

Mission Made Possible
(Second Edition)

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MISSION OF THE **REDEEMER**
MINISTRIES



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Chapter 2

Part A

Jean de Brebeuf

Just outside Bayeux France, Jean de Brebeuf was born on March 25, 1593. He came from a Norman family that traced its roots back five centuries earlier. As a young man, he joined the Jesuits and went on to ordination at the age of thirty. Initially, he occupied a rather comfortable teaching position at a college, but soon his life would change dramatically. In 1625 the Jesuits, listening to the pleas of the early explorers to Canada, agreed to send them three missionaries. When Fr. Jean received the order to go, “he did not hesitate to sever ties of blood and family affection, to abandon his homeland and consecrate himself forever to the salvation of the Indians of the new world” (Devine 3). He was, at the time, thirty-two years old, of robust stature and full of strength, and blessed with a soul already advanced in prudence and a mind mature in judgment (see Devine 3-4). Fr. Jean de Brebeuf, SJ, was in the prime of his life.

Upon arriving in Canada, he spent his first year with the Montagnais tribe, where he endured frigid temperatures, mocking neighbours, a challenging foreign language, and a hundred other difficulties. Following this, he was assigned to the Hurons. He would spend a month canoeing and portaging to reach his new post. Once there, he committed himself to the trying task of mastering their language. God blessed him with a sharp memory and the intellectual capacity necessary to unlock grammatical rules. His two companions, however, could not grasp the language and so left him alone with the Hurons as they returned to Quebec. Fr. de Brebeuf “visited the homes of the Indians, gathered them together, explained to them the rudiments of the Christian faith, and tried to impress on them the existence of the true God of heaven and hell, and the other great truths of religions ... But the weeks and months were passing, and he had not yet been able to make any impression on minds and hearts ... He struggled on patiently [for two years] hoping that the hour of grace would strike” (Devine 6).

Before he could see fruit being born, political consideration led to the Jesuits being recalled to France. While back there, he wrote, “Lord, make me a man according to your own heart. Let me know Thy holy will. Let nothing separate me from Thy love, neither nakedness, nor the sword, nor death itself. Thou hast made me a member of Thy Society and an apostle in Canada.” He also wrote a letter to Jesus in which he offers to serve Him and sacrifice his own life for Him (see Devine 8).

A change in circumstances allowed for a return to Canada two years later. Fr. de Brebeuf once more headed to Huronia (the shores of Lake Huron). While traveling there, he wrote to his superior about those to whom he was bringing the Gospel, “What ought we not to do for God and for souls redeemed by the Blood of the Son?” (Devine 9). For the next 17 years, in the harshest and most difficult of circumstances, he traveled between Huron villages to proclaim the Gospel, baptize converts, and labour for the spiritual benefit of those God had entrusted to him. At one point some of Hurons believed he was a sorcerer who was responsible for a recent pestilence and so sought to kill him. They blamed him further for the lack of rain and poor crops. For these “crimes” they were going to kill him, but shortly before they planned his execution, he invited them all to a feast, and there he “told them that death had no terrors for him, that it meant eternal life for himself and his brethren” (Devine 12). This act of courage in the face of imminent death changed their minds, and so his sentence was commuted.

Slowly Fr. de Brebeuf began to see more conversions. While initial faith was often shallow, God manifested His grace in the baptized as they grew in virtue. But in March 1649, disaster struck. Another tribe from the region, the Iroquois, attacked the Hurons. Fr. de Brebeuf heard of the attack from villagers and was urged to flee, but he refused to leave his people. He was captured along with another Jesuit (and many Hurons) and subjected to severe and humiliating tortures. Relentlessly the captors abused him with horrifying and dreadful inflictions. In the midst of this, “Father de Brebeuf stood like a rock, insensible to flame and fire, which astonished all the blood-thirsty executioners who tormented him” (Devine 16).

The torture continued for many hours. Even as this happened, de Brebeuf’s “zeal was so great that he preached continually to those infidels to try to convert them” (Devine 16). On March 16, 1649, having been in the missions for over 20 years and endured continual hardships throughout and inconceivable torments at the end, he died in the flesh and was born into eternal life.

Noel Chabanel

Noel Chabanel was born on February 2, 1612. We know little of his early days, but at the age of 18, he entered the Jesuit Noviciate. After several years of formation, he began to teach philosophy. But the mind of this young Jesuit was not set on books or ideas, but instead was captured with the dream of being a missionary to Canada. This dream became a reality when he was sent to Huronia not long after ordination. His first

impressions were not favorable. “[T]he wild aspects of the new country, with its half-naked populations, its bark cabins, its poverty and squalor, made a profound impression on him, and we may infer from the story of his life that his heart often traveled back to the peaceful classrooms” in France where he once taught (Devine 92). Fr. Chabanel realized quickly that the years ahead of him would be tremendously difficult. In addition to the physical and psychological challenges, he struggled with new languages. He was bright but did not have the facility for language learning. This was embarrassing and “it was a serious obstacle to the work he had come to do in Huronia. Without knowledge of the languages, he was useless” (Devine 93). Then a further difficulty arose; he began to find the life of the locals repugnant. He was familiar with a more refined life, one of cleanliness, manners, and graces. He wasn’t pompous and proud, but having been raised in a radically different culture and society, he began to resent the very people he came to serve. He could not become accustomed to the poor food, sleeping on the ground, cold temperatures, abundant vermin, and a hundred other irritants.

All of this began to put vocational doubts in his mind. He saw himself as a useless burden on the other missionaries. Consequently, believing he could accomplish more good at home, he seriously considered asking to return to France since his time in Canada had been an utter and humiliating failure. But before making the request, he was struck with a singular grace; and like the son in the parable of the prodigal, *he came to himself* (cf. Luke 15:17). He realized the shallowness and vanity of his reasons for wanting to leave the mission. These, he recognized, were not reasons to abandon the mission and the vocation he had been granted. So knowing his own weakness and fickleness, he decided to do something radical: He took a vow, which would forever bind him, “to remain in the Canadian missions until death.” These are the very words of that vow: “Jesus Christ, my Savior, who by a wonderful dispensation of Thy paternal Providence, hast willed that I, though altogether unworthy, would be a fellow-helper of the holy apostles in this vineyard of the Hurons; impelled by the desire to obey the will of the Holy Spirit regarding me, that I should help forward the conversion to the faith of the barbarians of this Huron country, I, Noel Chabanel, being in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament of Thy Body and Thy Precious Blood which is the tabernacle of God among men, make a vow of perpetual stability in this mission of the Hurons, understanding all things as the Superiors of the Society shall explain them and as they choose to dispose me. I conjure Thee, therefore, oh my Savior, to be pleased to receive me as a perpetual servant of this mission and to make me worthy of so lofty a ministry. Amen” (Devine 97/98). The combination of this experience of grace and the taking of the vow proved to be a decisive turning point in his life and missionary endeavor. Not long after, his superiors sent him to work with the Petun tribe. Before going, he told a friend, “I do not know what is going on within me or what God wishes to do with

me, but in one respect, I feel entirely changed. I am naturally very timid, but now that I am going to a dangerous post, and it seems to me that death is not far off. I no longer have any fear” (Devine 100). One day, not long after his arrival with the Petuns, he was hiking through the forest. In the woods that day there was an apostate who had come to blame the Christian faith for some calamities in his family. When their paths happened to cross, the apostate killed Fr. Chabanel in cold blood.

These are just two of the eight stories of the North American Martyrs. St. Jean de Brebeuf and St. Noel Chabanel reveal an interesting contrast. De Brebeuf was physically robust, good at languages, filled with courage and magnanimity. He seemed to be made for mission. Chabanel was nearly the opposite. He was much more fragile and valued basic comforts. He did not have a natural love for those to whom he brought the Gospel, he found language learning difficult, and his mind often raced with the temptation to return to the life he knew and loved in France.

These two men were on opposite ends of the missionary spectrum. One was bold, confident, competent, and resolute. The other was meek, unsure, incapable, and wavering. *Yet both came to be great missionaries* and ultimately shed their blood as martyrs. One (de Brebeuf) seemed to be destined to be a missionary by birth. The other (Chabanel), required God’s deep transformation to be one.

Your mission in the mission

To be an evangelist today does not mean that you must sell all you own and move to a foreign country. It does not mean you have to become a priest or a consecrated religious. And it does not mean that you must leave behind all in your life that is good (family, job, hobbies, or eating smoked salmon on occasion).

To be an evangelist means that you have chosen to reveal Jesus Christ to the world.

Earlier, we reflected on salvation history. While God made all of creation good, something went wrong (sin) and something needed to be done about it (redemption). Jesus came to destroy sin and death and to ransom His beloved. Now the victory of Jesus is to be announced to all who will hear so that every person may respond to God’s invitation to be set free, to be filled with sanctifying grace, to worship the one true God, and to spend eternity in heavenly beatitude. But this mission needs missionaries. This mission needs boots on the ground to take the Good News into the world.

Jesus could have done it. He could have stayed on earth and continued to preach. He could have done *Part One* (saving us) and *Part Two* (making this salvation known and realized). Instead, He chose to include us in His mission. He bestowed His mission upon us. Thus His mission is now our mission.

God calls everyone to a unique element of *the mission*. The work of St. Jean de Brebeuf was *his* mission within *the mission*. The legacy of St. Noel Chabanel was *his* mission within *the mission*. Sts. Paul, Francis Xavier, Dominic, Catherine of Siena, Therese of Lisieux—each of them lived out *their* mission, which was a participation in *the mission*.

Do you know who else played a vital part in *the mission*? Every man and woman in history who passed on the faith to others. Often this was a father and mother to a child. Or a teacher to a student. Or a priest to a parishioner. Or a friend to a friend. And often it was not just an individual who led a person to faith, but the collaboration of a constellation of people. Particularly in a Christian culture, the faith was “caught” rather than “taught.” It was transmitted almost by osmosis. Men, women, and children were immersed in a culture of faith, which drew their hearts, minds, and souls to God. We can think this means that no one was a missionary, but it was quite the opposite. The parents, teachers, friends, and priests all played a role in sharing the Christian faith with the next generation. They were all, in this sense, missionaries.

You have faith. You have this because of His grace and because someone (or most likely, some “ones”) shared faith with you. Sometimes it was through their witness of life. Other times it was by speaking about God in their life. Sometimes it may have been at a retreat. Even if it seems like you came to faith in a vacuum (“I was reading the Bible by myself one night and all of a sudden it just made sense,” you might say), there were almost certainly people in your life who planted seeds of faith. There may have been the person who gave you the Bible, the person who encouraged you to read it, and the person you spoke with about your encounter with God in the Scriptures. Each person was, simply and humbly, fulfilling their part of the mission. They were living out *their mission* within *the mission*.

We have a mission. The faith has been handed down from one generation to the next for 2000 years. Now we must pass it on to others. Christ gave us the baton of faith for our sanctification and so that we may proclaim it for the salvation of others. We do this out of gratitude for what we have received and because the eternal salvation of souls is at stake. That is why *the mission* matters, and that is why our participation in it is so vital.

Here is the unbelievable truth about God’s plan: the part of *the mission* that is *your mission* can only be done by you. *God made you for it and it for you.* You don’t have to be Brebeuf or Chabanal or Mother Theresa or Francis Xavier. *Their mission is not your mission.* God has something *unique for you.* It is a piece of *the mission* that He entrusts entirely to you.

St. John Henry Newman explained this clearly,

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me, which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him; whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about (John Henry Newman, Mediations and Devotions).

Knowing the mission which would be entrusted to you, God made you specifically for it. That means He created you in a beautiful and particular way so that you could fulfill your mission. *You are perfect for your mission.*

Don’t look at the saints and say, “I’m not like them.” Of course you are not. And that is good because they were not made for your mission. You were. Instead, look at them and say, “Isn’t it astonishing that God made them exactly as they needed to be?”

Now marvel and say, “Isn’t it wonderful that God made me exactly as I need to be?”

Really. Stop right now and say those words to yourself: “Isn’t it wonderful that God made me exactly as I need to be?”

The saints were not always great saints. They did not die as they were born. God made them at their conception to be a person endowed with specific gifts, but He also spent their life *making* them. He was continually forming and shaping and moulding them.

God drew them out of themselves and into Himself. He was healing their wounded hearts, purifying their desires, enlightening their minds, and strengthening their wills.

So don't think that the person you are today is the perfect fit for *your mission*. *Your mission* is likely daunting. It may seem scary or even impossible. That is because it is ... if you remain as you are today. God made you, but He is also making you. He is preparing you to be the man or woman of His dreams so that you may perfectly fit *your mission*.

And here it gets even better: part of the process of “making” you is having you begin *your mission* now (even if you do not feel ready for it). Jean de Brebeuf seemed to come out of the womb prepared to be a leader, missionary, and martyr in Canada. But Noel Chabanel? Even after seminary formation, ordination, and moving to Canada, he still did not feel ready. His weaknesses tempted him to quit. He was almost convinced God did not make him for *this* mission. But, with God's grace and the firm commitment to keep his hand to the plow, he stayed in *his mission*. Then something miraculous happened. *His mission* began to make him. He became courageous and zealous. He began to see where God's hand was leading him. He was made for *his mission* by the mission itself. And it ended with him receiving the greatest of crowns: Martyr and Saint.

You will never be ready for *your mission* until you are part of it. No amount of books, or studying, or prayer (all great in themselves) will adequately prepare you. Instead, our gracious God invites you to do one thing: *trust in Him*. He will provide all that is lacking. And in this way, you will know that it is His grace and not your own merits that have borne fruit in the Kingdom. So don't look at where you are right now and all the ways in which you are inadequate. Look instead into the eyes of Jesus and trust that you can do all things with Him who strengthens you (cf. Phil. 4:13).

St. Jean de Brebeuf: Pray for us.

St. Noel Chabanel: Pray for us.

St. John Henry Newman: Pray for us.

Part B

How can we even begin?

In our last reflection, we looked at Sts. Jean de Brebeuf and Noel Chabanel. When we think of these great missionaries, it is easy to believe that we could never do what they

did. It is not just martyrdom that seems way beyond us; we question if we can even do something as simple as talking to another person about our faith in Jesus and His invitation to friendship.

We often doubt ourselves because we see our inner poverty, fears, and weakness. We may consider ourselves wholly unprepared for the task. We believe we need more time to grow, learn, and prepare.

The truth is more straightforward. To be an evangelist, *we simply have to do it.*

Studying helps, prayer helps, reading helps. But the most important thing you can do is start.

Want to sink some free throws? Sure, you can read books, talk to basketball players, and think it through. But what you must do is get out on the court and start throwing free throws. Want to learn a new language? You can listen to tapes, read books, and study grammar. But the best thing you can do is immerse yourself in it and start speaking. You'll make lots of mistakes, not know some words, mispronounce others, and mix up grammar, but *in the very act of doing, you learn how to do.* Want to be a concert pianist? Listen to piano concerts, read books, talk to a neighbour who does it professionally. But don't wait three years to sit down at the piano and start playing. It may be slow and dull at first, focused on scales and basic pieces, but it is in playing the piano that you learn to play the piano.

St. John Paul II said that faith is strengthened when it is passed on to others (see *Redemptoris Missio* 1). We think we cannot share faith because we do not have enough faith (or courage, or formation, or knowledge, or something else). We tell ourselves, “When I have a lot of faith (or courage, or formation, or knowledge, or something else), then I can start to share it. Then I will evangelize.”

That is not how it works. By evangelizing, you become an evangelist, and as an evangelist, you become better at evangelizing. If you think you cannot do it, then the surest way to become able to do it is to do it.

This is important. Here it is again. If you believe you cannot do it, then the surest (and best and easiest) way to become able to do it is to do it.

Have you ever seen adults learn to skate? It is ridiculous. Grown men and women—competent, educated, and accomplished in a hundred ways—stand frozen like the ice they are on. They hunch over gingerly with a helmet on head and pads on elbows and knees in the hopes of not falling. They look preposterous. If they dare to move a skate forward, they usually end up falling on their backside. They thrash around ungracefully, trying to stand up, and once they do, they soon fall again. Up they get, and they may glide three or even four feet before crashing down. Up, down, up, down.

How does someone learn to skate? It can help to watch others skate. It is not a bad idea to have some basic instruction before going on the ice. Proper equipment makes a difference. A short book on skating might have some effect. But those things combined amount to, at most, 20%. Even with the best pre-ice instruction, the best skates, and the best how-to-skate book, the first time someone steps out on the ice, their legs will go in directions they do not want, their balance will be lost, and their pride will be damaged. *They will fall and likely fall often.* It is embarrassing, and it is not fun. But it is necessary because 80% of learning to skate is skating. Fall. Get up. Repeat. After 30 minutes, they will not fall as much. And after the third time at the rink, while still tentative, they probably will only fall a few times. By the tenth time, they will be slow and ungraceful, but won't do any nosedives. They have started to learn to skate by skating.

So too with being an evangelist. You become an evangelist by evangelizing. Will you fall? Will you experience embarrassment? Will you say the wrong thing? Will you be at a loss for words? Will you feel like you made things worse and not better? Yes! But in that, you learn and grow (and you will also begin to see fruit). Jean de Brebeuf and Noel Chabanel did not convert everyone they met. They were not always sure of what to say. They had lots of failures. But they became true missionaries by being missionaries.

If we wait until we feel ready for our mission, we will lay on our death bed, saying, “Lord, I am almost ready.” Instead, our daily prayer must be “Lord, I am not ready, but I am willing.” And this prayer is true because you are not ready but you are willing. And a willing heart is all that God wants. He can do the rest.

The “success” of sharing your faith is the fruit of His grace. So even if you are nervous and unsure, His grace is more than sufficient to work in the hearts of others as you share the Good News with them.

80% (at least) is going and doing. 20% is preparation. But the preparation is important so let's briefly look at it.

Having a firm conviction of who Jesus is

St. John Paul II wrote, “Jesus Christ, the redeemer of man, is the center of the universe and of history” (*Redemptoris Hominis* 1). Jesus is the centre of everything. Therefore, to know and love Jesus Christ is fundamental for the Christian and the missionary. We cannot proclaim the Good News – for the Good News is Jesus Himself – if we do not know Him.

We must know Him with our mind, but also with our heart and our soul. As spouses know each other, so must we know our Lord. Benedict XVI wrote that “We have come to believe in God's love: in these words, the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (*Deus Caritas Est* 1).

To know Jesus is first to encounter Him.

To encounter means to come in contact with something. Originally the sense of the word was that the person was surprised by what they encountered because it was unexpected. If you were walking home and a thief tried to steal your hat, you had an “encounter.” If you boarded a train, took a seat, and realized the person next to you was your first-grade teacher, you had an “encounter.” You have come in contact with someone unexpectedly.

But the word means more than this. There is an interaction, connection, and event between the persons. With the thief, there may be a physical interaction as you grab for your hat. With the former teacher, there may be a hug or handshake and then sharing of where life had taken each of you. Thus an encounter happens between persons. An encounter with Jesus is, in the first place, unexpected. How few of us anticipate that we can “meet” Him! Rarely do we believe that an experience of Him is possible. For many of us, Jesus is more like an idea than a person. We believe in Jesus as we believe in Saturn; we give assent to its existence but based on the claims of others and not our own experience. Or maybe we treat Him like an ancient historical figure. We know of Aristotle. We have his teaching. But no one thinks that they can truly know him, let alone encounter him. Jesus is not like this (even if we treat Him this way). He is not an idea or a thing or merely a figure of history. Jesus is eternal and eternally present. He is a person, who not only can be encountered but who wants to encounter us and wants us to encounter Him.

An encounter with Christ can come while reading Scripture or studying theology. It may be on a retreat or during Mass. It can happen while praying the rosary. It might occur in the midst of a profound conversation. Or perhaps it comes at the most unexpected moment: while riding a bike, going for a hike, sitting in a traffic jam, or kneeling on the floor while calling out to God in a moment of pain, loneliness, or desperation.

How do we encounter Jesus? Fundamentally, it is up to Him to reveal Himself. He always initiates the encounter. But in simple ways, we can dispose ourselves to recognize the encounter:

By being where Jesus is. Jesus is the Word of God, so we must spend time in the Scriptures. Not just to deepen our understanding of the teachings, but so that we can find Jesus Himself there. We can spend time in Adoration where Jesus is present before us since *the Eucharist is Jesus*. We attend the Holy Mass more frequently and devoutly. In prayer, we can speak and listen to Jesus as we do with a beloved friend. In other words, we go where Jesus is: Scriptures, Adoration, Mass, prayer.

By opening our hearts to an encounter. Jesus never forces Himself on us. He will only come where He is welcome. Pray for your heart to be open to receiving Him. Pray for an encounter. Pray that He may come to you. Unite your words and your will as you pray often, “Jesus, I open my heart to you.”

By invoking the Spirit to awaken us to the encounter. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind so that you may recognize an encounter with Christ.

How do you know that Saturn exists? Probably because you were taught so. And you had no reason to doubt what you were told. You trusted that there was good science beyond what you were taught. You may never have seen it and you likely don't have the scientific background to prove that it is there, but, nevertheless, you are willing to agree that it exists. Yet even though you have come to believe in Saturn, what impact has that had on how you live your life? Probably not much. In fact, if Saturn didn't exist (or if you were never told of its existence), wouldn't your life be almost exactly the same as it is now?

It is not uncommon for people to treat God this way. They may intellectually assent to His existence, but He means nothing more to them than Saturn. When it comes to how they live their life, what they value, and the priorities they set, God is irrelevant. God, for them, is like a cold distant planet whose existence matters very little (or not at all).

But that is not who God is. He is a personal God. That means we can have a personal relationship with him. *Personal* in this sense does not mean strictly private, but rather that it is a relationship *between persons*, as spouses or friends would have. And what is essential in the relationship between spouses or friends? They continually encounter each other. That means they meet, they interact, they grow. And they leave changed.

Such encounters with God ought to be common. We do not live the Christian life based merely on intellectual assent (although that does play a role), but through a personal and lived friendship with Jesus. This friendship is to be continually nurtured through encounters. These can happen anywhere, although the sacraments are privileged places of encounter with God. In Baptism, He came to dwell within our souls. If we stay in the state of grace, He is always there revealing more of Himself. In the Eucharist we have the opportunity for the most profound and beautiful encounter that is possible in this world. In Confirmation, we encounter the Holy Spirit. Every time we go to Confession, we encounter Christ and His mercy anew. These continual encounters with the Divine Guest nourish and strengthen us to take the Gospel into the world.

An encounter with God is not limited to the sacraments. It can be during prayer, or while on a retreat, or just as you are thinking about Him while you look out a window. Truly, it can be anywhere anytime. God desires that we encounter Him. He doesn't want us just to “know” him with our mind. He wants us to “know” him with our hearts.

Do you wonder if you have encountered Jesus in this experiential and transforming way? Do you feel like He is more of an abstract idea than a person? Does He seem far away rather than close, intimate, and knowable? Are you open to an encounter with Him?

If so, then pray:

Jesus, I invite you into my heart anew. I invite you to come and to encounter me so that I may encounter you. Remove everything in my heart that keeps me away from you. Jesus, I don't want to know you the way I know an idea or a thing, I want to know you as a person. Make me aware of you. May I experience your love, your mercy, and your very presence. Fill my life with your life. I invite you now to come to me so that I may encounter you as I never have before.

Now set down this book and take 10 minutes of silence with your eyes closed and your heart open. Speak from this open heart and listen with your soul.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit

St. Paul VI reminded us that “the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 75). You cannot evangelize on your own. It is only with Him and in Him and through His power that anyone can fulfill their mission. This is even true for the Apostles.

Three years they spent with Our Lord. They saw Him multiply food, walk on water, heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. He taught and formed them. After his torture and crucifixion, they experienced Jesus risen from the dead. Thomas put his own finger in Christ's side and proclaimed His Divinity. Finally, just before He ascended into heaven, the Apostles are commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world.

Yet in Acts 2, the Apostles are locked in the upper room. They are not out evangelizing and bringing Christ salvation to the world, but rather are hiding securely. Jesus Himself has commissioned them for the mission and still they cannot do it. Why? Because they are not yet clothed with the power from on high (cf. Luke 24:49). Three years of formation *from Jesus Himself* was not sufficient. They need an infilling of the Holy Spirit.

And so do you. Without the Holy Spirit, you will fail.

Most of us know this intuitively. It is part of the reason fear paralyzes us; we see the task of evangelization, and it appears to be too great. Good. It is. But this is why God has given us His Helper. Pentecost was not just for the Apostles; it is also for us. We have (because we need) the grace of Pentecost in our lives.

God desires to give you even more of Himself. He is not miserly with us. He does not give insufficient or incomplete gifts. He does not withhold from you what your mission requires. It is the will of the Holy Spirit to fill us anew every day, if we permit Him to do so. Will you open your heart now and forever to this? If you recognize your need for more of Him, say now and say often, “Come Holy Spirit.” Say it *in* your heart. Say it *with* your heart. Say it *for* your heart.

Now trust that you have the Holy Spirit and step into action.

Being a person of earnest prayer

Sometimes Catholics believe that having a life of prayer means saying the occasion prayer. Often we think of prayers as grace before meals, petitions for the sick, and a Hail Mary for a good parking spot. Yes, those are prayers, but they don't constitute a true prayer life anymore a piece of carrot constitutes a full meal.

To be a man or woman of prayer, that is, to have an authentic prayer life, one must spend time – dedicated, uninterrupted, quiet, consistent time – with God. It is to have a conversation with Him. It is to read the Scripture and then discuss it in your heart with God. It is to pour out your passions, desires, disappointment, hopes, dreams, and struggles. It is to immerse yourself in the life of Christ revealed in the Bible. And it is to listen.

A life of intimate prayer is not about reciting a long list of intentions and continually speaking. Rather, it is to be with God – to soak in His presence and be close to His heart. It is simply *being with Him*.

Prayer is the lifeblood of the missionary. How are we going to grow in courage if we do not hear His words of encouragement? How are we going to know what He is asking of us if we are not listening to His guidance? How are we going to share the joys of intimacy with Christ if our friendship with Him is shallow?

Everyone can pray, which means everyone can converse with God. As with all communication, we get better as we do it more. No poet is known for their first poem, no musician is remembered for the first time they sang, and no author is famous for the first line they ever penned. Every artist grows in the doing. So too, we grow in our capacity to share the fullness of ourselves with God. But to become, we must begin, and this is the challenge for today.

Where do we start if we are not consistently praying? The first step is to set a time and length each morning. For example, to pray at 7:00AM for 10 minutes. When praying, begin by calling upon the Holy Spirit and praising God. Second, read a passage from the Gospels. Third, chew on that Scripture as you repeat it in your heart and mind. Then ask God “What might this mean for me?” and wait quietly for His answer. Next, speak directly to God about your meditation. Finally, resolve to act on anything that He has brought to your mind and conclude by thanking Him.

Prayer also includes worship/adoration. To worship is to recognize the grandeur and perfection of God and to give Him praise for it. To adore is to love Him. When we worship and adore God, we recognize that He is of prime value and importance. In doing this, we come out of ourselves. Our life becomes more properly ordered. We acknowledge that there is one God, and we are not Him. We begin to see more clearly how we ought to live. The man who loves his car more than his children has *disorder* in his life. As a result, his actions will be *disordered* as he spends more money, time, and energy on his car than on his children. But if he *reorders* (we could say, re-prioritizes) his life, it becomes *ordered* again.

Taking the life of virtue seriously

God calls us to be virtuous men and women. A virtue is “an habitual and firm disposition to do the good” (Catechism #1803). That means it is a good moral habit. A virtuous person is a person who has good moral habits. Thus “The virtuous man is he who practices the good” (ibid.).

How do we build a habit? By doing it. Do you want to be an honest person? Start speaking honestly. Don't lie. Do you want to be a merciful person? Start being merciful. Do you want to be a generous person? Start being generous and not miserly.

Sounds easy, but it isn't. A person who is dishonest not only has to build the habit of honesty but also break the habit of dishonesty. The person who finds it very difficult to be merciful has developed the bad habit of being merciless. The person who finds generosity difficult is probably a miser.

We all have moral habits. The important thing is to break the bad ones and build the good ones.

We do this first and foremost with His grace. Thus we need to ask the Lord for the grace to be virtuous. *Then we need to act.* We don't become a generous person by thinking about being generous. We don't become generous even by making plans to be generous. *We become generous by being generous.*

To be a more effective missionary, you will need to be growing in virtue. This does not

mean that you can't evangelize until you have all the virtues. Quite the opposite! In evangelizing, you will build the virtues because you are necessarily developing the good habits of generosity, faith, mercy, etc.. If some part of evangelization seems difficult, it likely points to an area where you need to grow in that particular virtue.

What are some of the essential virtues of the missionary?

i. Charity

We must love God and love neighbour. Without this, evangelization is ineffective. A life that is not rooted deeply in the love of God and neighbour is disordered and squandered. It will not bring us joy, and it will lead us down a path of destruction. Without charity, evangelization becomes proselytization since it is about us and not about them; it is about winning arguments and not souls.

ii. Courage

Almost everyone is afraid when they first think of sharing their faith. There is the fear of rejection, of getting things wrong, of not having an answer, of being made a fool, etc.. These fears are not from God; *do not let your fear paralyze you*. You must act in the midst of it. Courage is not being free of fear; it is choosing to act despite the feeling. Think of this: When you are 90, do you want to look back on your life and see that many decisions were made out of fear? Do you want to see your life as one marked by cowardliness rather than courage? Do you want to recall a life shaped by insecurity and not by the adventure of full abandonment to God?

Or do you want to look back at your life and see the times when you chose to act despite the fear? *Jesus came to set you free; do not let fear throw you back into bondage*. Courage is not easy, but as you step out and do courageous things, despite feeling afraid, you will notice that the grip of fear will be broken.

iii. Humility

More often than perhaps we willingly admit, we are held back by pride. *What will others think of me? How will I look? What if I don't have all the answers?* These concerns are not rooted in a concern for the other but in self-centredness. By allowing the fear of embarrassment to triumph, we permit our ego to put us in bondage. Furthermore, our

pride tells us that we have to have it all together. Our pride tells us that if a person responds, it is because we did a great job. Our pride tells us that this person is our project. None of these is an authentic Christian perspective.

The missionary sets aside the ego and focuses solely on the other person. They simply surrender themselves to the Lord and allow Him to use them as He wills. Thus they reveal the true nature of humility which is to recognize that the origin of all good is God Himself.

There may be times when we are embarrassed before the world, and there may be times when we are exalted. *It does not matter.* What matters is that we do what we ought. *We must get over ourselves.*

iv. Perseverance

The missionary must persevere amid inevitable difficulty, obstacles, and failures. These will come, and they will come often. They are not evidence that you are unfit for this work, nor are they a sign that you should stop. They simply reveal that we labor in a fallen world. Even St. Jean de Brebeuf met with *many* failures, including individuals who did not respond to the Gospel, converts who later betrayed him, and projects that collapsed. Did these disappointments slow him down? Absolutely not. Instead, he persevered in the confidence that God was with Him.

All great Christians meet innumerable obstacles in their apostolic activity. Part of what makes them great is that they do not quit or become discouraged. Instead, they continue in the confidence that they have a call from God and that, if they were faithful, their efforts will bear fruit.

Your labors in the vineyard will often seem arduous. Much of the fruit you hope for will not come. Challenges you could not imagine will tempt you to discouragement. Do not allow this fallen world (and your weak flesh) to stop you from the most exciting and meaningful adventure of your life: bringing the saving salve of the Gospel to hearts that silently long for God. Jesus promised, “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:20). *Never give up! Never be afraid!*