

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

The Great Imperative

By Blessed Paolo Manna, PIME

[From the book *Apostolic Virtues*]

1) Be Holy

We missionaries often ask ourselves why the work of the conversion of the world proceeds so slowly. Many reasons to explain this sad fact could be cited, and truly the problem can be considered from many different angles, some of which have nothing to do with our responsibility. However, for the part that concerns us (and this is the main one), the problem has a very clear solution. God, in His infinite wisdom,

has desired to have co-workers. God does His part very well; do those called to assist Him do their part just as well?

But this is not what I want to talk about. I cannot stress enough the part that missionaries in the field have to play in this cooperation, and it is for this reason that I say to you: be holy missionaries, and for the part that concerns you, your apostolic duty will be completely fulfilled: the souls which the Lord in His merciful design has entrusted to each of you to bring healing, will be saved, and at the end of your days you will be able to say with the Divine Redeemer: “I

guarded those you gave me, and not one of them was lost.” (Jn 17:12)

2) In Glorious Footsteps

We have some great examples in front of us and we need to treasure them. Our missionaries, even from the human point of view, have been superior men. Some among them have been eminent in doctrine and knowledge of language; others for their astuteness and sensitivity in assimilating themselves and relating with people of other cultures evangelized by them; many were true strategists of the apostolate

always taking on new positions; all were courageous, hardened to fatigue, ready for any hardship. But it was not their intelligence, nor their prudence, nor their courage that made them great in our eyes and in the eyes of God: they were great, they saved many souls, they founded many churches, principally because they were holy men, men of a rich interior life. This was the secret, the soul of their zeal, their perseverance, and their successes. It is the solemn teaching which they have passed on to us, and of which I love to remind you, so that always our missionaries of today and tomorrow might find in it

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Paolo Manna was born in Avellino Italy in 1872. He entered the Institute of Foreign Missions in 1891. On 19th May 1894, he was ordained as priest. In 1895 left for the mission of Toungoo in Eastern Burma. He worked there for a total of ten years with two short repatriations until 1907 when his illness forced him to come back to Italy definitively.

From 1909 onwards, through writings and a variety of other activities, he dedicated all his energy for more than forty years to fostering missionary zeal among the clergy and the faithful.

In 1916 founded the Missionary Union of the Clergy on which Pius XII bestowed the title of “Pontifical” in 1956. He became the director of Le Missioni Cattoliche (the Catholic Missions).

From 1909 he published “*Missionary Propaganda*” as well as “*Missionary Italy*” for young people. He wrote great works of evangelical and missionary passion such as “*Operarii autem pauci*” (the labourers are few), “*Go out of Your Country*”, “*The Separated Brethren and Us*”, “*Observation on the Modern Method of Evangelization*”, and “*Apostolic Virtues*”.

He was an ardent and passionate soul for the proclamation of the Kingdom and everywhere he kindled the flame of missionary commitment.

He was the Superior General of PIME from 1924 to 1934. He died in Naples on September 15, 1952, and was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II in 2001.

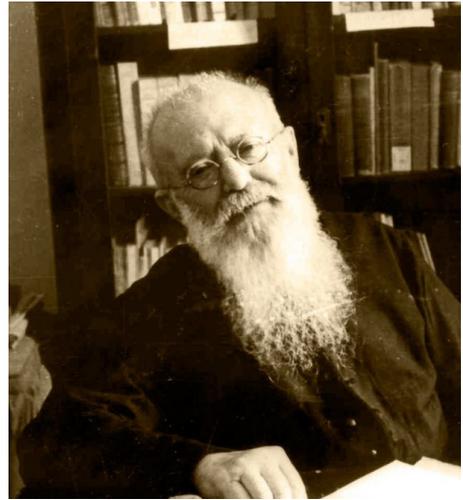
the primary and essential basis for the sanctification of themselves and souls entrusted to them.

3) Prayer And Optimism

At times, discouragement can infect a missionary right in the middle of his apostolic career. Well, also in this case, there is no other remedy than prayer, which puts us in the position of supplicants and helps us to see both our misery and the comfort that can be found from the fruits of our struggle.

You won't find men of prayer who are pessimists in regard to missionary work. And if you can think of some missionary, whether in the missions or back home, who says that the results of his apostolic work among the non-Christians are not worth the efforts he has put forth, you can be sure that the one you are thinking of is not a man of prayer.

We must take as a matter of faith that, just as every prayer is infallibly granted in proportion to its moral perfection, so every effort made for God for the conversion of souls is effective in the proportion to which it is enlivened by prayer. We may or may not see the results of our work here



below, but they are there, and God takes note of them. The fidelity, omnipotence and goodness of God guarantees this, because united to God in prayer, it is not we who are working, but God who

is working in and through us, and God never works in vain.

The missionary must never be discouraged. It would be an offense against the all-powerful God who has called him and for whom he works! The true missionary is always an optimist, always filled with the enthusiasm which first inspired him to leave everything

and follow our Lord in the way of the apostolate.

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Revisit, dear confreres, the whole history of your holy vocation: how many difficulties you've overcome, how many separations from loved ones, how many sacrifices, sufferings and tears! You had a great vision of heroism before you, and you were impelled by the desire to prove your great love for Jesus Christ.

But now, so many years removed from the fervor of your first Mass and your unforgettable departure ceremony, do you still have that same enthusiasm, that same desire to work for Jesus, to win souls for Him in great number, to suffer for Him, who did not hesitate to give His life and blood for you? If such is the attitude of your heart, rejoice and thank God, because you are quite right! But if someone feels abandoned and discouraged, disillusioned, cold and unenthusiastic, he should examine what his prayer life is or was like during his years in the missions. Let him examine himself dispassionately and severely, and maybe he will find the key to the puzzle, the reason for his predicament; and surely the remedy for it will appear clearly to him as well.

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4) Meditating On The Cross

The missionary must present himself to non-Christian peoples as *alter Christus* (another Christ). In fact, the missionary is nothing if he does not imitate Christ.

When the missionary relies only on his humanity, he is ineffective. It is because so many missionaries of the Catholic Church do not perfectly reflect Jesus Christ that the non-Christians are not converted. Beloved confreres, it is often said that there are few missionaries; but there are even fewer true missionaries,

the missionaries who reflect the divine figure of our Lord Jesus Christ with their whole lives! But how can they reflect and imitate Jesus Christ if they do not make Him the constant object of their meditation? How can our spirits reflect the features of the divine model without constantly fixing our gaze upon Him, without studying and analyzing His life, from the manger, to

the cross, to the altar?

We must read the Gospel daily; it must be our habitual book of meditation, a book which is never exhausted, because

we never finish in our study and understanding of it, nor in putting it into practice in our lives.

Ah! Only the missionary who faithfully imitates Christ Himself and can join Paul the Apostle in saying to the people *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”* only He can reproduce that image in the souls of others. Those who do not do this begin to weaken and to complain if their efforts are not rewarded. The missionary must nourish a steadfast love, must have a real passion for souls. But how can he have this love if he is not a man of prayer? It is out of meditation on what Blessed Jesus has done for the salvation of souls that our vocation has sprung. The cross has made us missionaries, and it is the cross which must nourish in us the love for souls.

Let us, then, often make the passion and death of our Lord the object of our meditation, and let us especially dedicate ourselves to this practice during the sacred season of Lent. These mysteries are the true source of apostolic zeal. Thinking of the wounds of Christ, thinking of the cross, the humiliation of Calvary, teaches us to love souls and to embrace any sacrifice for their salvation.

Missionaries, men who are naturally strong and decisive, do not do things halfway. When we became missionaries we intended to give our whole selves to Jesus Christ. If we are not united with Him in a great, total dedication, which

one cannot have without prayer, He will be constrained by our lack of generosity to remain far away from us, and we will thus end up being deprived of a great amount of grace, and undoubtedly we will fail miserably.

Let us be united to God through a life of meditation and in this way we will become visible instruments of His mercy. Let us not delude ourselves: apostolic zeal, without which we are nothing as missionaries, does not blaze up except from a heart aflame with the love of God. When our heart is united to God in the intimacy of meditation and prayer, then we will be fervent and our love will inspire us with that diligent, practical persevering and untiring zeal which characterizes the true apostle of Jesus Christ.

5) **“Our Citizenship Is In Heaven...”**

To reach souls to win them for Christ, human means are not enough. We are on the earth among humanity, but our interests are heavenly and divine; we work in a supernatural world. To work with success in this field, we must be in constant communication with God; we must be able to say: *“Our citizenship is in Heaven.”* (Phil 3:20) Only in this way will our words and our struggles be effective in reaching souls and reaching the heart of God.

There are some missionaries who preach and who work hard in many

ways, but produce little fruit, and too few souls are converted. They don't pray enough, and their work is largely mechanical, little if at all enlivened by grace, which is indispensable in order to win souls! We sometimes grieve over the fact that we are not able to accomplish great things, that our struggles bring about few results: we complain about the hardness of the non-Christians and the newly baptized who do not respond to our care! But do we, who are so certain that we've worked very hard, ever ask ourselves if we've prayed just as hard?

Be men of sound interior life, of prayer, and even if you don't have a lot of natural gifts, the grace of God will abundantly supply anything you lack! How many times have missionaries, with few natural gifts but great in holiness, produced great fruits of goodness in the missions, while others, perhaps more intelligent and able in themselves, have worked in vain! It is worthwhile to know how to preach, but it is much more worthwhile to know how to pray. The missionary who has learned the language well and knows how to preach, but prays little, can expound perfectly on the truths of our religion, but he leaves the people cold. The missionary who has much intimacy with God in prayer, even if he is not the best in his presentation, will always have the gift of planting the spirit of Jesus Christ in souls, and this is ultimately what any preaching

must accomplish. The former will teach about Jesus Christ; the latter will make Him visible. You understand the difference! "Unless the teaching comes from within, the tongue of the teacher works in vain" (St. Gregory).

6) Let Us Live The Faith!

The fervent life of a missionary, his regular, wise, industrious and untiring activity, the unalterable joy of his life and his perseverance in the work, even in the midst of privation, hardship and difficulty, are always the result of a life of faith.

If faith is obscured, then zeal is also diminished; then even the strongest are affected by tiredness and discouragement, and they might end up completely unhappy and lose their vocation. If instead, the missionary lives by faith, then it is great, it is wonderful, it is divine: he can give his whole self to the Church and to souls; no hardship, no difficulty defeats him; no heroism is beyond his power!

The missionary is a man of faith par excellence: he is born from faith, he lives by faith, for faith he willingly works, endures, and dies. The missionary who is otherwise is, at most, an "amateur" in the apostolate; soon he will be an obstruction to the mission, a failure in himself and, God forbid, the cause of ruin for souls. Without faith the missionary has no reason to be. He

doesn't exist; or, if he does exist, he is not the true missionary of Jesus Christ.

The missionary who wants to live and remain at the height of his vocation must constantly nourish this spirit of faith, enlightening and inspiring himself by meditation on the great truths of our holy religion. By continual prayer he must receive from God (whose instrument he is) the grace which he needs for his ministry and without which he can do nothing in regard to the eternal salvation of his own soul and that of the people to whom he has gone to evangelize.

Meditation then, and prayer: these constitute the power of the missionary, the only true sources and reasons for his zeal, his perseverance and his success!

A missionary who finds a half-hour of meditation burdensome, who prays his Office distractedly and hurries through the Mass, who has little familiarity with the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin... who, on the pretext of many works and projects taking up his time, gives little attention to meditation and

other acts of piety, such a missionary is a poor illusion: his work is in vain and without any true consistency, and his projects, even if he has many of them, are nothing more than simple chatter, often expressions of a vain and frivolous spirit.

The great sublime mission of the apostolic man is to save souls, and to save them as Jesus Christ saved them. To be able to carry out this divine commitment worthily the missionary must always carry with him the great motives which impress upon him, like a law or a necessity, the duty of the

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apostolate, zeal for the salvation of souls. Thus he will frequently meditate upon the love of God for souls; upon their value and excellence; upon the danger that so many might be eternally lost; upon the nobility of the apostolic vocation, rich in merits above any other; and upon the indescribable prize reserved for true apostles of the Gospel.

The creation of this visible world, the ineffable mystery of divine redemption, the sanctification of souls which has required so many

miracles of divine power, the Holy Eucharist, the Blessed Virgin, the Church, everything which tells us how much God has loved and continues to love His people: there is not any subject of meditation that is not able to convince us of the immense, incomparable love of God for souls.

7) God With Us!

Another very important element of the interior life is devotion to the Holy Eucharist, which I would like to see very active in all of our missionaries.

For us, Jesus is everything, and Jesus is in the Blessed Sacrament. Then what could we lack? If we are lacking something, is it not because we remain distant from the Lord, who is the source of all grace?

Make of the Holy Mass your paradise: the sacred tabernacle should be the magnet which attracts you irresistibly. Before it you will pass the most beautiful hours of your life, and the time most useful for your apostolate: you will attract your newly baptized to it and unfaillingly make them better.

“Look to Him that you may be radiant with joy”! (Ps 34:5) Let us remain close to the Eucharistic heart of Jesus and this

immense source of love will sanctify our poor hearts and ignite them with so much ardent zeal that souls without number will be attracted to us. Thus we will have reached the goal of our life, which is sanctification, and the goal of our divine vocation, which is the salvation of the souls entrusted to us.

When in the midst of one suffering or another, you place yourself before the tabernacle and tell Jesus that it is for Him that you struggle, for His interests that you suffer, that it is His cause which is in peril; when instead of becoming angry at your enemies you implore mercy and pardon for them, then you can be sure that you will no longer feel sad and depressed, but will leave your fervent prayer as if coming out of a healing bath, refreshed and renewed, with greater strength to continue the battle. An hour of adoration overcomes more difficulties than many discussions; a fervent prayer, illuminating the spirit with the eternal light of God, comforting the heart with the life-giving warmth of Jesus’ heart, makes our own love unclouded and fills us with humility and generosity; then, most difficulties, which at first seemed so heavy and insurmountable, appear to us as things which are in fact negligible.

