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**Lenten Recollection for Missionaries in Mongolia**

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## **Prayer and mission**

The more time passes, the more I try to live out with truth, love, and fruitfulness the mission that the Lord entrusts me, and the more I understand and experience that the link between mission and prayer is absolutely indispensable. We see this in Jesus himself, we see this in the Apostles and all the saints.

For this reason, it seems very important to me to meditate on this theme, especially in the season of Lent, in which we are all called to return to the truth and purity of our vocation as baptized Christians and of the mission that the Lord entrusts to each of us.

In the profound fifth chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, which on this topic should be quoted in its entirety, Pope Francis underlines strongly the importance and fruitfulness of uniting prayer and mission. He says: “Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence” (EG 259). Then he adds, picking up the Benedictine *ora et labora*: “Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work. [...] Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out” (262).

### **The mission and prayer of Jesus**

A few weeks ago, the Sunday Gospel was Mark 1:29–39. A Gospel that shows how, from the very beginning of the public mission of Jesus Christ, prayer was already present. Let us read this passage:

“And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon’s mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” And he said to them, “Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.” So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.” (Mk 1:29–39)

The first reading of that same Sunday was Job 7:1–4, 6–7. In this reading Job expresses mankind’s whole outcry when one does not see salvation coming to light on the horizon.

“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle  
and come to their end without hope.  
Remember that my life is a breath.” (Job 7:6–7)

When everything is going fine, these words seem to be exaggerated, full of pessimism and depression. But whoever finds themselves faced with grave illnesses, or serious relationship problems with loved ones, or with economic and work problems that compromise family peace; or also those who find themselves immersed in terrible situations like the people who today suffer terrible and absurd wars – such a person understands that the cry of Job is full of truth, is the truest human cry.

How does God answer this cry?

The Gospel we have read describes this response. God’s response to Job’s cry, which rises up from all mankind, from every heart, from every situation in which man feels abandoned and hopeless, is *the coming of Jesus Christ*. The coming of the Son of God which is *his mission*, that which the Father entrusts to him and that Jesus comes to fulfill to the point of death and resurrection.

For this reason it is important to consider this Gospel scene attentively. Jesus has just called his first disciples and he is always with them. They all go to the house of Simon and Andrew to rest and have lunch. The mother-in-law of Peter is the first sick person whom Jesus heals. The news spreads fast in the city of Capernaum, which at the time had fewer than 1500 inhabitants, so that by sunset all the sick people of the village of fishermen were carried before the house of Simon and Andrew. Jesus heals them all and drives out the demons.

When everyone withdraws, finally Jesus and the disciples can go to rest. Peter and the others wake at the call of the rooster, and they notice that Jesus is not in the house. He went out to pray, when it was still dark, perhaps taking a lighted torch with him, and going away from the sleeping village. For the disciples, Jesus’s withdrawing to go pray is something new that they have not yet discovered. Then they will understand that he was always doing it.

When they find him, they tell him, almost like a rebuke: “Everyone is looking for you!” (Mk 1:37). Of course, at the first light of dawn, a small group of sick and possessed people had returned to the house, who the evening before had not manage to come, or maybe also poor and sick people from the area around Capernaum who had been notified during the night.

Jesus, however, invites the disciples to expand their listening to the cry of Job which arises from all mankind and not only from their neighbors and acquaintances of Capernaum: “Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.’ So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.” (Mk 1:38–39).

Jesus defines his life right away as an evangelizing mission, as a mission of preaching, of announcing the Gospel and of freeing from the evil one, from sicknesses, from all that makes human life prisoner to sin and death, incapable of good, of joy, of love.

We notice that Jesus says this as he comes out of prayer, as if in prayer his coming on a mission into the world had found its origin, its point of departure, and hence its initial impulse.

One might think that after praying for a few hours, denying himself sleep, one would be tired and want to go home to rest, to warm back up, to have breakfast. Instead, Jesus comes out of prayer with an energy: "Let us go elsewhere!" Perhaps he did not even go back to the house of Peter and Andrew, where he would have had to busy himself with a small crowd of sick and possessed people sitting at the entrance. They departed immediately, just as they were. Such was the force and missionary passion with which Jesus came out of prayer!

### **The involvement of the disciples**

Following Jesus in this evangelical and apostolic life, what happens in the disciples? It happens that, with time, their lives becomes more and more involved in the mission of Christ.

Jesus goes everywhere, wants to reach everyone, for the simple reason that he expresses with the words: "For this purpose have I come!" (Mk 1:38). Jesus is ruled by the awareness that he has been sent by the Father to respond in words and deeds to the cry for salvation that rises from mankind, from every heart, from every situation, from every epoch of history. From the moment that Jesus wakes up in the night, his thought is: "I am here to fulfill the mission of salvation willed by my merciful Father." And for this reason the first task of Christ's day is to reawaken this awareness by speaking about it heart to heart with the Father. The salvific will of the Father, for Jesus, is certainly not a law to apply, or a commandment: it is the gift of love that the Father and the Son share with each other in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Christ's prayer in the silence of the night expresses his desire that the day that is dawning, the persons he will meet, the joys and sorrows that the crowds will present to him, can all find in Him the response that God saves, enlightens, and comforts.

But, when Jesus says, "For this purpose have I come!" he does not leave Capernaum on his own. He says, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also." (Mk 1:38). He asks the disciples to leave with Him, to follow him. He will be the one preaching, but the disciples must accompany him. Thus begins a patient education, in which the disciples can enter step-by-step, as if by assimilation, into the mission the Son receives from the Father. And, remaining with him, the disciples will assimilate not only the words and deeds of Christ's mission: they will assimilate his prayer too, his life of constantly "coming out from" his communion with the Father to go save mankind.

In the Gospel one gets the impression that for a long time the disciples were involved in Jesus's mission, but only later on in his prayer. It's like Jesus let them run after his missionary effort, always panting for breath, without ever managing to keep up with the dedication of Jesus, who gave himself to the crowds by preaching for hours and hours, who healed hundreds of sick people, who cast out hundreds of demons, who forgot to eat, to sleep, to rest. Jesus had warned them, like when someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go," and Jesus answered: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:57-58).

The disciples felt drawn to follow him, they sought to be right behind him, to do as He did, to serve his mission. But from when, at times, they become impatient, nervous, for example when they try to drive away the children who want Jesus's embrace, or when they tell Jesus to dismiss the crowds so they can go get themselves something to eat (cf. Mk 6:35-36), you realize that for them to follow Christ's mission is a draining experience, which tires them out, which exhausts them, which brings them to the limit of their physical and psychic energies. Sometimes even their relationships with each other show signs of this stress, on account of which they start to follow Jesus as if it were a race, a competition over who runs after the Lord better, and hence is the strongest, the most capable, the greatest. Sometimes the stress makes them nervous even with Jesus himself, like when they wake him up while the ship is in the storm and Jesus is sleeping peacefully, and they tell him in a rebuking tone: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mk 4:38).

So, they run after Jesus, they accompany him in his mission, but with a growing feeling of being at the end of their strength, under an ever-sadder strain, exasperated by everyone and everything. Which of us has not had, or is not having, this experience, whatever the vocation or mission is that has been entrusted to us?

### **"Lord, teach us to pray"**

We notice that Jesus certainly continued to go off to pray, during the night, in the desert, and probably they also saw him praying also when they were walking silently from one village to another. But they focused on the Master's mission, as if they did not notice his prayer, or as if they thought that it was a private matter for Jesus, that did not concern them and that they should not disturb. They did not understand the link between Jesus's mission and his prayer.

But one day, one of them, maybe John or Andrew, seeing Jesus returning from solitary prayer for the umpteenth time, suddenly says: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples" (Lk 11:1).

Jesus could have answered: "Finally! It was about time that you asked me!" Instead, with complete calm and serenity, like one does with kids to whom one is teaching the first prayers, Jesus answers: "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us

our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Lk 11:2–4)

The disciple asked Jesus to teach them to pray “as John taught his disciples.” Perhaps the disciple who asked to learn how to pray was John or Andrew, who, before following Jesus after his Baptism, were disciples of the Baptist. But the prayer they learned from John was not like what they learned from Jesus. This disciple, however, at least intuited that one cannot follow a prophet, a master, a man of God, without receive from him a gift deeper and more intimate than a teaching or an ethic of behavior. He intuited that, from a man of God, the true disciple must first of all learn about his relationship with God.

Christ’s prayer is not like John the Baptist’s, it is a mystery much more profound than any human prayer, even that of great prophets. Jesus, however, is moved by finally receiving this request, arising from the freedom of a disciple. A request that he did not force, that he patiently awaited, like a spring that patiently awaits the one who is thirsty, and, up until the thirsty one arrives, sees wasted the living water that springs from it.

Christ will one day solemnly shout it out in the Temple: “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”’ (Jn 7:37–38).

How much must Jesus await this thirst from his disciples? How much must he wait for this thirst to come to Him, like the disciple who finally tells him, “Teach us to pray”? And especially, how long must Christ wait before those who follow him in his mission realize that this following is not possible if, first of all and at the same time, they do not cling to his prayer?

That disciple who raised the question intuited something fundamental: that, in Jesus’s prayer, he was granted not only to approach the Heart of Jesus himself, but also to his own heart, to his heart as a poor man limping along after the Lord, seeking to keep pace with him in his mission.

In any case, that moment was a crucial moment, for the disciple as also for the other apostles. In that moment there came to be, or at least there began, a fundamental shift in the disciples’ following of Jesus, and so also in that of the whole Church. A fundamental shift concerning the mission of the disciples, of the whole Church. In that moment, the whole mission of all the disciples was as it were joined to the source, to the living spring, to the source of energy, of grace, of charity. It was like a great, dried-up river had finally realized that, to be a river, to flow, it was necessary first of all to be connected to the spring.

Of course the Apostles, like all of us afterwards, were still continually cutting themselves off from that spring, they had to go back to it, they had to reexperience a thousand times that the mission that does not graft itself into the prayer of Jesus loses all its strength, and also its nature, because then it is no longer the mission of Christ.

Without connecting itself to the source of prayer and working through by means of prayer, the mission of Christ to which we are called becomes just our mission, and hence is no longer a salvific, redemptive, Paschal mission; it is no longer a Christian mission, but is reduced to a human mission that lives on its own resources, that is always exhausting itself.

Let us note right away that this is true not only for those with a missionary vocation. It is true for every Christian vocation, is true for every baptized person. Living in a contemplative monastery is also a mission that dries up if it is not lived out in connection with Jesus's prayer.

### **Unity of prayer and mission in Jesus**

In that decisive and symbolic moment when Jesus was asked, "Teach us to pray," the disciples finally intuited – even if the full awareness could only come with Pentecost –, that in Jesus Christ there was a complete unity between prayer and mission. That which was separate in them, and often in conflict, was united in Jesus. For example, when Jesus proposed going to a desert place to rest with Him, and hence to dedicate themselves more calmly to prayer, and when they reached that place and they found the crowd that had preceded them to ask Jesus and them to get back to preaching and healing, the disciples lived this experience out as a kind of being taken away from prayer to have to dedicate themselves to the mission (cf. Mk 6:30–34). But for Jesus it was not so. Of course, Jesus did give himself times of solitude, of retreat, of prayer in the night and in the desert, but for Him they were not an alternative to the mission, nor even times in service of the mission. For Him to pray and to go preach, heal, and free from the evil one, were two aspects of the same reality. And this unity was what Jesus wanted to attract his disciples toward. Being disciples of Christ means exactly entering into the unity of prayer and mission that Jesus lives out. For this reason it is important to understand what this unity meant for Him.

We understand it especially from his response to the request, "Teach us to pray": "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come'" (Lk 11:2).

These first two petitions of the Our Father would be enough to illustrate the unity of prayer and mission that Jesus lives and to which he invites us. For Jesus everything comes from the Father and remains united to the Father. For Jesus, saying "Father" means affirming an eternal link of communion in the love of the Spirit. Everything is contained in the communion of the Son with the Father. A communion that is prayer, the supreme prayer of Jesus. And the mission of the Son and of his disciples springs from this radiant center without leaving it. Jesus is united to the Father in the communion that hallows his name, but also in consenting to the coming of his kingdom, which is the substance of every mission. The kingdom of the Father is the expansion in the world of filial communion with Him, and hence of the Son's prayer. In Christ, all this is given to us, is proposed to our free choice.

For this reason, entering into the prayer of Jesus and entering into his mission are the same thing, are the same mystery.

With a summary formula of St. Paul, one can say that prayer and mission are united by the coming of the Kingdom in which “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

St. John Paul II said at Collevaleza on November 22, 1981: “It is necessary for Him to reign’ in his cross and resurrection, it is necessary that he reign until ‘he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father...’ (1 Cor 15:24). When in fact he will reduce ‘to nothing every principality and every power and authority,’ which hold the human heart in the slavery of sin, and the world in submission to death; when “all will be subjected to him,” then the Son too will make an act of submission to Him who subjected all things to him, ‘so that God will be all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28).

Behold the definition of the kingdom, prepared ‘from the foundation of the world.’

Behold the definitive fulfillment of merciful Love: God all in all!

How many people in the world repeat every day the words, ‘thy kingdom come,’ pray conclusively ‘so that God be all in all.’”

In the prayer of the Our Father the unity of prayer and mission towards which Christ forms us is where one asks the Father for his kingdom to come. The mission is requested in the prayer, and since it is requested as grace, as event, when the Kingdom comes too, even when it comes in such a way that it involves us in its coming, making us instruments of this coming, then too the mission does not depart from prayer, because it does not depart from the relationship with the Father, from the loving dependence on the Father.

If we ask that “his kingdom come,” if we ask that “God be all in all,” God’s granting this prayer cannot be the receiving of something to carry away from the Father, but rather a letting this grace come through us.

There is no mission for us different from the Marian heart of the Son of God’s coming into the world. Mary says, “Let it be unto me according to your word!” (Lk 1:38). And Christ comes, and Christ is sent into the world, and the kingdom of God comes. Even the very first missionary trip, Mary’s hurrying to her cousin Elisabeth, does not depart from Mary’s prayer: it expands it, radiates it, together with the mission of the Son who immediately manifests himself to John the Baptist, to Elisabeth and Zechariah (cf. Lk 1:39–45).

### **Entering into Christ’s unity of prayer and mission**

There is a passage in the discourses of the Last Supper, in chapter 15 of John, in which Jesus presents this mystery of unity of prayer and mission by associating it with the gift of his friendship. It is worth the trouble of meditating on it particularly:

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” (Jn 15:12–17)

Years ago it really struck me to discover that in this passage Jesus tells us that the unity of prayer and mission we are seeking to deepen is constitutive of the disciples’ vocation. “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you” (15:16). The vocation is a gracious choice, an election. This is not true just for the Apostles, but for the vocation and mission of every baptized person. Christ chooses us and appoints us for what? Well, here the scope of the election and appointment is expressed by two phrases, introduced by two “that” or “so that” that grammatically have the same level, because both depend on “I have chosen you and appointed you.” So, these two realities for which we have been chosen and appointed by Christ are exactly mission and prayer:

- “that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide”
- “so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you”

Christ chooses us and calls us in order to bring about a fruitful mission and to be heard by the Father in all that we ask in the name of Jesus.

We must confess that we rarely think of our mission and prayer in the light of this graciousness of God, and so with faith and sure hope that truly our mission will bear fruit that abides, and that to obtain all it is truly enough to ask. Very often we reduce the mission to a task of ours that will only bear fruit if we merit it, if we work hard. And with prayer too, we think that we will be heard if we pray well, if we pray a lot. But here Jesus tells us that the Father’s listening is certain because He has chosen us and appointed us for this, we could say, with this guarantee, with this promise. But above all, even though the phrase is very clear in its structure and unity, we manage nevertheless always to disassemble it, to break it in pieces, with the result that we lose the unity between the mission that bears fruit and the prayer certainly heard that Jesus guarantees us on the most solid foundation that he Himself wants it, that He decides it, that it is his grace. His choice, he says, is only his own, does not depend on us, on merits, or qualities, that we might have.

This means that we do not truly follow Christ, we do not correspond to his election, if our vocation does not express itself in mission that bears fruit, and that bears fruit because the fruit is something we can ask for and obtain with the Son’s prayer to the Father.

Praying in the name of Jesus, of the Son of God, means praying to the Father with Him, like Him, receiving his prayer, as Jesus taught us in the Our Father.

“I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” Jesus wants there to be contemporaneity between prayer and mission, that they advance together and in continual communication, as He himself lives out his mission and his prayer.



## The friendship of Christ

But this unity has a more precise, more affective name in the passage cited: friendship, the friendship of Christ.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” (Jn 15:12–15)

We notice first of all that here too Jesus speaks of mission. Every commandment is like sending the disciples’ freedom toward a goal, toward a task to accomplish. In this case, toward the essential Christian task of loving each other as Jesus loved us, giving our life like He did. And Jesus says to the disciples that this mission has its source in his love. Not just its source but also the sea, its goal, its fulfillment.

The source and the fulfillment of the mission is the friendship of Christ, that friendship in which He loves us as the Father loves him: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” (Jn 15:9–10)

“You are my friends if you do what I command you” (Jn 15:14).

It is exactly Christ’s friendship that is for us the meeting point of prayer and mission, of communion with God that wants to expand into fraternal communion with all mankind. To be missionaries, the point is to live all this out from the starting point of friendship with Christ, basing oneself on it and abiding in it.

And this friendship is so abundant a spring, so overflowing and inexhaustible, that indeed anyone who wants to be a missionary to the furthest ends of mankind has nothing but this to cultivate. In the friendship of Christ we touch the boundaries of the world and of the history that Jesus has already loved and embraced by dying on the cross for us. From his pierced Heart rises a spring of love that immediately fills the universe and renews the face of the earth. St. John makes note of this from the beginning of the Passion, when Jesus washes the disciples’ feet and institutes the Eucharist: “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1).

In the love of Christ, everything is already fulfilled, and whoever lives in his friendship finds himself at the same time at the center and at the boundaries of the great mission of the Son of God who came to save and redeem all mankind.

Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. [...] But this conviction has to be sustained by our own constantly renewed experience of savouring Christ’s friendship and his message.” (EG 265–266)

This is all we have to cultivate in the vocation and mission of our life, amid all the trials, weaknesses, falls, and hostilities that we experience. Christ's friendship is, for the disciples, the nucleus sweet and humble, burning like fire, and fresh like living water, of every mission.

The only aberration in Christian life, in the life of the Church, is dissociation between vocation and friendship with Christ, between mission and friendship with Christ, and sometimes even between prayer and friendship with Christ.

And it is only by starting back over from this, from a prayer that goes along with Christ's friendship, that life, vocation, mission, like every community and the whole Church, are renewed, are reformed, find their charismatic and original nature.

The problem of the relationship between prayer and mission is all here. The issue is to always rekindle anew at the heart of the mission the meek and humble and radiant fire of friendship with the Lord.

And it is exactly this friendship with Jesus that is the first and really the only thing that must be sought in prayer, with prayer. The great hearing out that the Father guarantees us is that of the loving communion with the Son in which we experience the love of the Father in the breath of the Spirit.

### **Putting life and mission into prayer**

When we understand and experience that this is what Christian prayer is, we also understand that it is not enough to put a little or a lot of prayer into our life, into our mission, but that it is necessary to put our whole life and our whole mission into prayer, into the relationship with the Father in Christ, into their friendship, that is, into the Holy Spirit.

Jesus himself prayed like this, was in prayer like this. So much so that in the praying of the Psalms he recognized his own life, the mission that the Father was entrusting to him, the trials that he was living, the praise that sprang from his heart, up to the abandonment that he felt in the agony and death he underwent. We too are called to pray the Psalms like this and to have the experience that our whole life has its home, its fatherland, in the prayer that makes us live out friendship with God.

"My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net" (Ps 25:15). It seems absurd to want to walk while looking at the Lord instead of at the road. Rather, it is precisely this looking at Him that enables the journey, that frees the course of the mission. If we look only at ourselves, or at the task that is entrusted to us, without reminding ourselves to think of the friendship with Him who sends us, everything becomes a snare, everything becomes a net in which we get ourselves ever more tangled up, and we go no further, we remain stuck and sad, prisoners of ourselves, of our limits.

What freedom and effort in the mission is transmitted to us by a psalm like psalm 23!

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

One is walking, and one realizes that he is not alone, that he is accompanied by the Lord who becomes the Shepherd of the one he sends. He then has an experience of friendship with Him who fulfills every desire. Nothing is sad or dark, for He is with us. And it is the Lord himself who cultivates friendship with us: it is He who prepares the table in which his friendship defeats all enmities that undermine the heart. It is He who anoints our head with dignity and royal, priestly perfume; it is He who makes the cup of communion overflow; it is He who receives us in his house even when we are exiles or in alienating situations.

Let us imagine how this Psalm must have consoled Jesus in his mission, how these words described what He was living with the Father and what he wanted to offer and reveal to each of his disciples!

One day Jesus summarized all this with an essential word about his living out of prayer and mission in total unity: “He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (Jn 8:29).

This is the point! The issue is not uniting the practice of the mission to the practice of prayer, of doing mission to doing prayer, but of living out the whole mission while united to Him who sends us, that is, to live entirely within friendship with Christ, as Christ lived it out within his friendship with the Father.

At the moment of the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus expressed out loud this awareness and prayer, precisely so that everyone would understand that his being sent to give us life was entirely contained within his relationship of trusting communion with the Father: “Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me’” (Jn 11:41–42).

### **“Come, Lord Jesus!”**

This prayer united to mission is, deep down, the great fruit of Pentecost. Pentecost formed the Apostles and all the disciples in the unity of the prayer and mission that Jesus lived out and transmitted to the point of death on the Cross. And every time

that the Church, the communities and individual faithful people rediscover this unity, it is like Pentecost is renewed. We experience it so many times ourselves in our life, in our ministry, in our mission. Moments when we are surprised by the consoling and comforting awareness that He who sends us is with us, that he does not leave us alone, that he gives us all his friendship. Then we realize that our mission is His, it is He who is fulfilling it in us, through us, giving our life an otherwise impossible, unimaginable fruitfulness, and a deep peace, a happiness, even in the midst of the difficulties and trials of our mission.

Perhaps it is precisely this experience and awareness that we are reminded of by the last prayer of Sacred Scripture, at the end of Revelation:

“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. [...] He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.” (Rev 22:17, 20–21)

Christ’s “coming” is his mission. Asking Christ to come means asking for his mission to be completed not only in us, not only in the Church his Bride, but through us, through the Church, in the whole world.

The Spirit is united to the Bride to express this prayer. This, then, is the quintessence of the prayer of God and of man, of God in man and of man in God. There is no prayer that more corresponds to the event of our Salvation than this.

This prayer is like an Upper Room at the moment of Pentecost, when the Spirit is no longer just awaited, but is present, but when the disciples are waiting to be appointed and compelled to the mission by the coming of Jesus the Redeemer. The Church’s mission needs this constant Pentecost so that its mission not become separate from the coming of Jesus, from his presence sent by the Father.

Pope Francis, still in *Evangelii gaudium*, expresses this awareness with force and simplicity: “We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. This is why we evangelize. A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise. [...] In union with Jesus, we seek what he seeks and we love what he loves. In the end, what we are seeking is the glory of the Father; we live and act ‘for the praise of his glorious grace’ (Eph 1:6).” (EG 266–267)

The Spirit and the Bride do not cease to pray that Christ come, so that our every mission never be separated from the Bridegroom who sends us and makes it fruitful with sons and daughters of the Father who live in the brotherhood of the friendship of Christ.