

Sermon on the 4th Sunday after Pentecost – For Germany

A Faithful Parish and the Missions

Fr. Caleb Armour

Before this week, I had never stepped foot on this land. Before this week, I had never stepped foot in this church. Before this day I had never set eyes upon you, the faithful of this parish... and yet it is right here, in this land, in this church, in you, the faithful, that my vocation to the Holy Priesthood took fruit.

When a soldier goes to war, it is not only himself who is thanked for his service but his family also, because they helped raise him, they enabled him to serve, and they offered a sacrifice of their own when he was on the battlefield. And are the faithful not the family of the priest? Of the fisher of men? Do they not raise him? Do they not enable him to serve? Do they not sacrifice when he is in the mission field? The battlefield of God? The role you played in my vocation, in my parish, in the Church of God and in the fishing of men, this role may have been unknown to you, but it was not insignificant...and your role continues, not only in my life, but in the life of every other mission.

During these difficult times of the Church, it can often seem like we labour and labour for nothing. Like St. Peter, we seem to cast out our nets all night and catch nothing. We are having to fish with broken nets, trying to mend them the best we can and work with what we have, and yet it doesn't seem good enough. The evil around us seems to grow and grow whilst the faith seems to get less and less. But this is when we must persevere, this is when we must trust in Christ and obey Him. It is only at His command that our nets will be filled.... the only time we are certain to catch nothing, the only time we are certain to bear no fruit in our lives is when we give up and stop casting our nets into the sea. And in the boat of the good and

faithful parish there are always three nets, and the degree to which these are unbroken, the degree to which these are kept intact will determine how many fish you catch, or more importantly, the quality of fish you catch. These three nets are Prayer, Sacrifice, and Service.

The faithful parish by their constant and humble prayer can spread their net far and wide... and do not limit their prayers to themselves and to their own parish, but pray for all the Catholics in the world, especially for those people who have not been as blessed by God as themselves and their own parish. Now, this can be done explicitly by offering your daily prayers for the missions, by offering a special rosary for priestly and religious vocations, by offering your Holy Communion in union with Christ for the spread of His Church. But it can also be done so intimately by praying for your parish priest... who labours every day for the salvation of souls, for the conversion of sinners...and as like so many priests in these days...your priest is also a missionary priest... a missionary priest who is supported by your prayers, whose efforts are strengthened by your prayers. When Father Heyne came to Scotland 13 years ago, we only had about 10 people, and we only had Mass every two months on a Friday evening and a Saturday Morning in our home. Now, we have at least 25 communions on a Sunday, young families with children...and we have a priest and a Sister in the convent. None of this is possible without the grace of Almighty God... a grace which I truly believe has been granted because of so many faithful and fervent prayers, no more so, than the prayers of the parish which were sent alongside their priest.

The second net a faithful parish should always seek to have at their disposal is the net of sacrifice and of penance. 'We have laboured all night, and have taken nothing, but at thy word I will let down the net.' Our will...that is what St. Peter teaches us to sacrifice. That is what Christ is telling us in today's Gospel. If you want to gain souls for Christ, if you want your actions, your prayers, your penances to bear fruit... then you need to make the greatest

sacrifice... give Me your will. And this is what a faithful parish does. A faithful parish understands that they may have to be without their priest, their shepherd for many days... they understand that sometimes when they feel they need him most, he is needed more by another, perhaps by an apparent stranger in a different land. But they also know that it is the Will of God, and they accept it as such. They sacrifice their desire to have the priest all to themselves because they love God, they love Christ... and to share their priest, to make this sacrifice with love, is to share Christ. Satan, though, will seek to tempt the parish of a mission priest... He will seek to turn them on the priest, on the missions he serves. He might say, 'He is always away, he is never around, he is always helping them and never me.' And why does he do this, why does Satan try to destroy the missionary zeal of the Catholic parish... because the last thing he wants is to see Christ and His Church spread throughout the world. So, we must conquer Satan and his temptations, we must conquer the temptation to think of ourselves, to seek only ourselves and our little corner of the world, we must seek to be missionaries, and to spread Christ by offering our sacrifices for all the missions in the world. Offer up your daily trials, your daily annoyances, your Friday abstinence... deny yourself dessert one day, deny yourself a beer another day... whatever you enjoy doing, no matter how small, deny yourself it for the missions. It was the sacrifices and the penances of this parish that supported our mission in Scotland and my priestly vocation... but the effort doesn't stop now. We must continue to take care of our net of sacrifice, mend any holes in it, limit any excesses of the world, and make your net most suitable for catching souls.

The third net of the faithful Catholic parish is the net of service... service to the church, to the priest, and to our fellow Catholics. It is our duty to support the Church, but this does not only mean financially. In fact, the faithful parish will be an example of service by how much they give of their time, of their affection... by how much they foster virtue in their lives in order

to better serve God and His Church. If everyone gives all of themselves to the service of the Church as far as they can... then God will reward you. Your parish will flourish... that does not necessarily mean growth... Growth is not what is the measure of being pleasing to God... no, the measure is sanctity... and the parish who serves God and His Church with their whole heart will be pleasing to Him. Although, of course, growth often follows because the better example we serve and the more we pray and sacrifice, the more grace will abound in our souls and in those of others. So how can you be of service to your church? To a distant mission you have never seen or even heard of? Firstly, by being present. By attending Sunday Mass, and by attending daily Mass if possible. By attending special devotions such as first Friday and first Saturday.... Secondly, you can also be of service by offering your help to the priest. Does the priest need help with any work in the church that needs to be done? Does the priest need help with servers for Mass? Does the priest need more Mass stipends? What about your fellow parishioners? Do they need help? Perhaps they have a work project at home that they need help with. Perhaps they simply need a friend, or someone to talk to. What service do we provide? What example of charity, of patience, of humility do we give if we simply come to Mass, look at no one, talk to no one and leave, waiting to come back again the next Sunday? There is so much good that goes undone, so many kind words go unsaid, not because we do not have the prompting from God to do so, but because when it does come, we allow our own discomfort, our own awkwardness, our own wants to get in the way. However, the faithful parish will put these to the side. The faithful parish will think not as individuals serving themselves but as one whole working together for one another, for Christ. And this parish, no matter how small their acts of service have cast their net far and wide.... So far indeed as to reach Scotland... but again, it is not time to stop. But to keep mending the nets and to keep casting them out.

These three nets are exemplified in the Life of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, the cloistered Patron of Missions. And how could this little saint who never stepped foot on missionary land be the patron saint of missions? Because she lived a life of prayer, of sacrifice, of service for the intention of the missions, for the intention of winning souls for God, for the intentions of his priests. And so, the faithful parish should seek the intercession of this beautiful patroness of the missions and seek to follow her example.

My ordination to the priesthood is a beautiful illustration of the Mystical body of Christ. We are from different countries, we speak a different language, we have different cultures... and before today we were for all intents and purposes strangers to one another... and yet we have always been united... united in Christ, united in Charity. When one member suffers, we all share in that suffering. When one member succeeds, we all share in that success. So today is the time for you to share in the success of this ordination, to share in the Church's success and glory on this occasion. Today is a day to thank Almighty God for His many gifts to this parish, and to all the missions her prayers, her sacrifices, and her service have helped. But to also pray for the grace to continue to mend our nets, to make them stronger, and to cast them far and wide for Christ. So let us pray with the Church today in the Secret of the Mass, 'Be appeased, we Beseech You, O Lord, by accepting our offerings, and in Your kindness make even our rebellious wills turn to you.' Please pray for me and I for you. And may St. Thérèse of Lisieux, patroness of the Missions ... pray for us.