

## **A Reason to Give Thanks**

Recently, I met a person who openly declares that he is an atheist. My only question to him was, "Do you believe in goodness?" And without hesitation he answered in the positive, to which I promptly replied, "That goodness comes from someone!" I did not want to dispute his belief. Rather, I just wanted to leave him wondering and hope that he finds the truth.

There is goodness in every human person. I believe we all come from the source of goodness, who is Goodness Himself -- God. The great Augustine of Hippo believed in the same. "Our heart is restless until it rests in thee", he once wrote. When one is conscious of this reality, one is challenged to search for one's purpose, one's mission in life.

The Covid-19 pandemic has compelled us to change many practices in our daily lives. It caught us all unprepared. It made us realise that we must take care of ourselves by washing hands, covering our mouth when sneezing, and keeping a safe distance from others. But all this is done not just to keep myself safe and healthy, but to express the truth that if I live properly, I already care for the person next to me, too. In a time of crisis, especially, my life has an impact on others who are around me.

No wonder, Pope Francis summons us to understand the prophetic declaration of the prophet Isaiah (6:8), "Here I am, send me". Isaiah lived in a time of crisis. It may not have been a time of a pandemic, but, historically, it was a time when people were crushed by the unsettling times, a period of chaos when people were uprooted from their normal life and were exiled to a foreign land because of war. The God of Isaiah, the God of Israel, needed a reliable person to cause change and unite the people to their God. Or better still, to connect God with his people, once more! He was a necessary link. Our pandemic is an opportunity to understand one's self in relation to the rest of what and who exist around me. I am not a meaningless individual. I am a significant other. I can cause change.

On 27 March 2020, at 6:00 pm Rome time, Pope Francis made a valuable gesture at the peak of the pandemic in Italy. He walked into an empty, wet, and lonely Vatican Square. From the silent pavement of a normally crowded space, the chanting of the story of Mark's Gospel, The Storm at Sea (Mk 4:35-41), resounded. And Pope Francis shared his heart and spoke of the eventful dialogue that transpired between Jesus and his frightened disciples. The storm exposed the disciples' vulnerability and superfluity that made them utter the words "Do you not care if we perish?" To which Jesus replied with a gesture that abated the storm and kindled their faith. God cares. The Pope's reflection led to a silent prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The profound

event climaxed with Pope Francis blessing the City of Rome and the World with the Real Presence of Jesus. A compelling expression of the faith of our religious leader.

Mission Sunday is a day when we celebrate the faith lovingly implanted in us at Baptism, the faith that grows dynamically in our living the challenges we face creatively and bravely, and the faith that is devotedly nurtured in our prayers. From the very early days of Pope Francis' pontificate, he underlined the centrality of each believer's personal encounter with Jesus. He continually emphasises that prayer plays an important part in bringing to life this friendship with the Lord. And this friendship fuels our enthusiasm and dedication to articulate and own our availability to cause the transformation expressed in the Prophet Isaiah's words, "Here I am, send me!"

The goodness lived. The challenges encountered. The Gospel that illuminates. The Real Presence that proclaims our God who cares. The prayer that is a dialogue and equips us to capture the friendship offered by the one who declared, "I no longer call you servant, I call you friend" (John 15:15). The mission that enables a spark to transform lives. All these create the missionary who is you and me. There is a reason to give thanks. Mission Sunday is our day. You, me, we are missionaries. May our missionary hearts proclaim on Mission Sunday in unison, "Here I am, send me!"