

THE SONG OF THE BEAUTIFUL FEET,
MISSIO AD GENTES IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
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Ever heard this? “*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing Good News, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, ‘Your God is King!’*” (Isa 52:7).

The following is my reflection on the spiritual heroism of those who took glad tidings to the Nations, the heroes of the *missio ad gentes* (Mt 28:18-20, Mk 16:16-20). This is, therefore, the story of the execution of the mandate to go to all Nations to make disciples, the story of the ‘beautiful feet’.

By virtue of Baptism and common priesthood, an invitation has been extended to us to collaborate in the cause of evangelization so that all Nations call on and believe in Jesus (Php 2:11), an invitation to *one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic mission* to the Nations.

Before us all is a project of saving and gathering all people, a project requiring thousands of feet to play their part. It is for us an invitation to become missionaries to all who must know who Jesus is. It is a call to acquire, move with and use our feet to reach people of every nation (Mt 28:18-20).

The world with its people is staggering. The world is hungry and so the harvest is ready. Beautiful feet are awaited to reach every corner of the world to bring glad tidings to all.

But being able to call on Jesus is one thing, having things moving is another thing. This fact triggered logical and rhetorical questions: “*But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? But I ask, did they not hear? Certainly they did; for ‘Their voice has gone forth to all the earth and their words to the ends of the world’*” (Rom 10:14.18).

The answers which Paul provides to these questions are a credit to the Apostles and early Christians, because after being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they set their ‘beautiful feet’ in motion. This is what makes the book of Acts a beautiful stanza of the song on the ‘beautiful feet’.

I now delve into the song of the ‘beautiful feet *ad gentes*’, according to the *Acts of the Apostles*. After this introduction, this reflection looks into three things: the setting, continuity of the mission, and how the book beckons and tells us that the ball is now in our court

PART ONE

1.1. The Setting of the Story of the Beautiful Feet

Scripturally, the story or the song of 'The Beautiful Feet *ad Gentes*' started in the Old Testament. The *Acts of the Apostles* is its continuation. Its conclusion is far to be seen because it will take place at the end of history which I am not able to predict (cf. 2 Pet 3:8).

In fact, the first 'beautiful feet' were of God himself. The first movement of the 'beautiful feet *ad gentes*' was made by God himself. The occasion was the first sin of Adam and Eve, a sin whose impact we call original sin. God's feet arrived in Eden (paradise) and inspired strength to the trembling feet of the first sinners. Do not mind if this is anthropomism.

God announced the first Gospel (*proto - evangelium*) when he mentioned the Blessed Virgin Mary and her son, Jesus Christ. His salvation plan was to *put enmity between the devil and the woman, and between their offsprings and have the devil's head crushed* (Gen 3:15). This far, God's feet became 'beautiful feet' which brought Adam and Eve glad tidings.

The first couple had spoiled the paradisiacal promises: friendship with God, guaranteed health, guaranteed success in work, soft death, soft transition into eternal life, etc. Thence, fallen nature of human beings begged for salvation and announcers of the glad tidings. Hence forth, human beings started to long for the 'beautiful feet' of those who bring them glad tidings.

It did not take long, 'beautiful feet' of agents of glad tidings started to appear on earth. Some belonged to agents who did not understand themselves as such. Think of Abraham's, Noah's, Lot's, and Joseph's in Egypt. Others belonged to people who partly understood themselves as such. Think of Moses', Aaron's, Miriam's, David's, and Solomon's. Others belonged to hopeless agents who did not know who they were. Think of Ahab's, Jezebel's, and Jehu's.

Still others belonged to people who fully understood themselves as such. Think of judges', as well as major and minor prophets'. Do not mind whether some prophets were not historical figures, like Jonah. Finally, think of John Baptist's feet whose promise closes the Old Testament while his birth and activities open the New Testament.

1.2. Jesus' Feet, the Most Beautiful: The Climax of the Story

In the setting, the story of Jesus is the climax of the scriptural story of the 'beautiful feet'. Hence, his feet were the most beautiful because he was the climax of revelation. God the Father

announced this when He introduced Him to the Jews saying, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him” (Mk 9:7).

This is then echoed by the homilist behind the Letter to the Hebrews when he insists God spoke in partial and various ways to ancestors through the prophets and then, in the last days He spoke through His Son, the refulgence of His very glory (Heb 4:1-4).

Jesus announced the beauty of His feet saying: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord*” (Lk 4:18, Isa 61:1-2).

The beauty of Jesus’ feet is noted in His reception of the mission, His readiness to travel around preaching, His perfect execution of the mission, preparation of the Apostles to advance it, strengthening of their feet by the gift of the Holy Spirit, granting perpetual support by His continual prayer to His Father and guaranteeing eternal reward to all who will be faithfully involved in the mission.

The feet of Jesus were too beautiful not to be declared to the world. On Pentecost day, Peter declared this to the audience saying: “*Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders and signs which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know*” (Acts 2:22b).

Missio ad gentes is not an invention of the Christians. There is continuity between the Apostles’ work and Jesus’ work (1:1-11), and it was carried after obeying Christ’s parting command (1:12-14, Mt 28:18-20).

The *Acts of the Apostles*, then, records the fruits of the feet strengthened on the Pentecost day. The feet of all standing there were strengthened. This is to say the feet of Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia. This resulted into “*actio catolica*”. The beautiful feet which went to Rome, for instance, founded a Church which explains why Peter and Paul found there an already established church.

1.3. The Feet of the Apostles, Second Most ‘Beautiful Feet’

The Twelve were chosen by Jesus Christ to be with him so that they may be sent, hence, to become Apostles (Mk 3:13-19). So, He wanted them to acquire ‘beautiful feet’. He scrubbed and polished their feet for three years by teaching them by words and deeds. Since He wanted them to seriously deliver, he sometimes gave them special tuition (Mk 9:31).

To test their maturity, He sent the Apostles for block teaching practice. He wanted to see whether their feet had started to become beautiful for *missio ad gentes*. He summoned them and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. He sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. For diligence and discipline, He forbade preoccupation with burdens and shifting accommodation (Lk 9:1-6).

For their sustenance, Jesus wanted the Apostles to depend on their ‘beautiful’ feet. He asked them to discharge their mission free of charge for their livelihood would be guaranteed by the way they dedicate themselves to it and people recognize the beauty of their feet (cf. Mt 10:5-15, Mk 6:7-13, Lk 9:1-6, 12:22-33).

After testing the Twelve, Jesus sent the seventy-two (Lk 10:1-20). These came back rejoicing for overpowering the devil. Jesus corrected and taught them not to rejoice because the spirits were subject to them, but because their names were written in heaven. They were wrong. God’s promise to agents of evangelization is *one dinarius*, that is eternal life (Mt 20:1-16).

After His ascension, the return into His former glory (Lk 24:50-53), the ‘beautiful feet’ of the Apostles and the disciples were strengthened to take glad tidings “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 28:23-31). “The ends of the earth” meant Rome, in particular, but *ad gentes* in general. All except Judas Iscariot’s feet were beautiful. His feet did not go anywhere for they died at the very beginning of the mission. Jesus wasted his time beautifying and strengthening them.

PART TWO

2.1 The Acts of the Apostles, the Continuation of *Missio Ad Gentes*

The book of Acts is the continuation of the song of the *missio ad gentes*. This is why its principal parts are a classical description of how the beautiful feet of the early Christians advanced the mission. It opens with the preparation of the feet because the job lying ahead was a big project. Hence, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-2:13) because no mission *ad gentes* would become successful without His power.¹ For this, the establishment of the Church will be rightly attributed to the action of the Holy Spirit, and specifically upon Peter (2:14-18) and Paul (13:2 ff.) who worked hard in preaching the Risen Lord.

Then the book depicts how the “golden” feet trod Jerusalem (Acts 2:14-8:3); how they reached Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:4-9:43); how they started conquering the world of the Nations (Acts 10:1-15:35), and finally how Paul’s feet reached the end of the world of that time, that is Rome (Acts 15:36-28:31).

2.2 The Beauty of the Apostles’ Feet in the Acts

Let us survey the book to prove this and draw useful lessons. First of all, since Judas Iscariot’s feet were missing, the Apostles chose Matthias to bring the number of their feet back to twenty-four (Acts 1:15-26). Then, their feet were strengthened on the Pentecost day. As such, the ball rolled into their court. On the very day, their catechesis won three thousand people to Jesus (2:1-41).

This tells us that the development of the mystery of the Church would be introduced throughout the world by the apostolic teaching (1:24 f.), the teaching which will be forced to adapt itself to circumstances and people, and lead to the foundation of various church communities of Syria, Asia Minor and later on of all mission lands and continents.

After the fulfillment of Jesus' promise of having their feet strengthened (Acts 1-3), the disciples attempted to live communal life in Jerusalem (2:42-47) and eventually reach all Nations by preaching and signs which God would work through them (2:22, Mk 16:15-20). Living together and have everything in common was a decision to give their feet a home. That was the first small Christian community which made the Jerusalem community find maturity in the Spirit (1:15-5:42).

Peter and John cured a crippled beggar. This proved the words of Jesus that He came to set fire on earth (Lk 12:49). Ordinary people rejoiced while the Sanhedrin was disappointed. Peter explained the event, but the Sanhedrin resolved to stop further movements of their beautiful feet. They wanted to end the mission. They imprisoned the Apostles and forbade the taking of the glad tidings any farther (Acts 4:5-22).

The prayer of the community is effective. The early community prayed (Mt 18:20). They asked, sought, and knocked the door (Lk 11:10). The prison was opened by the angel of the Lord to tell all people that the mission was unstoppable.

Life in the first small Christian community was very beneficial but sins of greed, lies, and cheating jeopardized it. Ananias and Sapphira paid for their cheating with their life for the Holy Spirit could not be tempted. God continued to support the mission in Jerusalem by signs and wonders. But what Jesus said about his followers became true. Jesus had said his disciples would walk the way of persecution (Mt 10:24; Lk 23:3; Acts 14:22). The peace of their community was again spoiled by the re-arrest of Peter and John.

For the Sanhedrin, the Apostles were mischievous apostates who intended to bring the blood of Jesus upon them though at first they seemed not to fear it (Mt 27:25). The two were reprimanded, but they assured them not to stop bringing the glad tidings to the people because their mandate was to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). Challenged by the wisdom of one of them, Gamaliel, the grandson of Rabbi Hillel, to think twice lest they militate against God's work, Peter and John were released on the condition not to re-open their mouths to preach anything.

But the glad tidings were too good to be buried in their hearts in fear of the powerful. The Apostles' feet and mouths could not be calmed, hence, "*all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus*" (5:42).

Chapter 6 records the frustration of the ‘beautiful feet’ in the community. The *missio ad gentes* had already registered some beautiful fruits: some Greeks were won over. But favoritism and greed started to set things apart and the Apostles started to lose focus on prayer and proclamation of the Word. They discovered this and addressed it squarely. The solution was the appointment of seven excellent deacons (Acts 6:1-14).

As peace seemed to return, Jesus’ predictions on persecution continued to become true. He had said, ‘no disciple is superior to master (Mt 10:24) and what happens to green tree will happen to dry wood too’ (Lk 23:31, cf. Acts 14:22).

In this line, bloody suffering and martyrdom bloomed among his disciples to render true the fact that those who love and attempt to live like Jesus, who bled blood, are prone to bleeding blood as well. The first in the row was Stephen, the deacon. He immediately bled blood to pay for his speech (Acts 7:1-8:1). Thus, his ‘beautiful feet’ were rejected because he delivered a speech which was judged as undiplomatic by his listeners. The future instrument of God, Saul, witnessed the killing and was happy as he thought one of the “apostates” was eliminated.

God’s ways are inscrutable (Rom 11:33). The persecution of the Christians enabled the good tidings to spill beyond the borders of Israel to typical *gentes*. This was strange in human wisdom and logic but God can straighten the lines of a crooked story. Everything has negative and positive sides. Sometimes the disciples consciously planned and lifted their feet but when things seemed to delay, God pushed their feet by persecution. I mean, paradoxically, persecution in Jerusalem, which cut James’ feet at the very beginning of their mission, sent other feet to different regions (Acts 8:2-3).

Chapter 8:4-40 records how the mission to typical *gentes* started to win people. The ‘beautiful feet’ of the Apostles reached Samaria, the land of the “untouchable”. The very people, whom the two sons of Zebedee wanted to burn, were won to Christ (Lk 9:51-56).

Then the beautiful feet of deacon Phillip reached the eunuch of Candace. Philip explained the Biblical text he was reading, preached the Good News to him and baptized him. In this way the invisible beautiful feet of the carriers of the glad tidings entered Africa. What a wonderful *missio ad gentes*! Philip did two spiritual works of mercy to the African: instructing the ignorant and counseling the doubtful, which are basic works in the mission.

The scarcity of laborers in the vineyard was obviated by Jesus in his permanent prophetic statement (Lk 10:2). The master of the harvest addressed the problem by recruiting one “unexpected” diligent worker. God’s wisdom and plan chose Paul to be a special Apostle *ad gentes*.

Paul did not dream he would serve the very people he was bent to destroy. Thus, his call was both unexpected and dreadful (Acts 9:1-31, Gal 1:11-24). Failing to understand what had

happened to him, he went to the desert to meditate. Coming back to Damascus, he received an inimical welcome. Christians feared him. They did not trust his mouth and so did not recognize the beauty of his feet. The climax of this fate was a near miss he experienced as King Aretas' men ambushed him. Thus, the start of his *missio ad gentes* suffered a blow.

Paul went to Tarsus half confused. But a friend in need is a friend indeed; Barnabas' diplomacy opened closed hearts of the people to Paul. God turned Paul's heart to the people and people's heart to him (Mal 4:4-6). Barnabas officiated the marriage of the two hearts.

Jesus had promised to support the mission with miracles (Mk 16:16-20). In this line, the book of Acts records two miracles performed to Aeneas and Dorcas. The former was bed ridden for eight years while the latter had lost her life (Acts 9:32-43).

Missio ad gentes sometimes faces dirty questions. Sometimes missionaries doubt the humanity of some human beings. In some parts of Africa this is true. What is quite unfortunate is that the Bible had addressed the problem, but the missionaries fail to see how it had been addressed. The mission was to embrace people of every nation, race, people and tongue (Rev 7:9).

Peter and most Jews thought God was their monopoly and so they excluded the Nations. Hence, they regarded them as profane and unclean. Their negative opinion was deeply rooted in their hearts that the vision of animals to be slaughtered, they were refusing, was repeated thrice to Peter. This event, among others, tells us that Christianity had grown up from Jewish religious traditionsⁱⁱ by the apostolic teaching through the action of the Holy Spirit. God corrected Peter.

The conversion of Cornelius' family showed that God was not a private property of the Jews.ⁱⁱⁱ In this way, God justified the *missio ad gentes* to the head of the Apostles and the young Church. As if the vision was not enough, God gave Peter a sign, the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Nations, to stand as evidence that the Holy Spirit was also not confined to any particular nation (10:1-48).

What explained the extent of the mission to Peter was unknown to some Christians, hence, there followed Peter's arraignment before the Pharisaic element in the Church (11:1-18). The beautiful feet were not stopped by the challenges staged by some Judeo – Christians who did not properly understand the mission. Since its advancement did not depend very much on human plans, its chief force behind effected the establishment of the Church in Antioch and the reception of an exceptional Apostle, Paul (11:19-26).

Paul was especially chosen to boost the *missio ad gentes*, which was again not "problem less". Even in a well-established Church, the members face varied problems. The Jerusalem community confronted some; hence, a signal of CARITAS was shown to them. Christians who had more means sent relief to Jerusalem (11:27-29).

The beautiful feet hardly rested in peace. Shockingly, persecution from civil government surfaced and caused martyrdom of James. But death is also for killers. Herod died. As a super record of *missio ad gentes*, after this, the book highlights the mission of Barnabas and Paul (13:1-15:41).

These excellent missionaries were commissioned by the Church and set off. Their beautiful feet were entangled in a confrontation in Cyprus, but they were not stopped. From Cyprus they reached Antioch of Pisidia and then went to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (14:1-20). How they were received varied from place to place as it was said by Jesus (Lk 9:1-6, 10:1-24). Lystra was a wonderful mission land. Thanks to their profound humility, they refused divine honor admirers wanted to give them after curing a crippled listener. Then, enemies of evangelization stoned Paul almost to death.

When the pair came back to Antioch, their work caused a number of questions. Some questions queried the justification of their work *ad gentes* and whether the Gentile Christians were to observe Jewish customs. These questions were answered by sages at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem: the Nations were not to be burdened with Jewish traditions (14:21-15:35).

Some strange things do happen in life; they happened also in the *missio ad gentes* we are surveying now. Paul and Barnabas vehemently quarreled over one Mark, who abandoned them for some time. He was unfaithful to his vocation. Paul rejected him, but Barnabas accepted him. They, consequently, separated (15:36-41). After this incident, other Apostles disappear in the book. Paul alone remains as a protagonist.

2.3 Paul's Beautiful Feet to the Nations

Paul was a missionary to the Nations per se. But knowing his limitations as a person, he added to his feet the feet of Timothy and Silas (16:1-5).

The feet of this functional trinity did not skip any possible village and town. After receiving a vision of invitation, Paul and his assistants went to Macedonia where they won Lydia and her family to Christ.

Exorcising a slave girl with oracular spirit caused great havoc. Anyway, God's inscrutable ways allowed the imprisonment of Paul and Silas to effect the conversion of the jailer's family (16:1-40). There is no soft work. The joy wrought by the conversion of two Gentile houses was thwarted by an uproar in Thessalonica and Berea (17:1-15).

It is true what the psalmist said in Ps 127:1-2 that it is useless to build a house, or guard a city, or rise up very early without involving the Lord. Paul planned an intellectual show in Athens to defeat Epicureans and Stoics in Areopagus (17:16-33). He desired to beat the Nations by his philosophy. On the contrary, he received an embarrassing reward; his speech was intellectually ineffective so his listeners politely dismissed him.

This event reminded Paul of the right message to take to the Nations. So, he made his mind to preach about the cross of Jesus instead of bending on defeating people by his academic endowment. Thus, he went to Corinth a changed person. He learnt a lesson. Henceforth, Paul emphasized correct Christology and soteriology.

Something like "*invidia clericalis*" threatened the mission. One Apollo was doing a recommendable job though he was not officially trained or commissioned to bring the glad tidings to the Nations (18:1-28). Paul's wisdom overcame the problem (1 Cor 1:10-17). He declared why

there should be no conflict in the vineyard: there must be many laborers because there are many ways to serve the Word. He observed, some may plant it and others water it.

Then, the beautiful feet of Paul and his companions reached Ephesus, where they could not enjoy full respect for a riot occurred and seriously frustrated their message (19:1-41). Since it is good sometimes to confer with others in the same mission, Paul went to Jerusalem where the brethren welcomed and planned with him (21:1-26).

2.4 Paul's Last Days

Taking the Gospel to the Nations resembles a race whereby athletes, after running their courses, hand their sticks to next runners. Paul's run started to near its conclusion. Many incidents started to slow down the speed of his beautiful feet. The full story is given in 21:1-28:31.

Paul's end started with his arrest in the temple. Paradoxically, this incident offered him a golden chance to meet the Sanhedrin and bear witness to the resurrection. Similarly, disregarding the volatility of the Jewish mob, he preached the message when he faced it. Paul was not even intimidated by the Roman Tribune. He courageously faced his enemies and the Lord cheered him.

One's enemies are his own relatives, Jews counted Paul a nuisance and so they plotted to kill him. His nephew revealed the plan and the plot was thwarted. He was lucky! But the drama was not yet over; Paul was forced to land in the hands of Felix, the governor, at Caesarea.

The governor was corrupt, instead of freeing the innocent Paul; he wanted to get some money from him. Paul was not ready to buy his right. He was not ready to reward corruption.

In all this trouble, Paul was very hard at his mission. He continued to grasp every opportunity to pass the glad tidings to the people. Felix left Paul in prison because he did not bribe him. His "stubbornness" kept him in prison till a new governor arrived. Governor Festus could have released Paul, but he had already made a mistake of appealing to the Emperor Nero in Rome.^{iv} By then Nero was not yet corrupt.

Before he was "dispatched" to Rome, Paul was brought before King Agrippa. Paul's rhetorical smartness almost won the king to his cause. On that day, his feet shone before the audience. But since all this was leading to the conclusion of his *missio ad gentes*, Paul was not released. He had but be shipped to Rome (27:1-12).

The storm at sea and the shipwreck threatened Paul's beautiful feet. God, who had promised to be with all who work in his vineyard (Mt 28:20), saved the life of Paul and those with him and brought them to Malta.

Paradoxically, all these troubles enabled Paul's beautiful feet to reach the island. After a rest in Malta, the journey to Rome continued as his longing to go there stood (Rom 1:15). Paul arrived in Rome. To his surprise the acquittal he expected was not granted him. Instead of being granted full freedom, he was put under house arrest. But all the same, this fate did not shut his mouth; he continued preaching from the house he hired (28:11-31).

The song of the beautiful feet ends here. It ends in suspension. Anyway, the book has given us a broad survey of the Church's growth from resurrection of Jesus to Paul's Roman imprisonment. This shows us that the Church developed from its roots in Jewish religious traditions in Jerusalem, to a series of Christian communities among the Nations of the Roman Empire.

2.5 Nothing to Fear

Before I move to another part, let me draw six provisional conclusions. First, the Triune God cannot leave agents of *missio ad gentes* alone. The feet of the Apostles were chosen, prepared, beautified, strengthened and preserved by the Triune God.

The Father prepared the blue-print of the salvation plan; "supervised" the incarnation of Jesus on earth, supported him throughout his earthly ministry and finally guaranteed the coming of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the beautiful feet of his disciples for the mission.

Playing his part, the Son worked the immediate establishment of the Kingdom of God and worked for three years among the Jews. To see to it that the Church achieves its *missio ad gentes*, together with the Father (Filioque), he sent the Holy Spirit as power and source of life to all who would believe and call on him.

As for the Holy Spirit, he became the power without which the Church could not be established nor Christianity spread and endure as a religion which guarantees salvation of all people. The pneumatological aspect can be summarized in three assertions: the Holy Spirit had been ruling and directing the Church according to Jesus' promise (cf. Lk 24:49, Acts 1:2, 2:1-4, 15:28, 16:6-7), He had always been the invisible power of the Church and the Apostles had been the visible authority. Finally, though He had once been given without the mediation of the Church (10:44-47), the normal means of incorporation into the community was by Baptism.

Second, since no power could shut the mouths of the Apostles, *missio ad gentes* is the Word of God growing and expanding. This realizes the parable of the sower (cf. Lk 8:4-8, 12-15).

Third, without the call to repentance *missio ad gentes* is incomplete (cf. Acts 2:37-40). All who were being admitted into the Church were asked to "turn around". The most impressive example has been the "turning" of Paul from persecutor to Apostle (cf. Acts 9:1-9).

Fourth, *missio ad gentes* is nothing but the salvific message. Even God's "visitation" is for salvation (cf. Acts 7:25, 15:11 and 28:28).

Fifth, God's restored people are expected to answer God's fidelity with "fruits worthy of repentance" (cf. Acts 26:20), faith being the first. With it goes prayer which defines the people's relationship with God (cf. Acts 1:24-25, 4:24-30).

Sixth, restored people, have been expected of "metanoia" and imitation of God in his qualities (cf. Acts 4:27 - 5:11, 6:1-7). All were being convinced that God's fidelity was intact. His promise was to give them confidence in their commitment to him.

PART THREE

3.1 The Book Beckons Us, the Ball is in Our Court

The book ends at chapter 28. One sad reality is that in some areas the footsteps of the beautiful feet of Jesus, the Apostles and early disciples, even Paul's, are nowhere to be seen. What happened?

It seems wherever the Christians did not firmly grasp the sticks extended to them for the run, Christianity has lost ground. Christians in the North Africa, Middle East, and Asia Minor (Turkey) can be numbered. Were we to depend on Christians in these areas only, we could have said Christianity is very sick in bed. Thanks to successful *missio ad gentes* in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and South America!

3.2 How the Book Beckons Us

Since the book ends by telling us that the beautiful feet of Paul, the chief character of *missio ad gentes*, are under house arrest, it invites us to take the stick from his hands and run our course.

This being the case, we can ask ourselves several questions. Do we understand this? Do we feel concerned? Are we ready to offer ourselves for the work? Are we ready to let our feet to be chosen and prepared by the Triune God to carry on the work of bringing glad tidings to further ends of the world?

Of course, we are not asked to start from nothing. Sons and daughters of all continents are working. But the work is a bit complicated because even where the beautiful feet started to move for mission lands need some feet to return. Europe needs assistance. It needs an increase of beautiful feet. Some beautiful feet can return there. The number of the feet there is reduced, some are aged and others are tired. New evangelization of Europe is, thus, justified.

This said, there are twin basic questions: whether we feel concerned and whether we understand how beautiful our feet must be. The book of Acts does not predict the understanding of the new agents of evangelization but delineates the aspects of the beauty supposed to be found with their feet, namely, readiness to spread the Gospel, faith, faithfulness, discipline, mastery of the Word of God and doggy determination. These aspects have been noted in the persons of Paul and his companions.

3.3 The 'Beautiful Feet' in *Missio Ad Gentes* Today

Let us here resort to SWOT analysis (i.e. noting strength, weakness, opportunity and threat) for our duty.

Strength: The Acts of the Apostles deals with about 120 disciples. Unlike them, our strength today is in the presence of many bishops (apostles), priests, the religious and other agents of evangelization plus financial muscle. Thanks to Africa, Asia and Latin America. I see beautiful feet in *MISSIO AD GENTES* right now. They are treading the bushes and remote towns and villages.

Weakness: I note weaknesses in the quality and distribution of the feet. The Apostles had companions. The quantity of the feet today is conditioned by formators and formandees while their distribution depends on the generosity of bishops and religious superiors. Their number bows to the prophetic saying of Jesus Christ. He said the laborers were few and it seems it will remain always so. But the Lord of the harvest can revoke his prophecy, if we ask him to repeal it.

To date, the number of the feet remains small because modern world propaganda render holy vocations distasteful; some of the feet die in the seminaries and still others die early in the mission like Judas Iscariot's.

The quality of the feet is conditioned by the owners. It depends on the owners because one's shadow depends on one's own posture. The beauty of some feet is getting pale because some of the owners do not behave. Some are lovers of money. Others are lazy. Others are traitors. Others are people who count costs. Others are selfish. Others are drunkards. Others are quarrelsome. Still others are suffering from malicious inclinations, like pedophilia. This is very unfortunate!

In addition, some are fearful. Others choose places to work. Others know the work but feel they are not concerned. Others fear to go to mission lands, so instead of going to the ends of the world have engaged reverse gear and desire to return to where missionaries came from. Others are cowards, they fear pastoral challenges. Others are pleasers; they say only what pleases their listeners (2Tim 4:1-4). Others do not listen to the Holy Spirit, so they do not count him as important Person. Others slip into economic problems as they undertake projects of self-reliance and still other feet belong to people who are hungry.

Opportunity: It is now as ever. The harvest is ripe though the labourers are few. This is why Jesus asked us to pray always for the master to send more labourers in his vineyard. We can undertake *missio ad gentes* in its varied faces: political, scientific, industrial, economic, intellectual and cultural.

Threat: It is other religions and mushrooming churches.^v The threat consists in these forcing to tread and stand where Catholics are standing and treading.^{vi} This is chaos and as such interreligious dialogue and ecumenism look superfluous and ridiculous (Rom 15:20).

Concluding Observations

I am winding off my reflection. Admittedly, *missio ad gentes* is guided by the Holy Spirit, and as such, it is willed by God himself. The heritage of Judaism passed to the Nations not because the Nations rejected the message of God but rather because God planned so (Acts 1:8). Then, God closely cooperates with those He calls to take glad tidings to all Nations.

The beauty of the feet of our forerunners was guaranteed by armor of God which they put on to help them to endure hardships and hold their ground. They ventured to both the Jews and the Nations with their loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as their breastplate, their feet shod in readiness for the Gospel of peace, holding faith as their shield and carrying the Word of God as the sword of the Holy Spirit and salvation as their helmet (Eph 6:13-17). Let us allow this book, which today tells us that the ball is in our court, win us (Heb 13:7-9).

Tanzania

Africa February 2019

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END NOTES

ⁱ Pope Francis, “Pope Urges Evangelical Renewal of Church’s Missionary Commitment”, Rome, Speech of 1st June 2, 2018.

ⁱⁱ Dennis Hamm, *The Acts of the Apostles, Little Rock Scripture Study*, Liturgical Press, 2006, 22

ⁱⁱⁱ David E. Pratte, *Commentary on the Book of Acts. Bible Study Notes and Comments*, Gospelway, 2016, 184

^{iv} Robert C. Jones, *Acts of the Apostles*, Acworth, 2009, 39

^v Titus Amigu, *Makanisa na Vikundi vya Dini*, Franciscan Kolbe Press, Limuru, 2013, 1-12

^{vi} Titus Amigu, *Madhara ya Utandawazi katika Familia*, Franciscan Kolbe Press, Limuru, 2013, 26-30.

Scripture is taken from The Lockman Foundation, NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, 1995.