



DATE: October 21, 2018 (World Mission Sunday)

THEME: Bearing Witness to Love

READINGS: Is 53:10-11 / Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22 / Heb 4:14-16 /
Mk 10:35-45

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For our reflection today on World Mission Sunday (October 21, 2018), Pope Francis has provided us with a message entitled, “Together with Young People, Let us Bring the Gospel to All.” The final section of the message is about “Bearing Witness to Love.” The following are some brief insights on that topic.

Bearing. The verb “bear” and the noun “bearing” speak of crucial moments: ● *bearing on the question* — because it is relevant; ● *bearing in mind* — because it is important; ● *bearing with one another* — because it is necessary in our relationships; ● *bearing oneself well* — because we are persons, not animals; ● *bearing a hand* — because we need to join in and help out.

In addition: ● *bearing the pain / cross* — because it is the best choice in view of the bigger picture and the longer vision; ● *bearing arms* — because we are called to serve even at the cost of our lives; ● *bearing fruit* — because we have observed / done the above items with distinction; ● *bearing a likeness* — because all of the above are possible only to the extent that we share in a feature or characteristic of God; this is the best fruit of all: becoming like Him.

In the First Letter of John (3:1-2) we are reminded and assured: “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet, so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it



did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Witness. One can be an authentic and effective witness only when one has personally experienced—seen, heard, smelled, touched and/or felt—what one is talking about. At heart, this is what Christianity is all about. In his first encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love), Pope Benedict XVI rightly underscored: “*We have come to believe in God’s love; in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life.*” “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (DCE 1). In his message this year for World Mission Sunday, Pope Francis in addressing the youth joyfully expresses his gratitude “to all those ecclesial groups that make it possible for you to have a personal encounter with Christ living in his Church: parishes, associations, movements, religious communities, and the varied expressions of missionary service.”

A real witness does not keep to oneself what one has experienced. That person talks about it, shares it with others. Then, others come to experience it themselves through the witness. Others are enabled to be part of the privileged moment and reality through the testimony of the witness. In the words of First John (1:1-4): “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life—for that life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that our joy may be complete.”

Love. As a song puts it, “Love is a many-splendored thing.” Yes, each person has an understanding of what love means. No wonder love is the most misused and abused word. For us Christians, love is first and foremost about God and godly things: ● “God is love” (1Jn 4:16); ● “In





this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins” (1Jn 4:10); ● “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another” (1Jn 4:11).

Indeed: ● “Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1Cor 13:4-7). Since God is love and living, love is life-giving. The more we love, the more we are alive and the more others are alive.

Bearing witness to love is possible. Indeed, it is a choice that is both free and compelling at the same time: “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (the love of Christ urges / impels / behooves / spurs us on (2Cor 5:14). A holy restlessness is involved here, because the beloved is now a lover as well. One cannot but bear witness to this love of God.

Mission. Today we celebrate World Mission Sunday. In his message for this day Pope Francis points out that “Life Is a Mission.” He continues: “The fact that we are not in this world by our own choice makes us sense that there is an initiative that precedes us and makes us exist. Each one of us is called to reflect on this fact: “*I am a mission* on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 273).

The liturgical readings for this 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, echo this necessary and urgent call to mission, to bear witness to this love.

First Reading: “If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him. Because of his affliction, he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear.”

Second Reading: “... let us hold fast to our confession.... Let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.”



Gospel Reading: “Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Presented with this call to mission, the call of bearing witness to love, we pray in the words of our response today in the responsorial psalm: “Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.”

In the words of Pope Francis in the same message mentioned earlier: “How many young people find in missionary volunteer work a way of serving the ‘least’ of our brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25:40), promoting human dignity and witnessing to the joy of love and of being Christians!”



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“I will not tire of declaring that if we really want an effective end to violence, we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression.”

Oscar Romero

