

MARYKNOLL CENTENNIAL MASS

Homily

October 7, 2011

Bishop Ricardo Ramírez, C.S.B.

Thank you for the honor and privilege of preaching on the momentous occasion of the closing of your centenary celebration.

I was invited many years ago by one of your Maryknollers, Fr. Walter Winrich, before I was a bishop and while I was working as a missionary at our Basilian Fathers Missions in Mexico, to assist him at his mission in Mérida, Yucatán. I was used to the pleasant cool climate of Central Mexico, and the humidity and heat of Yucatán was unbearable. The nights were the worst – I had a choice to either sleep in a hammock or in a bed. Neither worked; the bed was full of bedbugs and in the hammock, I simply could not get the right curl of my body to get comfortable. I was glad to get back to the comfort of my bed back at the Basilian mission in Puebla. That was the extent of sharing Maryknoll missionary life. I couldn't cut it!

Among the richest pearls in the treasure chest of the Church are her missionaries. “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!’” (Is. 52:7).

The hundred years of Maryknoll are a cause for the entire United States Church to rejoice and be glad. Your history and legacy is a tribute to the faith of the Catholics of this country. Today I join the immense number who salute the Maryknoll Fathers and I am proud to be a member of the National Conference of Bishops (They went by a different name then.) which 100 years ago gave their *benepiacitum* to the Society. The bishops recognized that the founders of Maryknoll, those noble, holy visionary and heroic men

were gripped by the desire to evangelize and who desired nothing more than to be sent to proclaim the mystery of Jesus.

The call of missionaries, their privileged function in the Church and in the world, is rooted in the very identity of the Church and the reason for its existence: **TO ANNOUNCE TO ALL THE WORLD THE LOVE OF GOD.** The missionary activity of the Church is what gives the Church its very identity.

All of us here owe our presence to the evangelizing mission and we can trace our faith back to the preaching of the apostles—indeed back to the appearance in the world of the Person of Jesus Christ himself. He is the first missionary, the first of the many who have been sent.

I learned long ago that God is a perfect gentleman: he always knocks before he enters. He invites and gives us the freedom to open the doors of our hearts.

“As the Father has sent, me so I send you. (Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn. 20:21). The Father sent him to bring us the invitation to eat with God. Isn't this the beautiful image in today's readings? “I invite you to come and eat.”

**“On this mountain the LORD of hosts
will provide for all peoples
A feast of rich food and choice wines,
juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.**

**On this mountain he will destroy
the veil that veils all peoples,
The web that is woven over all nations;**

he will destroy death forever.

**The Lord GOD will wipe away
the tears from all faces;
The reproach of his people he will remove
from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken.**

**On that day it will be said:
"Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!
This is the LORD for whom we looked;
let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"(Is. 25: 6-9)**

Yes, we can now behold the God, “for whom we looked to save us!”

And, would you believe, he was looking for us from all eternity! Salvation is nothing less than the blessed encounter between the God who searches for us and those who search for him and long to see his face. And the encounter is at a great sumptuous feast!

Everyone can grasp the image of the festive meal in the prophet Isaiah and in the Gospel. I remember as a child, my grandfather brought into grandma’s kitchen lots of vegetables from his garden; my grandmother cooked a big dinner with the vegetables and a bit of meat. As we gathered around the table to eat that nice meal, my grandfather exclaimed, “¡Hijos, estamos en la Gloria!” (“Children, we are in heaven!”)

In Las Cruces I befriended a family with small children. I knew they were going to a pizza place to celebrate the birthday of one of the kids. I wanted to treat them with dessert at my home. On the way out of the pizza parlor, their dad told them, “Now we’re going to the bishop’s for strawberry shortcake.” The youngest of the children shouted, “That’s my kind of bishop!” When the world hears the good news of Jesus and the promised fiesta in heaven: “That’s my kind of God!”

Missioners invite others to the banquet of love, the banquet of forgiveness, the banquet of justice and peace, mainly through their witness. And there is to supposed to be excitement in the way we invite; we do it with without words. Pope Paul VI wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

“Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? This is the witness of the missionary; these are the questions they provoke in the remote places where they are sent. There power and something compelling in their presence, in their sharing and in their witness of solidarity.

Whether by this witness or by the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, the evangelizer invites people to hope in the promises made by God and through the preaching of God’s love for us and of our love for God made manifest in our love for others. The preaching and living out the message of love necessarily leads people to the reality of the Eucharist and the promise it brings.

True missionaries join those who struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life and in the shadows of death: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, and injustices of every kind.

As we proclaim the Gospel, we encourage one another to do good and to commit ourselves to justice, reconciliation and peace.

Pope Benedict, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, writes that “God’s word inspires men and women to build relationships based on rectitude and justice, and testifies to the great value in God’s eyes of every effort to create a more just and more liveable world.” He reminds us that a commitment to justice and to changing our world is an essential element of evangelization.

MARY: No one associated with Maryknoll can forget Mary. It's in your name! In the *Magnificat* sings the praises of the Lord. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the word of God; the word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God.

For 100 years Maryknollers have taught all of us how to act as a people "sent" to proclaim the Good News. Because of our baptism we all called to be, as the VI General Conference of Latin American Bishops says, not only disciples, but also missionaries. Pope Benedict's Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, repeats this teaching:

No believer in Christ can feel dispensed from this responsibility which comes from belonging to the Body of Christ. A consciousness of this must be revived in every family, parish, community, association and ecclesial movement. The Church, as a mystery of communion, is thus entirely missionary, and everyone, according to his or her proper state in life, is called to give an incisive contribution to the proclamation of Christ.