

**29<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year (Year C)**  
**(Exodus 17:8-13 / Luke 18:1-8)**  
**20.10.2013**

*Mission Sunday – Prayer*

Today is Mission Sunday. This is a good opportunity for us as Church to reflect anew on our missionary vocation.

However the danger for us is to immediately envisage our missionary vocation as a calling to convert others, to bring them something they are lacking. The point I would like to make today is that we need to be evangelised, our hearts and our land have become a land of mission.

Almost 40 years ago, Pope Paul VI declared: “The Church is an evangeliser, but she begins by being evangelised herself. (...) She has a constant need of being evangelised if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel (...), in order to evangelise the world with credibility.” (*Evangelii...*, n°15)

I think that it is not presumptuous to say that, if the Catholic Church wishes to evangelise with credibility society in the North and in the South of Ireland, she badly needs to be re-evangelised first.

According to Bl. John Paul II, the “challenge of *the new evangelisation* consists not so much in baptising new converts as in enabling those already baptised to be converted to Christ and his Gospel.” (*Ecclesia in Europa*, n°47)

The challenge is huge here in our country because it entails a real conversion of our hearts, and some very concrete changes in the way we act as Church, in the way we relate to one another in our Christian communities. We have to rethink what it means to be a priest, a lay man or woman and what it means to be Church in a changing and challenging society.

We would need more than one homily in order to be able to deal with all these questions. However our Gospel reading invites us to focus our attention on one very important aspect of our Christian faith: prayer.

Is it necessary to say yet again how prayer is vital for us? As fish cannot live without water, Christians cannot live without prayer. For Pope Francis, we should pray “as though our very life depends on it” (20.05.2013). He goes on to warn us that our prayers should not be “polite prayers, but prayers from the heart”, “brave prayers like that of Abraham who was struggling with the Lord to save the city” (Id.).

Clearly we are not talking here about “saying prayers” but about praying. To pray does not mean to think about God in contrast to thinking about other things, or to spend time with God instead of spending time with other people. The danger is to remove God from our daily life and to hold him in a little pious niche. To pray is to be in personal relationship with God, to think and to live in his presence. To pray is not a performance, it is an encounter, a loving encounter. Too often we transform our times of prayer into exchanges of courtesy during which we just read beautiful prayers written by other people to a God who is far away in the sky.

What would we say of a lover who would only ever speak to his or her beloved in using words which were written by somebody else?

Sometimes, it may be nice and uplifting to read prayers written by inspired authors but ultimately God wants to meet with you and me personally, he longs to dialogue with you and me, not somebody else. As poor and inadequate as our words may be, they matter to God because he loves us and because the words we use reveal something of who we are in truth.

Our prayer should be rooted in an intimate and loving relationship with God and should permeate our whole lives. And yet prayer is not only a meeting between an individual and God. When we consider the prayer life of a Christian, there are two facets which we must hold together: first, as we have already said, prayer is about our personal relationship with God and second, we are never alone in prayer, we always pray as part of the Church, as a member of the Body of Christ.

Prayer and community go together. When the community of believers is first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, it is seen as a community gathered together in prayer (Ac 1:14). With the whole Christian tradition, we believe that “there is a special excellence in the prayer of the community. Christ himself has said: ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst’ (Mt 18:20).” (GILH n°9)

This is particularly true of our Eucharistic celebrations. Unfortunately sometimes we may give the impression that we come to Church on Sundays as individuals. It happens that some people read their prayer books during the whole celebration, giving the impression that all that matters for them is their communion to the Sacrament. For many of us there is a need to make a healthy transition from a me-alone-with-God model of prayer to a sense of not being separate from the men and women who surround us.

The Sunday Eucharist is not an act of private devotion where we come to receive the consecrated host. It is an opportunity for us to be strengthened as Church, as brothers and sisters. With our diversity, with our differences, because we listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church (Cf. Ap 2:7), we are made one and so we can reflect more perfectly the richness and life of our God.

During the World Youth Day in Brazil, Pope Francis explained to the young people that by praying, “we train ourselves ‘to get in shape’, so that we can face every situation in life undaunted, bearing witness to our faith” (Vigil, 27.07.2013, n°2).

If we wish to be missionaries in our land and bear witness to our faith in our families and communities, we have to revisit our prayer life and to allow God’s grace to challenge and encourage us in our efforts to maintain an honest and life-living relationship with the Lord and with one another.