

WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH AFTER VATICAN II?

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Homily of Monday, 5th Week of Easter, May 23, 2011
Acts 14:5-18, Ps. 113, John 14:21-26

“Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him’” (John 14:22-23).

This is the great promise of Jesus, that if we keep his word and do his will, he will dwell within us together with his Father. This is the indwelling of the Trinity in the heart of those who believe in Christ and love him by doing his will. Christ wanted this to be known to all, so that he might indwell in all who will believe in him and do his will. He therefore sent his apostles to the ends of the earth to announce this good news (Mark 16:15). Missionaries today continue this mission.

It is rather curious, though, that now-a-days we hear some people saying that since Vatican II we missionaries are no longer much interested in preaching the gospel to those who do not believe in Christ nor do we want to convert or baptize them, for, according to these people, the Council said that God is already with these nonbelievers in Christ and that they can be saved without converting to Christ. Therefore now, they say, our missionary interest is more in interreligious dialogue and works of charity.

Yet what the Council actually says is: “Though God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him (Heb. 11:6), yet a necessity lies upon the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 9:16), and at the same time a sacred duty, to preach the gospel. Hence missionary activity today as always retains its power and necessity” (*Ad gentes, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church* 1.7).

Thus although we recognize, without understanding how, that God can lead people who have never heard about Christ by means that God alone knows to the faith in him which is necessary for salvation, we nevertheless have, as has always been the case, the obligation of preaching Christ to the nations, so that they may come to have, even in this present life, the fullness of the salvation that God has prepared for them and has revealed to man. We missionaries are

therefore like St. Paul, who said, "If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16).

Therefore what missionaries did before the Council in preaching Christ to Hindus and Buddhists to convert and baptize them was correct, and should continue today and in the future, to bring them to the fullness of God's salvation.

At the same time, it is good to have an interest in the good which we encounter in other religions, such as the admirable asceticism that we see in Hindu *sadhus* (see my article on "Hindu Asceticism" on my website under OTHER WITINGS/asceticism). At a time when many Christians have forgotten the importance of asceticism, they can remind and inspire us anew concerning this important dimension of our faith in Christ.

Jesus says today that he wants to dwell in those who believe in him and love him by keeping his word and doing his will. And what is his will? What is his commandment? His first and most important commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:30). This means to love him completely, with our whole being, without any division of heart, with an undivided heart in our love for him. We are to reserve our heart for him. To do this, we have to live ascetically, eating very simply, avoiding delicacies, and worldly entertainments and diversions, which divide the heart. In this, we can learn much from Hindu *sadhus*, while at the same time trying to share with them the fullness of the revelation that Jesus Christ has brought into the world.