

Preface

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To reignite in the People of God the baptismal awareness of the mission of the Church, Pope Francis designated an Extraordinary Missionary Month for October 2019. This event is to occur in conjunction with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, addressing the activity of the Catholic missionaries in all continents.¹ The theme provided by the Pope for the Extraordinary Missionary Month is *Baptized and Sent: the Church of Christ on Mission in the World*, a theme which combines the pastoral concern of Pope Benedict XV with the missionary vitality expressed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity" (EG 15).

The aim of Pope Francis is to reinvigorate the *missio ad gentes*, in order to fulfill with new enthusiasm Jesus Christ's command to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Mission makes the Church,² and every baptized person is an Apostle sent to proclaim Jesus Christ and His Word of salvation "to the ends of the earth" (Ac 1:8). Witnessing Christ, transmitting the Christian Faith, and sharing the Good News of the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit is the very essence of the missionary identi-

¹ The designation occurred during the Angelus Prayer on World Mission Sunday, October 22nd, 2017. The speech given by Pope Francis is available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2017/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20171022.html.

² F. MERONI (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church*, Aracne Editrice, Canterano (Roma) 2017.

ty inherent to all Christians in any time, yesterday as much as today and always.

However, “for the man who enters upon the apostolic life there is one attribute that is indispensable. It is of the most critical importance [...] that he has sanctity of life. For the man who preaches God must himself be a man of God” (*Maximum Illud* 26). In that respect, Martyrs stand out as the highest example of missionary disciples of the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus, and thus hold a central place in the celebrations of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019. As living witnesses of the Church’s Faith in Christ, their acts and deeds were God’s hands and feet, in carrying forward the work of evangelization throughout the world. They made Jesus known to those who had never encountered Him, and “they crowned their apostolate with the glory of martyrdom, entrenching the Faith at the cost of their blood” (*Maximum Illud* 5).

Martyrs are indeed the seed³ from which the Church has flourished throughout the history of salvation, and today their memory continues to guide the faithful wherever the Christian mission is challenged by hardships, injustices, and suffering. The case of Asia is paradigmatic. The accounts of the life and death of hundreds of Martyrs over the past centuries and in more recent times, are the bedrock of the missionary baptismal identity of millions of Christians, who are called to bear testimony to Jesus’ teachings amid extremely adverse circumstances.

Here is why the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) devoted this editorial endeavor to “Martyrs in Asia,” as a contribution to the Pontifical Mission Societies’ engagement in laying the groundwork to the Extraordinary Missionary Month October

³ “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Christians”. See TERTULIAN, *Apologeticus*, 50,13 – CCL 1,171.

2019 upon request of the Holy Father.⁴ The book features an introduction by Archbishop Thomas Menampampil SDB, India, and describes the path to martyrdom of Christians, both missionary religious and lay, in selected Asian countries, namely Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar.⁵ Furthermore, it provides theological and pastoral reflections with the aim to inspire the work of evangelization of the local Churches and their faithful.

“Martyrs in Asia” originates from a Study Seminar organized at the Vatican by the International Center for Mission and Formation (CIAM), in June 2018. The Study Seminar convened a group of prominent scholars and experts on the history of the mission in Asia, and was coordinated by the journalist and writer Paolo Affatato, responsible for the Asia Desk of “Fides”, the news Agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies. The editorial work concerning the publication was taken care of by Emiliano Stornelli, Chairman of RSC Religion & Security Council.

“The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission” (*Redemptoris Missio* 42). The meaningful stories of the “Martyrs in Asia” tell us about a testimony that – by

⁴ On the same day of the Angelus Prayer on World Mission Sunday, Pope Francis sent a letter to Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and President of the Supreme Council of the Pontifical Mission Societies. He entrusted him with “the work of preparing for this event, especially by raising awareness among the particular Churches, the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and among associations, movements, communities, and other ecclesial bodies”. The letter is available at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2017/10/22/0727/01588.html#ing/>.

⁵ *Omnis Terra* – PMU CIAM Publications is not responsible for the content of any translation into English of texts and quotations from other languages included in the chapters of this book. All chapters will be available in open access on the website of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019 (www.october2019.va/en.html/).

serving the neighbor through the language of God's mercy and truth – succeeded to move millions of hearts and minds to “open wide the doors for Christ”.⁶ Jesus was with them (cf. Mt 28:20) in the supreme moment of the martyrdom, materializing through the Paschal mystery to seal their achievement of a fully divine life. Blessed and Saints, they established a solid platform for the announcement of salvation to all the Asian people. They still intercede for their Churches, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, called to witness the same Gospel today so to share the same divine life offered by the Church in the Sacraments, in the proclamation of God's Word, and in the Christian charity of her sons and daughters.

Vatican City

January 25th, 2019

Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle

⁶ “Homily of His Holiness John Paul II for the Inauguration of His Pontificate”, 22nd October 1978, available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html/.