

**Homily on the Mission at the Celebration of the
Salvatorian Missionary Year of the British Province
April 15th 2015**

St. Joseph's Parish, Wealdstone

Dear Friends,

The mission, and specially our Salvatorian mission, is related to Jesus Christ, to His relationship to our Father, to His message and His works, to His culture and religious tradition, to His Apostles, His followers and to us, the baptized.

There are a lot of ways to speak about mission, about our mission as Salvatorians, our mission as Christians. But our time here is limited. Therefore I only want to speak about that what was really important for our Saviour and about what can be a challenge for us. I choose for the Gospel of Luke 4,14-22. It is the Mission Statement of our Saviour, giving us all the elements to be good (Salvatorian) missionaries.

Jesus' mission is founded on His personal search for meaning in life. Does life consist of just working, eating, sleeping, getting married and enjoying? Is there anything else? The mission of our Saviour starts with a preparatory phase. Jesus develops inside the specific religious history of His people. At that time, those who were looking for a greater meaning in life went to listen to John the Baptist. He preached a life of conversion and fundamental changes leading to a more disciplined life. We soon see how Jesus withdraws to the

desert for a certain time. It's a time for recollection and discernment on the values of life. That means that Jesus exposes Himself to external and internal change factors in His life. Jesus' preparatory phase consists of discerning and meeting. Discerning the values to be proclaimed and lived. Meeting the One who gave Him life and His love freely. Without that discernment and meeting, His mission can't be possible. Jesus begins His mission with a very clear and discerned vision.

Here we have a first conclusion: I can't be a real missionary without a preparation and vision.

Jesus lives and acts inside a culture and a religious tradition. In His time, there isn't much difference between culture and religion. Diversification among the different cultures and religions appears much later. In many parts of the world, this differentiation hasn't taken place yet. This reality derives today in many cultural clashes. It makes people's coexistence much more difficult. Jesus belongs to the Jewish religion and culture. Although Galilean Jews aren't much appreciated by the more prepared and stricter Jews of Jerusalem, they also respect and put in practice several very clear rules. On Saturday, men meet in the synagogue. Jesus also goes to the synagogue with them. In the weekly service, they pray and sing, and some verses of the Law (the Torah) are read, followed by another of the prophets. After the readings, a commentary is added. Any adult present can ask for the privilege of reading and commenting. The reading takes place while standing, the commentary while sitting. Jesus follows

the ritual and reads the verses of Isaiah 61, 1-2. It's very interesting that Jesus chooses a text from a prophet and not from the Law. His message gives priority to the prophetic over the law, without erasing it. God's message is a message of love and hope, not a scolding or moralizing one. Many have read those verses but their meaning always remained half veiled. Now, the One has come who can give it true meaning. The text is fulfilled and that's why it becomes meaningful. "Today," in the presence of a privileged group, Jesus doesn't choose a casual text of the Scriptures. He reads His text, the text that gives meaning to His life, to His mission. Besides, the text Jesus chooses is absolutely liberating.

The second conclusion is that our mission always is inserted into a culture and religious tradition. A missionary has to know and to respect the culture and religious tradition from the people he wants to serve. His service has to be prophetic.

In order to clarify and proclaim His mission, Jesus uses a text of the prophet Isaiah, very well known by His environment. He reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." And He proceeds to interpret these words: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus isn't a politician who launches a campaign in His favour. He isn't looking for power or tribute or, even less, property. He isn't acting on His account, He is not placing Himself at the centre. He rather sees Himself as a

person sent by God, His Father. The Father is the subject. Jesus is just obeying His Father. He does everything out of love for His Father, who always shows Him His love for Him and for mankind. It's the Father who anointed Him, as He anointed the kings, to bring the good news. What is this good news? It's a message about God's unconditional love for every person, and special for those who are not taken into account by society

Now, who are the recipients chosen to live the Father's freely given love? The poor, and not just those living in material poverty. Every kind of poverty draws God's attention and therefore His Son's. There are the captives, but not just those who are confined in jail. There are many forms of captivity. They are chosen to experience God's love. There's the blind, those who have problems to see the truth, the real freedom, to see the love towards the others and oneself. There's the oppressed, who are victims of those oppressing them because they want to have others under their power. All those can count on God's privileged love and therefore on Jesus'. The great on earth have problems accepting God's love. On the contrary, the small welcome it with open arms. That's why Jesus can say that He comes to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. When the most excluded ones can participate again in the community life, there is good reason to celebrate this joy. Again, Jesus is not looking for His but for the happiness of all people, especially of those who don't count.

The third conclusion consists in the fact that we have to decide which are the privileged of our mission: the powerful society-people or those who don't count in our society.

There is a double reaction among His listeners. The spontaneous reaction is of approval and admiration. But when they start to think and to compare, they ask how it's possible that a simple worker's son can show such clear ideas. Through His intimate relationship to God, Jesus is enlightened by God's Spirit. There is no need to study like the Law specialists, the openness to receive, live and proclaim God's freely given love is enough.

Our mission must be founded on a firm relationship between ourselves and the Father. This is the foundation of Christ's mission. We don't pursue our own agenda but to be the Father's instrument towards mankind. We might lack of many things but if this is missing, everything is missing.

Here we have a fourth conclusion: The mission is not ours. The really subject of the mission is our Father. We are his instruments. But He needs our service.

God loves the human being. He loves His creation. His relationship with everyone and everything is ultimately a love relationship. What does this mean? God wants to show through His Son how He wants to relate to the human being. Jesus is someone who looks after mankind. He pays attention to what they need. In His relationship to the human being, He listens. What is the word, the question that the other poses? Jesus listens before answering. Besides, Jesus makes the effort of feeling the other, in order to see how He can help

the person. Which are the problems the other bears inside? Just like God, Jesus tries to free mankind, returning them their freedom. Jesus wants to grant deep happiness to mankind despite their failures and suffering. God is merciful; He always forgives when mankind asks Him for forgiveness.

The fifth conclusion consists in the task that our mission has to be one of respect for the being different of the others. Therefore we have to have the capacity of listening and discerning, reading in community, the concrete signs of the times. And we need the capacity of building up communities of mercy and forgiveness.

Dear friends, you might wonder why I made such a long introduction about Jesus' proclamation of His mission. The answer is simple. According to our Founder, a true vision of our mission as Salvatorians must be based on the life of our Saviour, which is nothing else but Christ's deep and shared experience of God's unreserved love for His children.

Therefore we may conclude that:

A true Salvatorian missionary doesn't look out for himself but tries to be an instrument of God's love for others.

A true Salvatorian missionary puts himself at the service of all men and women, without any exception. We are at the service of all kinds of people and of all cultures.

A true Salvatorian missionary knows how to see, listen, feel others to share their life situation.

A true Salvatorian missionary doesn't grow tired of walking with those who open up to God's love.

A true Salvatorian missionary respects the culture, customs,

traditions and religiosity of others. He doesn't seek to prevail or to impose his culture and traditions.

A true Salvatorian missionary is a man of God and cultivates his relationship with God in prayer.

A true Salvatorian missionary models his own life on the life of Jesus and the message of the Holy Scripture.

A true Salvatorian missionary loves His Church. He suffers when she suffers. He rejoices when she rejoices.

A true Salvatorian missionary lives his mission on the basis of his baptism and confirmation.

A true Salvatorian missionary lives his mission fully supported by God's Spirit, as promised by Jesus Christ.

A true Salvatorian missionary turns to the pagans as a light for the nations, spreading the word of the Lord through the whole countryside.

A true Salvatorian missionary grows strong in the Lord, with the strength of His power.

Ultimately, a true Salvatorian missionary lives his being a Christian as a never-ending mission.

I see here a lot of confreres who were and are those real missionaries, some already having a beautiful golden age. Many thanks for your inspiring example. May God bless you. I would like to close with the words of our Founder. I found them in the booklet of our General Superior, Fr. Milton. By the way, I hope every one of our members took the time, not only to read it, but also to meditate it, making it our flesh and blood.

“Always keep your holy vocation before your eyes,
everywhere and in all things.

That vocation is to form Christ in yourselves and your
neighbour.

Love one another (...)

Be all-inclusive in your love for peoples
of whatever race or nation (...)

Cherish the spirit of prayer...

The Society’s growth should be
of the greatest concern to you.

Promote its good name by good example...

Help the missions by prayer and sacrifices
and by obtaining help for them.

Continue to do good,
working for the glory of God
and the salvation of souls
with all your strength.

Move ahead. Go forward!

(Letter of Fr. Jordan to the members on Passion Sunday 1913)

Dear confreres I repeat the words of our Founder:

‘Move ahead. Go forward! Move ahead. Go forward!’

Amen

Michel Coppin sds