

Today together with over 1 billion Catholics worldwide we come to observe and celebrate the World Mission Sunday. It was officially instituted in 1926 by Pope Pius XI for the whole Church.. Every year since then, the universal Church has dedicated the month of October for reflection and prayer for the missions.

Since its institution in 1926 the Holy Father every year sends out a special message to all Catholics to remind us of the great importance of this annual celebration of World Mission Sunday - to steadily move forward for the work of evangelisation for the life of the Church and for the support of all missionary activities of the Church.

Pope Francis, in his first World Mission Sunday message in 2013, challenged us to proclaim courageously and in every situation the gospel of Christ, a message of hope, reconciliation and communion. In 2014, the Pope challenged the Church to become a welcoming home, a mother for all peoples, and the source of rebirth for our world through the intercession of Mary, model of humble and joyful evangelisation. In 2019, Pope Francis wrote, “The Church is on a mission in the world – Baptised and Sent.” “This missionary mandate touches us personally: I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptised man and woman is a mission.” In his 2020 message, the Pope said that we have to discharge our mission like the prophet Isaiah, “Here am I, send me.” “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20). We have to “own and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts.” (2021) “You shall be my witnesses (Act 1:8) (2022)

For today’s World Mission Sunday 2023, Pope Francis has chosen the theme: “Hearts on Fire, feet on the move (cf. Lk 24:13-35). Reflecting on the disciples’ encounter with Jesus on the journey to Emmaus in Luke’s gospel the Holy Father writes that ‘their encounter with Christ in the Word and in the breaking of bread sparked in them the enthusiastic desire to set out again towards Jerusalem and proclaim that the Lord had truly risen. Their hearts burned within them, their eyes were opened, and their feet set out on the way.’

Pope Francis reminds us that wherever we are in the world, ‘the primary and principal resource of 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. They can bear witness to the life that never dies, even in the most difficult of situations and in the darkest of moments.’

Unlike the Pharisees in today’s Gospel who always try to trap Jesus in what he said, we are called to open our hearts and minds to the living words of Jesus Christ. We are urged to return to the world all that belongs to the world: our deep seated prejudices, false assumptions and irrational fears, our worship of society’s current ‘idols’, along with unhealthy desires and cravings for all that is passing and ultimately meaningless; and to give to God our unconditional commitment to his will. After handing Jesus a denarius Jesus said to the Pharisees: ‘Whose head is this? Whose name?’ ‘Caesar’s’ they said. ‘Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs.’

On this day, as we celebrate World Mission Sunday, through prayer, reflection and material help we express our support of missionaries around the world who are striving to preach the Gospel among those have yet to receive it, let us remind ourselves of the words of St Paul to the Thessalonian community today in our second reading. Always with a ‘heart on fire and feet on the move,’ St Paul can truly say to them, “We always mention you in our prayers and thank God for you all, and

constantly remember before God our Father how you have shown your faith in action, worked for love and persevered through hope, in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Just as the two disciples of Emmaus told the others what had taken place along the way (cf. Lk 24:35), so too our proclamation will be a joyful telling of Christ the Lord, his life, his passion, his death and resurrection and the wonders that his love has accomplished in our lives.

Pope Francis concludes his message for us today, encouraging us ‘to set out once more, illumined by the encounter with the risen Lord and prompted by his Spirit. Let us set out again with burning hearts, with our eyes open and our feet in motion. Let us set out to make our hearts burn with the word of God, to open the eyes of others to Jesus in the Eucharist and to invite everyone to walk together on the path of peace and salvation that God, in Christ, has bestowed upon all humanity.

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