

THE CHURCH IS MISSIONARY BY NATURE

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Homily of Saturday, 4th Week of Easter, May 21, 2011
Acts 13:44-52, Ps. 97, John 14:7-14

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, “Show us the Father”?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?” (John 14:9-10).

Jesus Christ is the revelation of the Father to the world. He alone is the Son of God incarnate in the world for our salvation. God has no other Son, only him; and he became incarnate only in Palestine in the time of King Herod. This is the basis of the universalism of Christianity. It is the basis of the Church’s mission and of her missionary character. This is the reason why the Church is missionary by nature. She is to bring Christ to the world.

The Church’s mission is God’s will and Jesus’ will, as we see in the scriptures (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19-20). God did not become incarnate like this only for the Jews. The apostles made this discover in the first days of the Church (Acts 10:45; 11:18). The Church only *began* with the Jews, but this salvation was destined for the entire world, for Christ is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles,” as Simeon said (Luke 2:32). Paul and Barnabas today quote Isaiah’s prophecy to show that the salvation of God in Jesus Christ is meant for the Gentiles: “I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 13:47; Isa. 49:6). The apostles quoted this in reference to their decision to turn to the Gentiles and preach Christ to them, since the Jews had rejected their message. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

It is the mission of the Church today as well to preach Christ and God’s salvation in him to the nations and peoples who still do not believe in him. This mission is Christ’s will, for in sending his apostles to the ends of the earth, he said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). He sends them out because he wants everyone to have the opportunity of seeing the Father in seeing Jesus Christ in the preaching and in the sacraments of the Eucharist and of penance (Matt. 18:18; John 20:23). All will thus have the opportunity to invoke the merits of his vicarious death on the cross, in which Christ absorbed for us the righteous wrath of God against our sins by suffering it himself in order to free us from this suffering and alienation from God. On the

cross, God himself, in the person of his Son, suffered our just and necessary punishment for our sins to free us from our sins and from their punishment.

Christ wanted this good news to be announced to all the nations. It is the mission of the Church to do so. This is why we preach Christ to those who do not yet know him. Christ himself sent us to do this, and we have not been mistaken in doing so. He wants all to know this good news and to have the opportunity to believe in him as their Savior and to know for certain that they are forgiven and saved. And Christ wants to use his apostles and their successors to do this work of evangelization. He wants to work through us, through his missionaries, whom he sends to the nations—*ad gentes*—to preach this salvation of God which has appeared in the world in Jesus Christ. This is why the Church is missionary by its very nature, and this is its mission, to bring Christ to the world.

If we see Jesus sacramentalized in eucharistic form as bread and wine, which we eat and drink with faith, we are intimately united to him, and in being united to him, we are united to the Father, for Christ is in the Father, and the Father in him (John 14:10). We bring these mysteries and sacraments and this proclamation of salvation to the nations when we fulfill our missionary vocation as Christians and successors of the apostles.