

The received mission

1 Cor 9:16-19,22-23

Reading corresponding to the memorial of St Francis Xavier

"In fact, preaching the gospel gives me nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion and I should be in trouble if I failed to do it. If I did it on my own initiative I would deserve a reward; but if I do it under compulsion I am simply accepting a task entrusted to me. What reward do I have, then? That in my preaching I offer the gospel free of charge to avoid using the rights which the gospel allows me. So though I was not a slave to any human being, I put myself in slavery to all people, to win as many as I could. To the weak, I made myself weak, to win the weak. I accommodated myself to people in all kinds of different situations, so that by all possible means I might bring some to salvation. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others."

After the introduction to Advent and the strong emphasis we have placed in the meditations of recent days on the missionary mandate entrusted to the Church, which is in danger of being neglected, today we commemorate one of the greatest missionaries of our Holy Church: St Francis Xavier. In unimaginable circumstances and under immense hardship, he proclaimed the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Let us listen to some words from the depths of the heart of this great missionary, contained in a letter he wrote from Goa (India) to the Superior General of his Order, St Ignatius of Loyola, with whom he founded the Society of Jesus:

"Many in these places are not Christians simply because there is no one to make them so. I often feel like going through the universities of Europe, especially in Paris, and shouting, like one who has lost his mind, to those who have more science than charity, with these words: Oh, how many souls are excluded from heaven and plunge into hell because of your carelessness!

If only they would take the same interest in this matter as they do in their studies! In this way they could give an account to God of their knowledge and the talents entrusted to them. Many of them, moved by these reflections and by meditation on divine things, would train themselves to listen to the divine voice that speaks within them and, leaving

aside their human ambitions and affairs, would devote themselves entirely to the will and action of God, saying in their hearts: 'Lord, here I am; what do you want me to do? Send me where you want, even to India'".

St Francis Xavier was in India, Japan and Indonesia, winning and baptising countless souls for the Lord. A true apostle!

The Apostle acts on behalf of the Lord... What an essential statement! He who has received a mission from the Lord will not question at every crossroads whether or not he desires that which awaits him. He has already given his "yes" to God, and has thus placed himself completely at His service. He no longer belongs to himself, but only to the Lord. It is certainly in this perspective that we must understand St. Paul's statement that he is "under the duty" to preach the Gospel... He is only fulfilling the commission he has received! If you like, it can be said that this mission entrusted to him rules over him, so that all his thoughts and all his inner strength are focused on fulfilling the mission. And he places himself totally under it!

The supreme and unsurpassed model in this is the Lord Himself. Jesus came to fulfil the Will of the Father (cf. Jn 6:38). In everything and at every moment He carried out His mission, and He did it out of love for the Father and out of love for us.

It is the same for the Apostle Paul... From the moment he had the vision of the Lord (Acts 9:1-19), he lived in the mission he had received. His will is, so to speak, bound to the Lord; his freedom has already been completely given to Him, and everything else is a consequence of it.

Certainly this was also the attitude of the great Jesuit missionary St. Francis Xavier, whom we commemorate on this day. A life like that of this heroic saint can bear abundant fruit.

Since the freedom of having given oneself completely to the Lord and being under a "duty to be fulfilled" remains in place, it is possible for a St. Paul or other missionaries to become "slaves" of all. This means that they could see every situation from the perspective of how to win more people for the Gospel. From this dedication, they knew how to find the means God had given them to reach hearts, because there was no way too long, no cross too heavy, no task too great... It was the Lord Himself who worked in them!

How beautiful it is to admire these great apostles! But beyond admiration, their life of

dedication becomes a call to us... What is the mission that has been entrusted to me? What is essential in my life?

The season of Advent invites us to contemplate more deeply God's self-giving: *"Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being"* (Phil 2:6-7). God Himself gives us an example of perfect love. He made Himself all things to all people, in order to win us over with His love. If we imitate His self-giving, our life will become more and more clearly a mission: to proclaim God's love and to be totally at His service.

The Apostles followed Him unconditionally, and to this day the Spirit of the Lord raises people who, like St Francis Xavier, leave everything behind for His sake.

The missionary mandate cannot be relativised, let alone abolished. It is always valid, and if those who are called no longer fulfil it according to God's will, the stones will cry out (cf. Lk 19:40).