An Extraordinary Month

Pope Francis has set October 2019 as an Extraordinary Missionary Month to foster greater awareness of *missio ad gentes* and to animate the missionary transformation of Church life and pastoral activity.

A 100th Anniversary

Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922), the “missionary pope,” wrote the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, in 1919. Pope Francis wants the Church to celebrate the 100th anniversary of this foundational mission document.

In 1919, in the wake of a tragic global conflict that he himself called a “useless slaughter,” the Pope recognized the need for a more evangelical approach to missionary work in the world, so that it would be purified of any colonial overtones and kept far away from the nationalistic and expansionistic aims that had proved so disastrous.

Pope Francis goes on to quote and comment on Pope Benedict’s prophetic insight into the centrality of mission for the Church; a Church that just survived the rigors of World War I and was forty years away from Vatican II.

“The Church of God is universal; she is not alien to any people,” he wrote, firmly calling for the rejection of any form of particular interest, inasmuch as the proclamation and the love of the Lord Jesus, spread by holiness of one’s life and good works, are the sole purpose of missionary activity. Benedict XV thus laid special emphasis on the *missio ad agentes*, employing the concepts and language of the time, in an effort to revive, particularly among the clergy, a sense of duty towards the missions.

The Holy Father outlined the rationale for this celebration of the 100th anniversary to Cardinal Fernando Filoni, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, in a letter dated October 22, 2017, the Memorial of St. John Paul II and World Mission Sunday. The complete text of Pope Francis’s letter is published in this Mission Update and is available on USCMA’s website.

Continued on the next page...
A Kairos Moment

Could the Extraordinary Missionary Month be a Kairos moment for the Church? Perhaps the Holy Father is asking us to look to the past, to how mission has changed over the last 100 years, so we have the courage and creativity to imagine the next 100 years of mission. One thing is certain, mission is central to the life and future of the Church. Missionaries, and the members of USCMA, can help create a Kairos moment by prayerful and critical reflection on the scope, nature, and methodology of mission.


In an attempt to capture the all-embracing dynamic of mission in a one-line definition, one can say that mission is proclaiming, serving, and witnessing to God’s reign of love, salvation, and justice.

Pope Francis, in *The Joy of the Gospel* (Evangelii Gaudium), provides his own definition of mission – a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people – that captures the simplicity and purity of mission’s nature. Jesus was sent by the Father to love humanity and, in turn, sends us to do the same.

And we have failed – which is okay. This is not to say that sin is acceptable. Rather, it is to say that sin is inevitable. The methodology of mission always falls short of the inexhaustible love of God poured out in and through Christ Jesus – who suffered, died, and was buried. Our passion for Jesus and for his people is expressed through our cultural identity, heavily laden with assumptions and prejudices. Pope Benedict XV knew this better than most, thus the prophetic nature of his Apostolic Letter. Mission had to be purified of its “nationalistic and expansionistic aims.” This is the “happy fault” of mission. We will fail and in failing we learn something new about Jesus, about ourselves, and about others. We can learn from our mistakes. We can confess, and repent, of our sins. We can ask for, and receive, forgiveness. And through it all, by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, the earth is being renewed.

Pope Francis recognizes one Gospel, two evangelizations, and various manifestations of an accelerated global culture. The Gospel is one although it can be heard and appropriated in a thousand different ways – all of which can be affirmed, and purified, in light of the same Gospel. The two evangelizations are 1) the evangelization of people who have not heard the Gospel and the 2) evangelization of those formed in the Gospel but who have embraced a more secular worldview and no longer live their lives as if the Gospel was true and normative. This second effort is also known as the “new evangelization.” Finally, the third wave of globalization is accelerating at an alarming rate. For example, every day more and more people have a cell phone. In 2014, more people accessed the internet through a cell phone than they did through a computer. Can you imagine the implications of every adult on the planet having access to every other adult through a 4.5-ounce device that you can hold in the palm of your hand?

The Invitation

In a letter to the Superiors General of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Cardinal Filoni outlined four goals for the Extraordinary Mission Month.

1. Encounter. Mission draws its nature, its dynamism, its purpose from Jesus Christ. The missionary has a personal encounter with Jesus. This is not just any encounter – as if you met someone on the street for the first time. Nor is it an exclusive encounter – such as those enjoyed with lifelong friends, spouses, or family members. Rather, it is an encounter of the living Christ, alive in the Church in and through the Eucharist, the Word of God, and through both personal and communal prayer. Amelia Erlandson, through her year of service as a volunteer for Rostro de Cristo (Face of Christ), shares a personal experience of encountering Jesus in and through her students in this Update.

2. Witness. The Church is missionary by its very nature. Mission animated the lives of saints, martyrs, and confessors of the faith. These are the witnesses that we, as missionaries, are invited to remember and learn from during the Extraordinary Missionary Month. In this Mission Update, Julie Bourbon provides an in-depth look at the five Liberian Martyrs – the Adorers of the Blood of Christ sisters who died during the Liberian Civil War 25 years ago. We also meet Sr. Joan Chittister – through Tom Robert’s biography – who is clearly a “confessor of faith.”
3. **Formation.** There are people in the world who have not heard the Gospel. Have the Buddhists in Myanmar really “heard” the Gospel? Have the Muslims in Pakistan heard? The many peoples of China? The communists of Russia? The atheists of the Europe and America? Indeed, have the homeless in our neighborhood heard the Gospel? Have my own sons – who are caught up in video games and peer groups – heard the Gospel? What is the biblical, catechetical, spiritual and theological formation we need, as missionaries *ad gentes*? And what formation do bishops, pastors, priests, religious, and lay leaders need to renew the fervor for “the missionary transformation of the Church’s life and pastoral activity”?

4. **Charity.** The missionary work of the Church needs the personal, spiritual, and financial support of all the faithful. Some of the faithful keep the missions in their prayers and sacrifice to put a few dollars in the World Mission Sunday collection. Others actively engage their families in CRS Rice Bowl every Lent – learning about their neighbors from around the world while they “give up” lattes, candies, and chardonnay to help fund the many international programs sponsored by the Catholic Relief Service. Many of the faithful learn about the incredible work of missionaries through the Mission Cooperative Program where women and men – priests, religious, and lay missionaries – share their mission story with the faithful. Finally, a growing number of the faithful are investing their time and energy to participate in mission personally through trips, projects, and partnerships.

Jesus promised that he will be “with you always.” The more personally invested the faithful are in mission, and their parishes, the more they will encounter, and be formed and transformed, by the Risen Lord. Saint John Paul II believed that missionary activity “renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!”

**Mobilizing for Awareness and Animation**

USCMA intends to take an active role in fostering a greater awareness of *missio ad gentes* and animating the missionary transformation of Church life and pastoral activity. First, USCMA will make information about the Extraordinary Missionary Month available on its website. Second, a mobilizing for mission email will be sent to all members soliciting their ideas and suggestions. Third, staff will present to the USCMA Board of Directors recommendations on how to prepare for, promote, and celebrate the Extraordinary Missionary Month.

In 2018, USCMA will focus on expanding membership to include all organizations and individuals involved in mission, identifying and forming funding partners to help identify, recruit, animate, and form missionary disciples *ad gentes*, and cultivating parishes that desire to strengthen their missionary impulse.

“May the love for the Church’s mission, which is “a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people” grow ever stronger!” (Pope Francis).

**Together in Mission,**

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A Mission Forged in Blood and Courage

By Julie Bourbon
Photos by Donna Leuters
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It is said by the people that the Adorers of the Blood of Christ never really left Africa – even after five of their own were murdered by soldiers during the Liberian civil war – because their blood is in the soil. And so, it was in late Spring of 2017 that a homecoming of sorts took place as a small delegation of Adorers, lay associates, and students traveled to the country, renewing ties to a place that the order of women religious has always held close to its heart.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the sisters’ deaths, and events will be held in October to commemorate their lives and legacy in three locations where the Adorers have communities: Ruma, Illinois; Columbia, Pennsylvania; and Wichita, Kansas, at Newman University. The events will include prayer services, vigils, music, testimonials, and the debut of a short documentary film about the women.

The theme will be a simple one, drawn from the Book of Judges: “May your friends, oh God, be like the sun rising in all its strength.” (Judges 5:31). That the Adorers have always been a friend to the Liberian people – who most recently suffered through the devastating Ebola crisis of 2014-15, which crippled their economy yet again – has never been in doubt. But their recent visit, and news that an international group of sisters may take up a mission again in the country, has brought the potential for healing to a people who have long blamed themselves for the sisters’ deaths.

“They’ve suffered so much,” said Sr. Janet McCann ASC, U.S. regional councilor for the Adorers, who hopes the October commemoration will help people learn the fuller story of the relationship between the sisters and the Liberian people. “We lost five, and they lost thousands and thousands.”

More than Providential

The sisters – Kathleen McGuire, Agnes Mueller, Barbara Ann Muttra, and cousins Mary Joel Kolmer and Shirley Kolmer – were killed in late October 1992 as they went about their daily work, even as soldiers massed around them, even as the people they were serving were forced to flee. Theirs was a mission of education, healthcare, and hospitality, and they had no intention of abandoning it.

The facts of their deaths, which occurred before the Internet could bring news instantaneously around the globe, are known, although the exact identities of the killers are not and likely never will be. That they were soldiers under the direction of warlord Charles Taylor is clear; that the Adorers, who first established a presence in the country in 1971, do not want to re-litigate history is also clear.

“The sisters have made peace with it and are not interested in getting to the bottom of it,” said Sr. Janet.
Taylor and his army invaded Liberia in 1989. The chaos caused the Adorers to leave the country in 1990, but five women returned during a ceasefire a year later, anxious to resume their work. Their convent was located in Gardnersville, a suburb of Monrovia that soon became an epicenter of fighting. As the situation deteriorated, attempts by a West African peacekeeping force and other friends of the Adorers to evacuate the women failed. Two of the sisters were killed on October 20, on the road leading to a nearby town, as they drove a colleague home to see his family; he was also killed. The other three, and a Lebanese man who had sought shelter with the sisters, were killed October 23 outside the convent.

Word reached their mother house in Ruma, Illinois, early in the morning on Halloween. They knew the sisters were missing – they’d seen it on the television news – but confirmation of their deaths came from the provincial of the Society of African Missions (the SMA Fathers), who had long partnered with the Adorers. Confusion and uncertainty about what happened, when, and why reigned. The State Department, the U.S. embassy in Liberia, the Catholic Church, and the late Senator Paul Simon were all involved in recovering the sisters’ bodies and ultimately transporting them home for burial, which took several months.

A letter from the order’s Superior General, Sister Giuseppina Fragasso ASC, written a few months before their deaths, on Pentecost Sunday, was prescient in its depiction of their mission. It called for a renewal in their decisions to live lives “of radical love whether it brings us joy or costs us pain. Such radical love means a life poured out for all, in adoration, sharing and solidarity, perhaps to the point of bloodshed.”

Sr. Janet reflected on the letter’s closing words and the larger meaning of the lives and deaths of the women who were lost. It was “more than providential that we would receive this letter just a few months before our sisters were killed,” she said.

Much has changed in the intervening years. Liberia, under Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa’s first elected female president, has been rebuilding. Schools and clinics where the deceased sisters once worked now bear their names. The Adorers’ three separate communities of Ruma, Columbia, and Wichita are now one. The sisters are older, and fewer, but their heart for mission is still strong.

If, as Shakespeare wrote, what’s past is prologue, then it should come as no surprise that the Adorers are taking the occasion of this 25th anniversary to remember, revisit, and perhaps revive a mission and ministry that never really left them, or the Liberian people.

**Long-lost Friends**

The group that visited Liberia this past May was actually not the first to return since the murders. In 2008, three sisters visited, including Sr. Raphael Ann Drone ASC. They wanted to see, she said, “if we would still be welcome.”

Turns out, they were. “Well, we were received like long-lost friends!” she said of that visit nine years ago. “They thought we didn’t come back because we were upset they didn’t protect our sisters, but no. We’re just 20 years older and don’t have as many people.”

*Continued on the next page...*
Sr. Raphael Ann first went to Liberia in 1971, staying for 17 years. After the 2008 trip, she signed on with the SMA Fathers and some lay missionaries, serving from 2010-12, “and had a great time,” she said, training prayer leaders, tutoring children – “any kind of educating I could do.”

Hip and eye surgery then called her back to the States, but she returned in 2014 and was teaching English in the diocesan seminary only to be sent home after six months because of the Ebola outbreak. Feeling bad that she had committed to two years with the SMA Fathers but could not fulfill the promise, Sr. Raphael Ann now works as a secretary in their offices in Tenafly, New Jersey.

The most recent delegation was a chance for one last visit with a people she came to know well and to love. “When you go back, you run into people you knew when they were younger, and it’s always a thrill,” she said. At 76 and suffering with rheumatoid arthritis, Sr. Raphael Ann believes it wouldn’t make sense for her to accept another assignment in Liberia, much as she would like to. But, she said, “for the people, it’s not if, it’s when the sisters will return. They would like for us to come back.”

In a written reflection of the delegation experience, which included visits to familiar places and evening prayer and reflection, Sr. Raphael Ann called it “emotionally crowded.” She’s not sure where she will be in October at the time of the anniversaries. A member of the Ruma community, she knew all the murdered sisters, but the woman who has traveled the world and seen much says October is “so far away. I don’t like to make decisions so far away.”

Sr. Rachel Lawler ASC was also on the delegation this year. A longtime missionary in Liberia, she served for 11 years over several periods, until the civil war broke out. She’s been a sister for 67 years, and recalled teaching the women to make school uniforms on a sewing machine, and traveling to Monrovia once or twice a year to buy bolts of cloth. The women would sell the uniforms for income.

Now 86, Sr. Rachel sounds unfazed as she recollects fleeing to Ivory Coast with a group of disabled orphans in 1990, as soldiers closed in on the clinic where she was working.

“You didn’t know what the soldiers were going to do,” she said of her escape, by foot, truck, and canoe. She spent the night in a convent of Bernardine Franciscan sisters, and soldiers broke in, stealing the children’s toys and making off with or smashing all of the medicine in the health clinic. “So it was kind of frightening,” she said, in a mastery of understatement.

She was encouraged to go back after that by one of the sisters, Sr. Shirley, but thought it too unsafe and refused to return. Sr. Shirley would be among those killed.

Sr. Rachel was amazed at the schools and clinics she saw in Liberia this Spring, marveling at the maternity clinics, especially. “This time when we went over there, everything was very peaceful,” she said. With the passage of so many years, Sr. Rachel couldn’t always be sure who was greeting her during her visit. “There were people there that remembered me. I didn’t recognize them until they told me who they were. They were little children when I was there!”

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Planting Seeds

Two lay associates of the Adorers took part in the trip, bringing yet another perspective. Donna Luetters, who lives in Wichita, had been attending Mass at the Adorers’ convent and expressed an interest in making more of a spiritual connection to them. That was five years ago. As an associate, she joins the sisters for prayers, retreats, meals, and work. Last Fall, the sisters invited her to accompany them on the delegation to Liberia.

Luetters was, by her own admission, reluctant to go and declined the first time she was asked. Although she’d done a mission trip to Haiti and found the experience to be extremely enriching, she still had doubts about going to Africa. But then, she said, when told “you would represent us well, I thought, I don’t really have any reason not to go!”

She began reading up on the history of the women who died in Liberia, as well as a recent biography of Johnson Sirleaf, as she searched for purpose in being selected to make the journey.

“I knew it was more of a pilgrimage than a trip or a vacation,” she said earnestly. “But I wanted to go to Liberia with the same kind of mindset that they [the sisters] did, that there was a reason you go, and what was that reason?”

Luetters recounted being told more than once that the sisters could never leave Liberia, “because their blood was shed in the soil and it can never be removed.” She recalled visiting schools and clinics, and an enormous market in Monrovia that was dark and dirty and labyrinthine – “the belly of the beast,” she called it. She saw women selling produce and crafts at crossroads and children in uniform waving as they ran past on their way to school, dogs following close behind.

She saw signs of progress, such as cinderblock houses with gaping windows for airflow and stores selling glass to put in those empty windows. She also saw iron doors for sale, she said, “because of the crime rate.”

As she reflects on the experience, and prepares for the possibility of giving a testimonial at the commemoration in October, she thinks about what her mentor in the Adorers told her. “You don’t always see the results of the seeds that you plant,” she said, hitting, finally, upon the reason for the trip. “The whole concept of planting seeds was the theme I went to Liberia with, and I’m just now seeing it.”

Juanita Mason-Fegley, formerly an Adorer herself, has been an associate for 30 years, making her one of the first women to join the order in that capacity. She, too, was unsure about taking part in the delegation when first approached about it. She had known the late Sr. Shirley and was leery of possible violence in the country, as well as the Ebola virus.

But when she was asked again, after praying on it, she reconsidered. “I decided this was something God wanted me to do, because He had offered me the opportunity a second time,” she said, noting she had never previously traveled to Africa. “In my mind, I had the National Geographic picture of Africa, and it was very different.”

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Now 74, Mason-Fegley spoke of leaving home at age 13 and traveling from Chicago to Pennsylvania to attend an Adorers’ high school and ultimately take vows. As an only child, it was difficult for her mother to let her go; Mason-Fegley ultimately left the order to care for her mother as she was dying. She lives on the grounds of the mini motherhouse in Columbia, Pennsylvania.

“The [Liberians] were very friendly and welcoming, and outstanding in their acceptance of our presence,” she said. She, too, was told about the Adorers’ blood being in the soil, and of the people’s worry that they had not been forgiven for the deaths. “That touched me very deeply,” she said, “that they felt we held them responsible.”

**Fearless**

“I can’t even explain the amount of joy they had when seeing us,” said Erin Schueller, a rising sophomore at Newman University in Wichita. A recipient of a community leadership scholarship founded in the name of the five sisters, she was moved by the reception the delegation received in Liberia. “It was just the fact that the sisters hadn’t been there in so long, and those five sisters had such a big impact on their country. They thought if sisters come back, they’ll help do more.”

Schueller, 18, didn’t know the Adorers before attending Newman, but it didn’t take long for her to embrace them. A nursing major and a certified nursing assistant, she has worked at the Caritas Center, the Adorers’ retirement home, since last fall.

She read a series of 16 profiles of ASC sisters, including one on the Five Martyrs of Charity – the sisters killed in Liberia – to better acquaint herself with their lives, then applied for the delegation. She and Khoi Nguyen, another nursing major, were selected for the trip.

“I wanted to be inspired,” said Nguyen, 19, of her reasons for going. Her fondest memories of the experience were the young people they encountered – boys who wanted to become priests, children who longed to be pilots and study in America. “The children I met were wonderful. … full of hope and aspirations.”

Ramona Chebli wasn’t much more than a girl herself when she fled Liberia in 1993. She had made temporary vows with the Adorers and was living in the convent in Gardnersville when the war broke out. She knew all of the sisters who were killed.

“I’ll never forget that day,” they got the news, said Chebli, now 48, married, a mother, and a nurse for a Catholic healthcare system. She lived at the time with the Adorers in St. Louis, the city she still calls home. “It was horrible. Horrible.”

Although she left the order when she was in her late 20s, she has remained close to the sisters, visiting the Ruma community over the summer, and making plans to attend the commemoration in October. Asked about the possibility of the sisters returning to Liberia, she was conflicted.

Chebli herself has not visited her home country since leaving nearly 25 years ago, although she has not forgotten her Liberian heritage. “I am an American citizen and I’m proud to call myself Liberian,” she said, but she wondered whether she would want the sisters to go back.

Reestablishing a Presence?

Sr. Therese Wetta joined the delegation for part of the trip, although she was there on a separate mission, as part of a discernment process on reestablishing a formal presence of Adorers in Liberia. Were that to come to fruition, it would be an international effort, she said, probably including sisters from Tanzania, India, and North and South America.

Sr. Therese spent a year previously in Tanzania and spoke of the many needs now in Liberia, some much greater than what the sisters could address.

“My impressions are it is a country still recovering from both war and Ebola,” she said. “It is a country that has much potential but needs infrastructure. And by infrastructure, I mean roads, electricity and potable water. And it needs economic development.”

What the sisters could provide might be teaching, healthcare, and social work. “There are a thousand needs,” she said. “It’s not a matter of whether there is a need for us to do, it’s a matter of identifying where we can make a contribution.”

She marveled at how much the sisters were able to accomplish in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, given how little infrastructure existed then. “I gained a whole new admiration because I gained a whole new understanding for how challenging life must have been for them when they went,” she said. “There was no electricity, the roads were worse than they are now. I just realized how challenging life must have been for them, and yet from what I’ve heard and learned, they loved it there and they loved the people there. And I understand why they loved the people.”

Sr. Therese would like to be part of any future in the country. “The return of the Adorers to Liberia will be an important part of the healing process for the people,” she said.

More than anything else, it seems, the recent delegation was meant to reconnect partners in mission, partners whose hearts have long been in solidarity, though time and distance kept them apart.

“The death of the five sisters isn’t something that holds us back from coming back,” Sr. Therese said. “We want to be among you as we were before.”

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“May Mary Most Holy, whom we contemplate standing beside the Cross, invoke the Spirit with us and for us, so that, as in the Pentecost miracle, each of us as well as the entire Congregation may be renewed in our decision for a life of radical love whether it brings us joy or costs us pain. Such radical love means a life poured out for all, in adoration, sharing and solidarity, perhaps to the point of bloodshed. Thus we will be witnesses of the Blood of Jesus, sign of obedience and fidelity for the coming of God’s Reign.”

— Excerpt from a letter from Sister Giuseppina Fragasso, ASC Superior General, June 7, 1992 (Pentecost Sunday)
Learning to Encounter

By Amelia Erlandson

I spent the last 13 months living in Ecuador, volunteering through the program Rostro de Cristo, or Face of Christ. Rostro de Cristo is a postgraduate volunteer program that teaches and encourages its volunteers to try and live out the message that Pope Francis teaches. I, along with five other volunteers, lived in an invasion community called Arbolito, a sector of Duran located just outside of Ecuador’s largest city Guayaquil. My fellow volunteers and I worked in different areas including health, education, and women’s aid. My time in Ecuador was a year where I could attempt to truly encounter our neighbors and create the culture of friendship that Pope Francis talks about by living out Rostro’s five pillars: Service, Community, Spirituality, Simplicity, and Hospitality. Through all the work I did and everything I experienced this year, I think what was most impactful and beautiful was trying to live a life that is about being in relationship with others; a service of being rather than doing.

Invasion communities are towns where people move in and “squat” on a large area of vacant land (owned by a large land owner or the government). Land traffickers find these plots of land, and then go out looking for people who are looking to move. People move to invasion communities from the farming areas or from the big cities for several reasons, the main being access to education and health care or the affordability of living in one of these communities. All are under the impression that they are legally buying the land, and that they will be able to start a better life with more stability and opportunity. They realize only after they move to start their new lives that they do not actually own the land they paid for. Since these communities are not legal, the people who live in them often do not have access to basic human rights like running water, security or electricity.

Before I started with Rostro, I usually would think of service as building houses or handing out food, but this experience changed my definition of service a little bit. Though we worked all year and tried to be as helpful as possible, I think the most impactful aspect of what we did was just being with people.

I worked two part-time jobs throughout this year. In the morning, I worked at a bilingual foundation school called Nuevo Mundo. This school offered a quality education to children from invasion communities at a reduced price, and is an amazing program that I am proud to have taken part in. Nuevo Mundo is a foundation that is actively working towards breaking the cycle of poverty, and I learned so much about the importance of education through this job. They already had teachers, I was just there to assist in the classes and teach their English classes twice a week. I spent most of my time tying shoes, chasing kids around, and laughing with the children over silly little things. I was lucky to be able to spend time with so many joyful children, in such a wonderful school.

My second service site was an after-school program in an invasion community called Una Sola Fuerza. With this opportunity, I got to see the difference between the morning preschool and what a public school looked like. I worked with eight-year old children who knew less numbers than some of the four year-old children from Nuevo Mundo. Most of the children I worked with did not know how to read, but they did know how to copy. They could copy from the board their homework for the day, and then they would show me what they had to do but could not tell me what it said. Working at this after school program felt like treading water more than actually moving forward in many ways.
Towards the end of the year I was feeling really frustrated with my work at the after-school program because I was realizing that some of my students were just not progressing. One of the eight-year-old girls, Kimberly, did not know her numbers at the beginning of the year. I remember pointing to the number 8, and she had no idea what it was called at the beginning of my year. Towards the end, I worked with her and she was still hesitant about the numbers. And while she could barely identify 1-10, her homework had her working on numbers in the thousands. It broke my heart that I could not help her more, and that she would continue to be so far behind.

In that same week, I went to visit the home of another student, Moises. I was talking to Moises’ mom about how he was doing at school, and she told me that every day when she drops him off he is crying, and when she picks him up he is still crying. This surprised me because Moises had not cried at our program since the first week of the new school year. She told me that at school he does not feel loved or cared for. He likes going to the after-school program more because he knows that the volunteers care for him and there is a space for him to play and have fun too.

I realized then that my impact was maybe a different one than I had been anticipating. I wanted to be like a Nuevo Mundo, where I could educate to the point of making real change in the future of these kids and their educational careers. Realistically though, I am one person who was only there for one year. The change that I was creating was less of an educational one than an emotional change. I helped to create a place where my students could come and feel safe and loved. And hopefully this environment would help them learn, gain confidence, or just feel safe for a few hours a day.

Now that this year has ended, I realize that I gained so much more from this experience than I gave. I learned an infinite amount about what it means to love unconditionally from all the children I worked with in both my service sites. They loved me when I could barely speak their language. They would play with me and sit patiently with me while I tried to piece together sentences and connect with them. They loved me when I had bad days and lacked the patience that I was always shown. They showed me how to encounter my neighbor, and how to look at everyone with friendship and love. I will forever be grateful for the beautiful experience that was this year and I will carry my students and the people of Ecuador in my heart as I go forward.

About the Author:

Amelia Erlandson is a 23 year-old from Fort Wayne, Indiana. She attended the University of Dayton, and graduated in the spring of 2016 with a degree in English.

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I can’t remember the first time I became aware of Sr. Joan Chittister’s voice in the Church, but today I can’t imagine the Church without it. Tom Roberts’s book, Joan Chittister: Her Journey from Certainty to Faith, is more than a biographical sketch of an Erie Benedictine nun’s rise to prominence, but a deep dive into Chittister’s life story that carries not only her story, but the story of her community, women religious in the U.S. and the universal Church. Reading Roberts’s telling of Chittister’s life, much of it in her own words, is like starting at the center of funnel and spiraling upward and outward with each circle of her life simultaneously expanding and gathering in some of life’s deepest questions and challenges of the Church.

We begin the journey with the young Joan’s turbulent early years as an only child faced with an unstable home life. She sees, hears, and feels her parents struggle with their woundedness which puts her in touch with her inner voice and draws her close to God. Chittister describes her reality this way, “Every day wasn’t tragic. The real problem in my life was that every day could turn into a tragedy, and you never knew which day it would be.” (p.25). She likens this time of her life as a kind of Passion, a time of bearing a cross, a time of forming and nurturing a compassionate heart that would one day embrace the whole world, especially the vulnerable world. It is a time that she would come to understand that, “The cross always has another side to it. You go through the cross and on the other side is where you are supposed to be” (p.26). And come through on the other side she did.

Roberts, in laying this foundation of Joan’s childhood, helps us grasp the deep roots of faith which sustain Joan in her later life when she is faced with systemic turbulences and challenges in religious life and the Church. We can see how these early exterior circumstances of her life form Joan’s spirituality and leadership.

We then delve into Joan’s middle years – a time in which every aspect of personal, community, and societal life is touched by the hands of change which by some is an experience of liberation and for others, chaos. In the midst of it all stands Joan, as Roberts portrays, more flexible than rigid in her leadership of the Erie Benedictines and national organizations like the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. We can see her comfort with gray zones rather than seeing through white or black lenses. Her non-dualistic spirituality flourishes during a period when dualisms are clashing at every turn.

Roberts is clear to point out that Joan’s capacity for holding diverse viewpoints is not for lack of her own opinions, inner tensions, and decisive action when needed. What he does make clear is that Joan had an understanding at a deep level of what was unfolding all around her and the need to hold change and ambiguity is such a way as to allow the cracks to open even further so that light could pour through. She says, “I have a theory that when organizations are in a state of renewal, when structures are in flux, ideas should be stable, and when ideas are in flux, structures should be stable.” (p.85). The beauty of Joan, as Roberts unveils, is not her knowledge of organizational change, but rather her gifts of faith, love, and hope that lead not only her fellow Benedictines, but a much wider circle of God’s people when faced with both structural and ideological change. She does this by inviting each person with whom she encounters to realize and offer their own truths and talents at the service of God’s mission.
Of her own mission at the service of God’s mission, we see Joan step into an even more expansive reality when the journey moves into her later years. The world has come to know Joan for and through her speaking, writing, and listening. What Roberts helps us see in telling her journey from certainty to faith, is that Joan, sustained by the love of relationships of family, friends, community and God, has tread not on the edge of life’s waters, but plunged into the depths of the Well and from there can speak of both darkness and light, thirst and quenching, death and resurrection.

Why is it important to tell a story like Joan’s? As the title suggests, moving from certainty to faith is the journey of the interior spiritual life that has implications for how we live in the world. To have witnesses like Joan who have traveled the journey and continue to do so with such grace and integrity, gives hope to us all as we grapple with our mission at the service of God’s mission. She offers, “I have come to realize over the years that church is not a place, but a process….The Church needs to grow in its understanding of the Gospel, and I need to grow in my understanding of myself as I strive to live it. It is, in other words, a journey of conversion for both of us.” (p.236). We need not fear of getting it right, only committing to participate.

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Books for review

Pope Francis, *Morning Homilies IV*, Orbis Books, 2017


Heup Young Kim, *A Theology of Dao*, Orbis Books, 2017

Books for review


Diarmuid O’Murchu, Incarnation: A New Evolutionary Threshold, Orbis Books, 2017


Letter of the Holy Father on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter Maximum Illud

To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Fernando Filoni
Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

On 30 November 2019, we will celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter Maximum Illud, with which Pope Benedict XV sought to give new impetus to the missionary task of proclaiming the Gospel. In 1919, in the wake of a tragic global conflict that he himself called a “useless slaughter,”[1] the Pope recognized the need for a more evangelical approach to missionary work in the world, so that it would be purified of any colonial overtones and kept far away from the nationalistic and expansionistic aims that had proved so disastrous. “The Church of God is universal; she is not alien to any people,”[2] he wrote, firmly calling for the rejection of any form of particular interest, inasmuch as the proclamation and the love of the Lord Jesus, spread by holiness of one’s life and good works, are the sole purpose of missionary activity. Benedict XV thus laid special emphasis on the missio ad gentes, employing the concepts and language of the time, in an effort to revive, particularly among the clergy, a sense of duty towards the missions.

That duty is a response to Jesus’ perennial command to “go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). Obeying this mandate of the Lord is not an option for the Church: in the words of the Second Vatican Council, it is her “essential task,”[3] for the Church is “missionary by nature.”[4] “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity; she exists in order to evangelize.”[5] The Council went on to say that, if the Church is to remain faithful to herself and to preach Jesus crucified and risen for all, the living and merciful Saviour, then “prompted by the Holy Spirit, she must walk the same path Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice.”[6] In this way, she will effectively proclaim the Lord, “model of that redeemed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire.”[7]

What Pope Benedict XV so greatly desired almost a century ago, and the Council reiterated some fifty years ago, remains timely. Even now, as in the past, “the Church, sent by Christ to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all men and nations, is aware that there still remains an enormous missionary task for her to accomplish.”[8] In this regard, Saint John Paul II noted that “the mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion,” and indeed, “an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.”[9] As a result, in words that I would now draw once more to everyone’s attention, Saint John Paul exhorted the Church to undertake a “renewed missionary commitment”, in the conviction that missionary activity “renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others! It is in commitment to the Church’s universal
mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support.”

In my Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, drawing from the proceedings of the Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which met to reflect on the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith, I once more set this urgent summons before the whole Church. There I wrote, “John Paul II asked us to recognize that ‘there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel’ to those who are far from Christ, ‘because this is the first task of the Church.’ Indeed, ‘today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church’ and ‘the missionary task must remain foremost.’ What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity.”

I am convinced that this challenge remains as urgent as ever. “[It] has a programmatic significance and important consequences. I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion that cannot leave things as they presently are. ‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission.’” Let us not fear to undertake, with trust in God and great courage, “a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II told the Bishops of Oceania, ‘All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion.’”

The Apostolic Letter Maximum Illud called for transcending national boundaries and bearing witness, with prophetic spirit and evangelical boldness, to God’s saving will through the Church’s universal mission. May the approaching centenary of that Letter serve as an incentive to combat the recurring temptation lurking beneath every form of ecclesial introversion, self-referential retreat into comfort zones, pastoral pessimism and sterile nostalgia for the past. Instead, may we be open to the joyful newness of the Gospel. In these, our troubled times, rent by the tragedies of war and menaced by the baneful tendency to accentuate differences and to incite conflict, may the Good News that in Jesus forgiveness triumphs over sin, life defeats death and love conquers fear, be proclaimed to the world with renewed fervour, and instil trust and hope in everyone.

In the light of this, accepting the proposal of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I hereby call for an Extraordinary Missionary Month to be celebrated in October 2019, with the aim of fostering an increased awareness of the missio ad gentes and taking up again with renewed fervour the missionary transformation of the Church’s life and pastoral activity. The Missionary Month of October 2018 can serve as a good preparation for this celebration by enabling all the faithful to take to heart the proclamation of the Gospel and to help their communities grow in missionary and evangelizing zeal. May the love for the Church’s mission, which is “a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people,” grow ever stronger!

I entrust you, venerable Brother, the Congregation which you head, and the Pontifical Missionary Societies 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. May the Extraordinary Mis-
Missionary Month prove an intense and fruitful occasion of grace, and promote initiatives and above all prayer, the soul of all missionary activity. May it likewise advance the preaching of the Gospel, biblical and theological reflection on the Church’s mission, works of Christian charity, and practical works of cooperation and solidarity between Churches, so that missionary zeal may revive and never be wanting among us.[15]

From the Vatican, 22 October 2017

XXIX Sunday of Ordinary Time
Memorial of Saint John Paul II
World Mission Sunday

Franciscus

[4] Ibid., 2: AAS 58 (1966), 948.

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Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand of precious wood. When it was finished, all who saw it were astounded. They said it must be the work of spirits.

The Prince of Lu said to the master carver:
“What is your secret?”
Khing replied: “I am only a workman: I have no secret. There is only this:

When I began to think about the work you commanded
I guarded my spirit,
I did not expend it on trifles, that were not to the point.
I fasted in order to set my heart at rest.

After three days fasting,
I had forgotten gain and success.
After five days, I had forgotten praise or criticism.
After seven days I had forgotten my body
With all its limbs.

“By this time all thought of your Highness and of the court had faded away.
All that might distract me from the work had vanished.
I was collected in the single thought of the bell stand.

“Then I went to the forest
To see the trees in their own natural state.
When the right tree appeared before my eyes, the bell stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt.

All I had to do was to put forth my hand and begin.
“If I had not met this particular tree
There would have been no bell stand at all.
“What happened?

My own collected thought encountered the hidden potential in the wood; From this live encounter came the work which you ascribe to the spirits.”
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