

Extraordinary Mission Month



**Baptised
and sent**

October
2019

**1st PMS Mission Congress
of the Antilles Episcopal Conference
September 19-22, 2019
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO**

Extraordinary Mission Month: October 2019

On October 22, 2017, World Mission Sunday, Pope Francis made his decision public that October 2019 is to be observed throughout the Catholic Church as an Extraordinary Mission Month. A hundred years ago, in 1919, Pope Benedict XV published the first encyclical on the missionary nature of the Church: **Maximum Illud**. Pope Francis considers this centenary anniversary as a providential occasion to call on the Church to renew itself and become ever more prepared to work, pray and give financial support for our common mission to bring the Gospel of Christ to all peoples.

The mission of the Church

Pope Francis' initiative of reflecting deeply on this mission of the Church reinforces providentially what our Caribbean Bishops teach us in a Pastoral Letter that they published on August 6, 2017, just over two months before Pope Francis' announcement of the Extraordinary Mission Month. In this Pastoral Letter "Being Church in a Digital Milieu", the Bishops wrote:

"Good News to the poor is the mission and goal of all pastoral communications (see Luke 4:18). Through signs, gestures, words, books, moving images, audio, and social communications, the Church has sought to proclaim her message so that all people will hear it in their own native language (see Acts 2:11). To be faithful to this mission of evangelizing communications to the people of the Caribbean today, we will need a new missionary spirit, one that is built upon

participation, dialogue, and collaboration and one that speaks to the heart, soul, and religious imagination of our Antillean people. We need a new way of being Church!"

"It is the Lord who sends: Go proclaim—communicate—the Good News "and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..." (Matthew 28:19). Jesus Christ himself communicates, in his mission, on all levels of human interaction. Evangelizing communication builds on this example of Jesus Christ, always trying to meet people where they are—at their level of knowledge, feeling, and understanding—to bring them from their own life experience closer to the Father and eternal life".

"It is the Church's ministry and mission to communicate the Good News of salvation and God's love to all of humanity. The Church's call to evangelize and her prophetic mission provide the Church with the challenge and opportunity to seek to influence the values, judgments, and actions of Caribbean society".

("Being Church in a Digital Milieu", 1,2,5)

Sharing in the mission of the Son

The Church's mission must therefore be understood as participating in the mission that God the Father entrusts to His Son and to the Holy Spirit in the world. This we read in the Gospel of John in chapter 21 where the Risen Christ appears to His disciples and shares His divine life and salvation with them as He says: "Peace be with you". He then shows them the marks of the suffering and sacrifice He willingly accepted on the cross for our salvation: He is the true Lamb of God who

takes away the sins of the world and who delivers us from the mystery of evil. Then the Risen Lord speaks these important words: “As the Father sent Me, so am I sending you”. With this call to mission, He breathes on the apostles and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. Just as the life of the Holy Trinity is a mystery of love and self-giving between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so too we are all called to share in this same dynamism. “As the Father sent Me, so I am sending you”: the mission for the Church is not a mere option –one among many –but the very reason for which Christ wanted her. To accomplish this mission, the Church received and constantly receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is why the mission is part of her very nature as such. The mission reflects that which the Church is in the depth of her being. And for this reason Christ entrusted to the disciples the same ministry of reconciliation that He died for on the cross: “If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven” (John 21: 19-23).

Missio ad gentes

The Church is missionary by nature because the Church is born and founded in the Passover of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Latin term “missio ad gentes” refers to the evangelizing mission to which God calls the entire Church, by reaching those who have not yet encountered Jesus Christ and his Gospel, and by reaching places where the Christian faith is absent and not yet able to renew the cultures, nations and the many women and men whose lives still yearn for salvation from sin and death. To know Christ or not to know Him, to be baptized or not to be baptized, to embrace the Christian faith and belong to the Church, to live the Gospel of reconciliation and to experience God’s forgiveness, or not to – these make a real difference.

Pope Francis expressed in 2018 very powerfully what true evangelization, the “missio ad gentes” should be:

“We do not have a product to sell. It has nothing to do with proselytizing; we are not selling a product. We have a **life** to communicate: God, his divine life, his merciful love, his holiness! It is the Holy Spirit who sends us, accompanies us and inspires us. He is the source of our mission. It is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church forward, not us”.
(Pope Francis, Address to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, June 1, 2018).

The theme

The theme that Pope Francis has chosen for the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, which therefore will also be the theme for our 1st Mission Congress in the Caribbean with which we will open the Extraordinary Missionary Month from September 19-22 in Trinidad, is the following: **“Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world”**.

This theme emphasizes that being sent on mission is a call that comes with baptism and is for all the baptized. In 2018 Pope Francis said: “In Christ, our life is a mission! We are mission, because we are God’s love poured out, God’s holiness created in his own image. The missionary dimension of our Baptism thus becomes a witness of holiness that bestows life and beauty on our world” (Pope Francis, Address to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, June 1, 2018).

Pope Francis also wrote in his encyclical **“Evangelii Gaudium”**:

“Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to

our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people's hearts".

(Evangelii Gaudium, 265)

The importance of baptism

The faithful baptized laypersons, by virtue of the common experience of love in marriage and family life, must be placed at the center of pastoral concerns related to evangelization, liturgical life, catechetical formation, and witness of love within the community. In 2016 Pope Francis wrote:

“Looking at the People of God is remembering that we all enter the Church as lay people. The first sacrament, which seals our identity forever, and of which we should always be proud, is baptism. Through baptism and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the faithful are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. Our first and fundamental consecration is rooted in our baptism. No one has been baptized a priest or a bishop. They baptized us as lay people and it is the indelible sign that no one can ever erase.”

(Letter to Cardinal Ouellet, March 19, 2016)

Our temptation to reduce the Church to its clerical element of bishops, priests and religious, often identifying the call to pastoral ministry only with them, suggests the need for a radical renewal of the way we understand what it means to live out our baptism and our faith.

In baptism we all received the Holy Spirit. In the sacrament of confirmation, this gift has been powerfully reaffirmed and we were reminded of the mission to which God calls all of us, namely to make Christ known to all peoples as the One in whom we find love, eternal life and a new hope. We are called to share and to witness to our love of Christ as the living Son of God, whose words, miraculous healings, death and resurrection give us a vision of a renewed creation. In 2015 Pope Francis said: “The mission does not respond, in the first place, to human initiatives; the principal agent of mission is the Holy Spirit, this project is His. The Church is servant of the mission. It is not the Church that makes the mission, but the mission that makes the Church”.

(Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, December 3, 2015).

“Missio ad gentes” in our modern Caribbean societies

In their Pastoral Letter, our Caribbean Bishops wrote:

“Communication for the Church is ultimately about building communion with God and unity among peoples. We are to do this through words of hope and deeds of love, that is, through our very way of life. Thus communication must lie at the heart of the Church community”.

(“Being Church in a Digital Milieu”, 6)

“Communication is essentially giving our self in love and the building of communion for the sake of the Church’s mission in our Caribbean region... we need a conversion towards a new spirit, a new approach, a new way of being Church in the digital milieu... we need to recognize that

these rapid changes in technology are also altering the ways that people—our parishioners, and especially the youth—are gathering and processing information, expressing themselves, and creating relationships. This change provides us with a challenge as Church: how to place this technology at the service of evangelization”.

(“Being Church in a Digital Milieu”, 10)

Changes through the new technologies

The Bishops want all of us to reflect deeply on the enormous changes that the rapid developments in digital technology, the social media and the internet, have brought throughout the world and also in our Caribbean societies. This reality profoundly affects what ways of evangelizing will be fruitful and what ways that used to be effective, no longer work if we want to bring people into a meaningful relationship with Christ and to awaken in them an interest for the Gospel. And so the Bishops wrote:

“New technology [brings about] a change in human consciousness, change in the description of our self and change in political organization. Change in technology today is not just a change in the way we get out information or in the way we communicate with each other. It is more profoundly a change in society and in the way we understand the world and the description we give to ourselves—our identity”.

(“Being Church in a Digital Milieu”, 23)

Missionary outreach to our young people: awareness of the digital milieu

The Bishops call us to become more aware that in our changing societies, we will need new ways of being

Church, ways that will inspire our modern Caribbean people, especially our young people, to be part of the Church. We need new ways of organizing our Church life that speak to them and call them to faith and commitment to Christ. In this we must first try to understand the digital technology and the social media, and then learn ever more to use them in order to reach those who do not yet know Christ and the many who know Christ only in a formal way but not intimately.

Our world has changed so dramatically over the past 25 years! The enormous changes in technology, have brought a whole other way in which societies are relating and engaging with each other. Our young people think differently from adults, because the rapid changes in technology have also changed our young people. Their mode of interacting with each other, with society and with reality is different as a result of the impact of technology in their lives.

As we continuously hear Christ speak to us: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News", we must realize that our biggest challenge for evangelization today is to bring the Good News, and to bring Christ, to young people. This means that we must urgently learn a different way of listening to our young people. Our challenge is to bring the wealth of the Gospel to a generation that experiences meaning in a totally different environment. We must want to reach our young people where they are at, learn to speak their language, keeping it simple, understand how their world and their way of learning feels, and so to find ways of communicating with them that is part of their world. Today, more than ever, the Church needs to re-imagine: how can we communicate faith, how can we speak to the hearts and minds, to the passions and

believes of our people, especially our young people?

Seeking ways to strengthen the missionary zeal of our Catholic community

All of this starts with awakening within our Catholics an active missionary zeal. Many do not have this missionary zeal and do not as yet feel any drive to share their Catholic faith with others around them or to witness to Christ to young people. For many Catholics that is something that is the task of bishops, priests, deacons and religious. Having their children baptized and seeing to it that they do their First Communion and Confirmation, seems more than enough for many Catholics. However, the “*missio ad gentes*” is part of our Christian vocation at Baptism, when Christ looked at us and made us His own for the rest of our lives, to love us, to speak to us in His Word, to strengthen us spiritually through the divine grace He gives us in the sacraments, but He also sent us at Baptism to live in such a way that the values of His Gospel can change the world and turn it into a world of solidarity, goodness and hope.

The challenge of our personal authenticity

Our Caribbean Bishops remind us finally of the necessity of what we call in our Christian tradition “conversion”. That is becoming aware that we fall short of what God asks of us in many areas in our lives, in many parts of our mentality, our way of looking at other people, our way of doing business or trade, what we do or neglect to do in our relations with our spouse, or our children or our parents, or those around us. If our efforts to evangelize and to witness to Christ are to be fruitful, we must grow in personal authenticity. That is what Jesus’ call to conversion is all about.

The Bishops state:

“Those who navigate the digital milieu, value authenticity highly. Traditional understanding of authority is called into question. This generation wants to keep it real. They want the real deal. They want our words and teaching to match up with our witness and lifestyles. As Pope Paul VI has said: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”(Evangelii Nuntiandi #41, 1975).

(*“Being Church in a Digital Milieu”*, 27)

Therefore if we want to be fruitful in reaching the hearts of our young people, of adults who have drifted away from a meaningful relation with Christ and the Church, or if we hope to inspire those who do not know Christ at all to grow to believe in Him, three steps will be essential for all of us:

“the three steps of which any pastoral and evangelizing pastoral communications plan has to be made, are: (1) prayer, (2) being filled with the Holy Spirit, and (3) speaking the Word of God boldly. Pastoral and evangelizing communication starts with prayer because it is God’s communication. It further must be filled with his Spirit, which brings us the courage to proclaim like the timid apostles on Pentecost, whom the Spirit changed into courageous presenters of his word”.

(*“Being Church in a Digital Milieu”*, 30)

A call to action

So let us respond generously to the call that resounds from the theme: *“Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world”*. Let us preserve

that sense of gratitude for all that knowing Christ has brought to our lives, that sense of gratitude for the many ways in which prayer and the grace of the sacraments have enriched our lives. Let us think creatively of ways in which we can give back! Let us live our Baptism, becoming more and more a strong Catholic community that is active and compassionate, a community of men and women in solidarity with the less fortunate in so many beautiful ways, a community that lives the love that Christ speaks of. Let us embrace our young people and listen to them, converse meaningfully with them, open to learning what has to be learned if we are to share with them that same relationship with Christ that is the foundation of our lives. God calls us all to action, each in his or her own way. Let us respond generously!

