

A SPIRITUALITY OF MISSION

Reflections for Holy Week and Easter

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*Dedicated to
Sister Doctor Pauline Nugent, CCVI,
scholar, teacher, and friend,
celebrating sixty years as a
Sister of Charity of the Incarnate Word*

*We declare to you what was from the beginning,
what we have heard,
what we have seen with our eyes,
what we have looked at and touched with our hands,
concerning the word of life—
this life was revealed,
and we have seen it and testify to it,
and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father
and was revealed to us—
we declare to you what we have seen and heard
so that you also may have fellowship with us;
and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.
We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

—1 John 1:1-4

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Introduction

In some churches today, the buzz word is evangelization or new evangelization. The word “evangelization” means “to proclaim the gospel,” more specifically “to proclaim the good news” of Jesus Christ. When the adjective “new” is placed in front of the word “evangelization,” as in “new evangelization,” the meaning is “to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to those who have already heard it but are not living it.” In other words, there are a lot of people who lay claim to the name “Christian” without knowing anything about this lifestyle. Those who understand the gospel are called and sent to proclaim it in word and through the way they live their lives.

Throughout the past fifty years, various popes have written letters and exhortations and spoken often about evangelization. Many churches have crafted mission statements for their congregations that include a few words about evangelization, even if the word itself is not used. Catechetical programs emphasize how important evangelization is in the home, the neighborhood, and the workplace. Christian history is filled with those men and women who died while evangelizing to other peoples throughout the world.

I do not use the word “evangelization” often in this book. I prefer the word “mission,” from the Latin verb *missio*, meaning “to send.” Christians, who have heard the gospel, accepted it, and been formed in it, are sent to others with the same

basic message. In order to keep the proclamation of the gospel from becoming just another wordy event, I prefer to call this a spirituality of mission. The gospel has to take root and grow in the life of a person before he or she can bear the fruit of evangelization. The gospel has to take root and grow in a person before he or she can either proclaim it authentically or live it incarnately. In other words, mission has to become a lifestyle, a way one lives every minute of existence.

Title of the Book

The word “spirituality” is best understood as ongoing transformation. We are changed by letting go of our ego, our attachments to ourselves, houses, cars, others. While we live in a culture that abhors change, authentic spirituality is a process of constant change, of constantly being reshaped by the creating hand of God. For that to happen, ego has to go. In order not to fool ourselves into thinking that we have finished the process, we embrace spiritual practices (reading Scripture, meditation, journaling, etc.) that assist us in transformation. At first the practices may be difficult or even annoying, but they will reshape or transform us gradually. One day we wake up and notice how much we have been changed.

This book is titled *A Spirituality of Mission*. This means that the purpose of the book is to transform the reader into a missionary or evangelizer. It is designed to be a type of workbook for determining one’s spirituality of mission and implementing the change in thought that leads to the change in behavior. In other words, this book is meant to be an agent of gradual transformation. The twelve chapters are not to be considered stages or steps that a person can take in order to be transformed. A spirituality of mission is not a goal to be

achieved. The chapters are aspects that should be included in a spirituality of mission. They invite the reader to examine each aspect in order to understand it and to plumb the depth of its truth. Therefore, each person will put together the aspects of a spirituality of mission in a way unique to him or her. However, the one common trait that will pervade everyone's spirituality of mission is the Christian lifestyle. Others can tell by the way we live if mission has permeated behavior.

The book is supported by a spirituality of sacred numbers. For example, there are twelve chapters. Twelve is a sacred number, designating both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus, not to mention the 144,000 (12 x 12 x 1000) in the book of Revelation! In each chapter, we find five entries. There are five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus gives five major discourses or sermons. Biblical numbers do not often indicate a quantity; often they indicate a quality of the divine that is to be absorbed by the reader. The sacred number seven (composed of the number for the divine [three] and the number for the earth [four]) added to the sacred number five equals the sacred number twelve. Spiritually, these numbers are about God's union with people through Jesus and the mission that Jesus has entrusted to those who follow him.

Subtitle of the Book

The subtitle of this work is *Reflections for Holy Week and Easter*. To reflect means to redirect. Thus, a reflection is the process or act of reflecting something. When we speak of reflections based on the Bible, we understand the reflecting to take place in two ways. First, God's word is reflecting something of God to us.

Second, once we hear and understand the word, we reflect it to others. The sixty reflections in this book attempt to clarify God's reflections as recorded by the writers of the Christian Bible (New Testament), and they also attempt to reflect to us a way of applying God's word to our lives.

The reflections contained herein are designed to be used during Holy Week and the Easter season. The last days of Lent during Holy Week lead directly to the Sacred Paschal Triduum and the beginning of the celebration of the Lord's resurrection. While not exclusive to Holy Week and Easter, this liturgical time in particular contains a missionary aspect to itself. During Holy Week, as we celebrate the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem to complete his work, his Last Supper with his disciples, and his death on the cross, we recognize that we are sent, missioned, to reconcile just like Jesus did. During Easter our announcement is that God raised the crucified One from the dead—that is the good news that every missionary bears to others and lives daily.

Using the Book

This book can be used primarily during Holy Week and the Easter season, that is, from Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord through the Easter season to the Wednesday after Pentecost. While the reader may pick any two months to use the book (such as Lent–Easter or Advent–Christmas), I have listed the days of Holy Week and Easter next to the section titles of each chapter to make it convenient for the reader.

This book would make a great gift for those preparing for baptism during the Easter Vigil or those making a profession of faith during the Easter Vigil or at some other time. In other words, the material contained herein takes the period of post-

baptismal catechesis or mystagogy seriously with its focus on mission. The newly baptized and the newly professed members of the church with the help of their godparents and sponsors enter into closer ties with the rest of the faithful by reflecting on their mission. The faithful, by reflecting on their mission, experience a renewal of mission and a further deepening of the spirituality accompanying it. At the very least, the godparent or sponsor can use this book on a weekly basis with the newly baptized or newly professed for whom he or she served as a godparent or sponsor. Furthermore, small groups of people may choose to read a chapter of the book and discuss their responses to what they encountered here.

While the book does not tie in the daily Scripture texts from the Lectionary, those who read the daily texts will find it profitable to read them in connection with the exercises provided in this book. The assigned daily Scripture texts will further enhance the contents of each reflection. New spiritual insights will be gained from this process, and those ideas should be recorded in one's journal.

Four-Part Exercise

This book consists of sixty exercises that are each a fifteen-minute spirituality of mission. Any process takes time; the process of crafting a spirituality of mission is a graceful sweep from one stage of life to another. Each of the twelve chapters in this book offers reflections organized into four parts that will provide readers with about a fifteen-minute exercise on aspects of a spirituality of mission.

The first part of each exercise is a short quotation from the Christian Bible. It focuses on one aspect of the topic of the chapter. The reflection, part two, explores the metaphor

or idea found in the Scripture passage for its meanings and makes some applications for today. In the journal section, part three, readers make connections between the biblical quotation, the reflection, and their own lives. Those connections may be written down or meditated on with the help of the questions. In order to prepare for the appendix, which leads readers in a process of gathering their deepest insights into their spirituality of mission, I recommend that readers record their thoughts in a journal (written or electronic). Once they are finished, the exercise is concluded with a short prayer.

The appendix of the book is designed to help readers synthesize their written responses to the meditation/journal questions. The end product of the appendix should be the individual reader's spirituality of mission.

The four-part process is designed to surface a spirituality of mission, a way of preparing the self to be transformed. Spirituality, as a way of life, transfigures the person step-by-step as he or she gets closer and closer to God. After meeting the Divine, the individual better understands some of the circumstances of one's life, including one's unique self. Spirituality is the way that one is in the Divine's presence, which emerges through human experiences of being on mission and guided reflection upon those experiences.

Never can one imagine fully being the person one was created to be. However, through the process of call, listening and believing, leaving all, being commissioned, being sent, being free from worry, having a purpose, harvesting, fearlessly evangelizing, witnessing, paying the cost of discipleship, and calling others, a person comes closer to human fulfillment and may erupt in joy at having reached a spirituality of mission.



CALLED

Immediately

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord



SCRIPTURE: "As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him" (Mark 1:16-20).

REFLECTION: When Jesus calls his first disciples, they immediately respond. Simon and Andrew immediately leave their nets and follow him. James and John immediately leave their father and the hired men and follow him. There is no delay; there is no time to think about the call. It comes through the words of Jesus as he passes by. The fishermen hear it and respond to it immediately.

Such immediacy challenges the fishermen's comfort. They are comfortable being fishermen. They are comfortable fishing. They are comfortable mending their nets. They are comfortable being with their father. Jesus, however, disturbs their comfort by seeking an immediate response to his invitation to fish for people. Not even knowing what fishing for people might mean, four men relinquish their comfort and follow Jesus immediately.

God calls, or Jesus calls on behalf of God, or another person is the vehicle for God's call. An urge is felt to volunteer in a

soup kitchen—that's a call. In a writer's mind a new idea for a book begins to take shape—that's a call. A family member suggests a project for Lent or Advent, and all agree to the endeavor—that's a call. For some unarticulated reason comfort is abandoned immediately in order to answer the call. A spirituality of mission includes an immediate response when one recognizes a divine call.

JOURNAL/MEDITATION: When have you recently received a divine call? What comfort did you immediately abandon in order to answer the call?

PRAYER: Almighty God, you call me to follow your Son, and to fish for people. Help me abandon all that is comfortable to me, so that I may respond immediately to you who live and reign with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

Brothers

Monday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE: “As [Jesus] walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him” (Matt 4:18-22).

REFLECTION: The above passage from Matthew’s gospel looks familiar because the author of Matthew’s gospel used Mark’s gospel as a source for his own work. However, while the two passages are similar, they are also different. Mark emphasizes the immediacy of the first disciples’ response to Jesus’ call. Matthew keeps that emphasis, but embellishes the account with a focus on the two pairs of brothers. Simon, called Peter, and Andrew are brothers. James and John, sons of Zebedee, are brothers. Thus, Jesus calls brothers; he calls men who already know each other and can support each other in fishing for people.

One does not answer a divine call alone. Such individualism is foreign to most biblical narratives. When God calls Abraham, he doesn’t call him alone. God also calls his wife, Sarah, their servants, and others to leave their homeland and travel to a new land. When God calls Moses, he doesn’t call

him alone. God also calls his brother, Aaron, and their sister, Miriam. God's call of Samuel is not for Samuel alone; Eli is present to help the boy understand the call.

Jesus calls brothers to join him in his mission in Galilee and beyond. They will support each other in their work of evangelization. In other words, one does not fish for people alone. That is why all the members of a family often belong to the same church and travel together on a mission trip. Adult siblings solicit each other's material, spiritual, and financial support for supplying a soup kitchen, volunteering in a homeless shelter, or participating in a building project. While a person may participate in some type of home visitation—like meals on wheels, hospice, taking the elderly to doctor's appointments, etc.—serving others with a partner enables the two people to support each other in their mission.

JOURNAL/MEDITATION: In what type of mission do you have a partner? How does he or she support you? How do you support him or her?

PRAYER: Your Son called the brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John, to fish for others, Almighty God. Grant me the support of a fellow disciple in the work you have given me to do. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

Amazing Catch

Tuesday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE: “[Jesus] got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ . . . When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. . . . [A]ll who were with [Simon] were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people’ ” (Luke 5:3-4, 6, 9-10).

REFLECTION: The author of Luke’s gospel takes the two separate stories of Jesus calling Simon and Andrew and James and John and combines them with an account of a miraculous catch of fish, which appears as a post-resurrection story in the epilogue to John’s gospel (21:1-14). Luke’s streamlined version of the account not only makes the sons of Zebedee fishing partners with Simon (omitting the mention of Andrew), but also changes the focus of the stories. Mark’s gospel is focused on the immediacy of the response. Matthew’s gospel is focused on the companionship that supports the evangelization effort. Luke’s gospel prefers the amazement of all when Simon Peter fills two boats with fish and declares his sinfulness before Jesus, who, after removing his fear, tells him that he will be catching people. In other words, the focus is on the catch.

A person on mission has but one focus—the catch. However, the story is not about the catch made by Simon Peter; he is but the instrument for the catch. The story is about being a vehicle for the catch, letting God work through one in order to catch people. Then, a person realizes that he or she is not worthy of such use, of such a call. Simon recognizes his sinful state, and Jesus tells him that God can work miracles through him despite his unworthiness.

What was true for Peter, James, and John is also true for people today. The call to mission includes amazement at what God does through sinful or unworthy apostles. Not cutting off another driver in traffic may be the opportunity for God to work through a person. Visiting a friend in the hospital and praying with him or her may be the way God catches that one. Teachers are always catching students—hopefully studying—and who can say that God is not fishing for young lives through those who educate them? If one feels amazed, he or she can be assured that people have been caught by God. All one can do is keep following Jesus.

JOURNAL/MEDITATION: How have you been an instrument for God to catch people?

PRAYER: Lord, I am a sinful person, unworthy of the call you have entrusted to me. As I kneel in prayer before you, I trust that you will guide my boat and my net to those you have chosen to catch. Grant this through your Son, Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Tax Collector

Wednesday of Holy Week



SCRIPTURE: “Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him” (Mark 2:13-14).

REFLECTION: Besides the call narratives of Peter and Andrew and James and John, there is the call of Levi, a very short story about a tax collector invited to follow Jesus. The author of Matthew’s gospel alters the story he found in Mark’s gospel by omitting the detail of Jesus walking by the sea, changing the name of the tax collector from Levi to Matthew, and omitting his father’s name. The author of Luke’s gospel also omits the detail of Jesus walking by the sea, keeps his name as Levi, and adds that he left everything to follow Jesus.

Besides being a very short call story, the amazing note about the call of Levi (Matthew) is that he is a tax collector. At the time of Jesus, a tax collector was a Jew who worked for the Roman occupation forces in Palestine. The Romans didn’t care how the tax collector gathered the amount he had agreed to pay the occupiers, nor did they concern themselves with how much he gathered. The way the tax collector made his living was by raising the amount of the tax set by the Romans and pocketing the difference. There was nothing to keep a tax collector from making a lot of money off of his fellow Jews. Thus, from a Jewish perspective, a tax collector was a much despised man.

However, Jesus calls Levi (Matthew) to follow him, and a tax collector joins Jesus' group of disciples. Jesus' call of Levi (Matthew) illustrates a theme that runs through the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament): God's choice is not always a human choice. God chose Moses, a murderer, but humans would not have picked him. God chose David, a shepherd boy, but not even his father, Jesse, would have chosen him. No one is worthy of God's call, but that doesn't keep God or Jesus from calling.

JOURNAL/MEDITATION: In what ways are you like Levi (Matthew), unworthy of God's call?

PRAYER: You look into the heart, almighty God, whereas I see only with my eyes. Give me the ability to see what you see in that tax collector who follows your Son, Jesus Christ. He lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Called by Lot

Holy Thursday



SCRIPTURE: Peter said to the believers, “[O]ne of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.’ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed . . . And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:21-24, 26).

REFLECTION: The Acts of the Apostles is the companion volume to Luke’s gospel. In other words, Luke’s gospel is the first volume of a two-volume work, and the Acts of the Apostles is volume two. One characteristic displayed in both books is that whatever Jesus did in the gospel, the apostles, especially Peter and Paul, do in the Acts. Jesus called twelve apostles in Luke’s gospel; the apostles called Matthias in the Acts to replace Judas, who, according to the Acts, fell headlong into a field and “burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.”

Matthias is chosen by casting lots. The name, or initial, of each candidate is written on a stone and put in a jar. The jar is shaken until one stone falls out. This procedure is called divining, determining the will of God. While it may seem strange to people today—we would want to see a resume and conduct an interview—it was a normal practice by ancient people. Once Matthias is called, the Jewish Pentecost occurs, and Matthias is never heard of again in the Acts of the Apostles.

His sole function is to fill the twelfth position—vacated by Judas—in the company of apostles.

Sometimes that is all that is needed for mission. A position needs to be filled, and someone is chosen to take the place. A volunteer is needed to answer the parish telephone for two hours, and one person asks another to fill the open spot. A small group of elderly people needs to fill a spot left open by a member's death, and one invites another to join the study group. A group of highway trash collectors calls a friend to join them in their cleanup efforts, and a position is filled. All calls do not have to be glorious or fascinating. Some occur by lot; some because one makes a telephone call.

JOURNAL/MEDITATION: Whom do you know answered the call to be one among others like Matthias did?

PRAYER: Lord, you know everyone's heart. When I need to call others, show me whom you have chosen to serve you. I ask this in the name of Jesus, my Lord. Amen.