

Homily 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (28.10.18)

**'Go out to the whole world ...
teach them to observe all I have given to you'
Fr John Gerard, White Fathers Missionary Appeal**

As I said at the beginning of Mass, my name is Father John Gerard. I am a missionary priest. I belong to the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, but we are probably better known in this country as the White Fathers. And I'm here with you this weekend to say a few words about who we are, what we do, and to ask you for your help and for your prayers.

In our Gospel reading this morning, we hear how Jesus heals the blind man Bartimaeus, who was sitting by the side of the road. Healing the blind and the sick was a visible expression of Jesus as the Living Gospel. And that message of the Gospel, the Gospel of Life, is what we are all called to live and witness to in our daily life.

Indeed, preaching the Gospel today and witnessing to the Gospel today is just as relevant and is just as urgent as it's always been. And we, as White Fathers, preach the Gospel in different ways in Africa. Like many other things in the world today, the way of being a missionary has changed and evolved. The essential message remains the same: The proclamation of the Gospel, the message and life of Jesus Christ.

But the methods used and the way a missionary lives out his or her missionary vocation has changed to respond to new situations. In Africa now, the Church is well-established. Missionaries are there not so much to establish the church any more, as it was in former times, but to participate in the life of the Church, the life of the local Christian communities already present and, in most cases, thriving.

As well as regular parish work, many of our missionaries are involved in specialised tasks, such as promoting justice and peace issues, protecting the

environment. Others are involved in dialogue with Muslim leaders and some are involved in the training of lay leaders and catechists. I always find it rather unfortunate that when we hear news about Africa in this country, it often tends to be the bad news. And indeed, there is no denying the fact that Africa, as a huge continent, does have its fair share of problems: Political unrest, poverty, disease, and so on.

But it is not all bad news. There is a plenty of good news coming from Africa as well. And I can honestly say that my own experience of working as a missionary in Africa has been very fulfilling and very rewarding. I recently completed six years of living and working in our main house of our ministration in Rome. And during my time there, my work took me to 11 different African countries, and wherever I went, I always experienced the warm hospitality of Africa.

But it is the country of Tanzania in East Africa that I feel most closely attached to, having spent a good number of years living and working there, especially at the beginning of my missionary life. My years in Tanzania taught me that the Church in Africa is indeed alive and well and growing. There is a tremendous vitality in the Christian communities. The people have a very strong sense of their faith, and they have an almost felt presence of God right there with them in their daily life. They certainly know how to celebrate their faith in liturgy, for example. A typical Sunday morning celebration of the Eucharist would always take a good two hours, and it will be a joyful occasion, full of song and dance.

I always found that the life and joy of the young Church in Tanzania made me realise just how easy it is for us here in this country to take for granted the gift of our faith, the gift of the Gospel of Christ. Our faith truly is a gift from God, and it's a gift to be thankful for and to nourish.

It may come as a surprise to know that we do not have a shortage of vocations. In fact, we currently have over 450 young men preparing to be future missionary priests and brothers, and most of these are coming from Africa itself. There's some from the Philippines and some from India, but the vast majority of our future missionaries are going to come from Africa itself. It's yet

another sign of the changing face of the Missionary Church: Africans becoming missionaries from one African country to another.

I'm here with you this morning to ask you for your help in our work, and the retiring collection this morning will be for the White Fathers. But I'd like especially to ask you for your prayers. Please remember our missionaries in your prayers, especially those who are working in difficult and sometimes dangerous situations.

Although the way we live our faith here is very different to the way of the people of Tanzania, or anywhere in Africa, live their faith, we do share with them the same faith, and we all walk together with them on the same faith journey. The Church in Africa still needs and welcomes missionaries: Missionary priests, brothers, sisters, lay people. Let us pray today that we will all remain faithful to our call as followers of Christ and play our part in the spreading of the Gospel, knowing that God, who has called each one of us, is faithful and will never let us go.