

## Why Are We Missionaries? (and are you one?)

*Peoples everywhere, open the doors to Christ!* John Paul II

*The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid the supreme duty to proclaim Christ to all peoples. Missionary evangelization is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world. The definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel.* REDEMPTORIS MISSIO (On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate)

The Church is missionary by her very nature! The proclamation of the Good News is her mandate and her mission. We, who have been incorporated into the Church, because we are Catholic, because we are Christian, are both privileged and obligated to bear witness to our faith in Christ. We cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel.

MHJ is a missionary community. We are distinguished as such by the ‘special task’ to which we have been called, evangelism. The following words of Vatican Council II evidence the missionary nature of our community: *"Although the task of spreading the faith, to the best of one's ability, falls to each disciple of Christ, the Lord always calls from the number of his disciples those whom he wishes, so that they may be with him and that he may send them to preach to the nations. Accordingly, the Holy Spirit, who distributes his gifts as he wishes for the good of all, stirs up a missionary vocation in the hearts of individuals, and at the same time raises up in the Church those institutes which undertake the duty of evangelization, as their special task."*

The members of MHJ fully accept and wholly embrace our vocation to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How can we not? The love of Christ constrains us. This Gospel that we bear in our hearts ‘is the power of God that leads to salvation for all who believe.’ We understand our responsibility to proclaim that Gospel. Conversion requires faith, and faith, as Paul so eloquently tells us, comes from hearing the Gospel. “How can people believe,” he pleads, “if they have not heard? And, how can they hear if someone does not preach?” Pope John Paul II expresses it this way. *‘Preaching the Gospel requires preachers; the harvest needs laborers. The mission is carried out above all by men and women who are consecrated for life to the work of the Gospel and are prepared to go forth into the whole world to bring salvation.’* RM

I can well imagine what some of you might be thinking about now. You may have, prior to reading this, actually felt called to MHJ. You absolutely do not, however, feel called to live the remainder of your days (or any of your days) in some remote and desolate village in Uzbekistan, or in the squalor of a Congolese refugee camp, or in a frozen, isolated hamlet of northernmost China. If the thought of those situations terrifies you, you are probably not a foreign missionary; a *foreign* missionary. Your distress at the prospect of serving overseas should not be interpreted, though, as an absence of a missionary calling. Actually, quite the contrary is true. Most of our *missionary* work is needed right here at home.

The world has changed dramatically in just the past generation. Cultures and countries, once traditionally Christian, are no longer so. In fact, they have become so radically and rapidly secularized that they are not only alienated from the Gospel, they are antagonistic to it.

Western nations, the United States prominent among them, are in desperate need of evangelization. Our understanding of the role and scope of missionary activity must, therefore, reflect and respond to this tectonic shift in western society. Missionaries, of necessity, must now serve as much *ad intra* as *ad extra*. That is, not only is there a continuing need for foreign missionaries, but there also exists a pressing need for domestic missionaries, as well. In today's spiritual environment, missionaries are as necessary in Wal-Mart as they are in Waziristan; as needed in a church hall as in a Chinese hamlet.

We think that it is fitting to give the Church the last word on her missionaries and the purpose they serve. Speaking to and through her, Jesus makes plain what we are to do, but more importantly he describes who we are to be. The following excerpts taken from *Redemptoris Missio* are the prayer and the calling of MHJ. If they ignite a fire in your heart and fill you with a burning desire to be Jesus for others, you, too, are a missionary.

*Our own time demands a resurgence of the Church's missionary activity. The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing ever wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit. He is the principal agent of mission! Today all Christians, the particular churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit.*

*Missionary activity must first of all bear witness to and proclaim salvation in Christ. Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. Just as the whole economy of salvation has its center in Christ, so too all missionary activity is directed to the proclamation of his mystery. The proclamation of the Word of God has Christian conversion as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith.*

*Missionary activity demands a specific spirituality, which applies in particular to all those whom God has called to be missionaries. This spirituality is expressed first of all by a life of complete docility to the Spirit. It commits us to being molded from within by the Spirit so that we may become ever more like Christ. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, therefore, an essential characteristic of missionary spirituality is intimate communion with Christ.*

*Missionary spirituality is also marked by apostolic charity, the charity of Christ who came "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52), of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, who searches them out and offers his life for them (cf. Jn 10). Those who have the missionary spirit feel Christ's burning love for souls, and love the Church as Christ did. The missionary is urged on by "zeal for souls," a zeal inspired by Christ's own charity, which takes the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability and interest in people's problems.*

*The missionary must be a "**contemplative in action.**" a person of the Beatitudes. Before sending out the Twelve to evangelize, Jesus, in his "missionary discourse" (cf. Mt 10), teaches them the paths of mission: poverty, meekness, acceptance of suffering and persecution, the desire for justice and peace, charity--in other words, the Beatitudes, lived out in the apostolic life (cf. Mt 5:1-12)*

— Sr. Brigid O'Mahony