

Homily Notes – Mission Sunday 2026
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Imagine for a moment what the world looked like one hundred years ago. It was 1926. There was no television. No internet. No WhatsApp. International telephone calls were still extraordinary. Travelling from Southern Africa to other parts of the world took weeks rather than hours. For most people, the world beyond their own part of the world seemed very far away. Yet, in that very different world, Catholics scattered across continents were being asked to recognise something remarkable: we belong to one another. That year, Pope Pius XI established World Mission Sunday.

One hundred years later, the world has changed beyond recognition. We can speak instantly to someone on the other side of the planet. We can watch events unfolding thousands of kilometres away as they happen. The world has become much smaller. But the mission hasn't changed.

Today, from tiny rural parishes to great cathedrals, Catholics throughout the world are doing the same thing. We are gathering around the same Eucharistic table, praying for the same mission and supporting brothers and sisters whom most of us will never meet.

Pope Leo's theme for this centenary of World Mission Sunday, "One in Christ, United in Mission," reminds us of that simple truth, that regardless of where we come from, no matter the language we speak, whatever our culture or circumstances, in Christ we belong to one another.

We are one because we belong to Christ. We are united because, through baptism, we belong to one another. We are missionary because the faith we have received was never intended to be kept to ourselves. That same vision runs through the readings we have just heard. They remind us that God's love and God's mission have never been confined to one people, one nation or one corner of the world.

In the first reading (Isaiah 45:1, 4-6), God even chooses Cyrus, a foreign king who doesn't know him, as an instrument of his plan. Through the prophet Isaiah God declares, "I am the Lord, and there is no other." His vision stretches far beyond the boundaries people create.

Paul gives us another picture in the second reading (1 Thessalonians 1:1-5). Writing to the Christians in Thessalonica, he remembers their "work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope." That is a wonderful description of a missionary Church – faith that works, love that labours, hope that endures.

Then, in the Gospel (Matthew 22:15-21), Jesus is handed a coin bearing the image of Caesar. "Whose head is this, and whose title?" he asks. When they answer, "Caesar's," Jesus responds with those familiar words, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

On this World Mission Sunday, those words invite us to ask a very important question: "What are the things that belong to God?" The answer, of course, is much more than what we put into the collection basket. The coin bears Caesar's image, but we bear the image of God. So when Jesus says, "Give to God the things that are God's," he is ultimately asking us to give ourselves. Our time, our gifts, our faith, our compassion, our willingness to serve – all that we are and all that we have – belongs to God.

That is where mission begins. It begins not with somebody else, somewhere else, but with each one of us. Through our baptism, we have been called not simply to believe in Christ, but to share in his mission. As Pope Leo reminds us in his message for this World Mission Sunday, "no baptized person is exempt from or indifferent to mission." Mission belongs to all of us. Mission begins when we stop asking, "What can I spare?" and begin asking, "Lord, what can you do through me?"

For most of us, that mission won't take us to another country. Mission is about living differently because of the difference Christ makes in our own lives. If Christ has changed us, then that change should be visible in the way we live, the way we speak, the way we treat people, the way we forgive, the way we respond to those who are struggling, and the way we use what God has given us.

We don't always need words to proclaim the Gospel. Sometimes the most powerful witness is a life in which others can see something of Christ – his compassion, his generosity, his mercy and his love. That might happen in our families, our workplaces, our schools, our parishes or our communities. Wherever we are, there are people who need to encounter the love of Christ. The question is whether they might encounter something of that love through us.

World Mission Sunday also reminds us that our parish belongs to something much bigger than itself. Today's collection joins the offerings of Catholics throughout the world. Through the Pontifical Mission Societies, those gifts support the Church where communities are young, poor or struggling – including here in Southern Africa. Pope Leo reminds us that "Every gift, no matter how small, becomes a meaningful act of missionary communion."

One hundred years ago, World Mission Sunday reminded Catholics separated by enormous distances that we belong to one another. It reminded us that oceans and borders, differences of language and culture, political divisions and national interests couldn't separate the Body of Christ. One hundred years later, its message is exactly the same. Let us continue to pray for one another, to support one another and, above all, to live as people whose lives reveal the Christ in whom we are united. One in Christ, United in Mission.

Homily notes compiled by Fr Jerry Browne, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies, South Africa, Botswana, eSwatini.