
"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 505

our mission spirituality: 'in the spirit of Cenacle' [III]

...The cenacle scene tells us that all those who were present in that upper room without any discrimination felt the effect of the Holy Spirit – Mary, the apostles, the other women and brothers of Jesus.

In turn they all became persons on mission.

In fact anyone who comes into contact with God cannot but be a person on mission.

This is not only true of those whom God *formally* called, like Samuel, Moses, the prophets and the apostles. The very encounter of God with a person, *even without any formal and concrete commission*, is reason enough for the person to stir into some kind of "missionary" action.

- The Gerasene demoniac, for instance, experienced his meeting with Jesus as a real liberation from his personal insulation and social isolation. In the grip of his experience he begged him then and there to be allowed to stay with him, which meant in the circumstances that he was all eager to become part of the hand of the twelve in their Galilean mission. Jesus denied him that happiness, but still enlightened him on his own personal mission by saying "Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you" (Mk 5:19).

In obedient fulfilment of Jesus' command, he went off happily and began his mission at home, spreading his new-found health and happiness and freedom and liberation, all owing to the authoritative action of Jesus in his life. His mission did not take its origin or effect primarily because of what Jesus asked him to perform, but because of what he made him undergo and experience in his life situation.



- The Samaritan woman of Sychar, too, in her bold and spontaneous breakthrough into her neighbourhood after her encounter with Jesus, comes across as a lovable missionary character. Unlike the Gerasene man, the Samaritan woman did not even hear from Jesus any word about her possible mission at home; but her experience of coming to herself, of coming to light and of coming to life in the presence of Jesus, could not be kept to herself but had to be shared with others by virtue of its intrinsic dynamism. Her soul-shaking personal experience was affecting her so intensely and interiorly that she was no more her old outcast self, but a new human being

altogether; and so in her new being she could not conceive of what had happened to her in her encounter with Jesus merely in terms of her little exclusive private womanly self. She had perforce to look on her spiritual and radiant event as having meaning for others too.

And how right she was! With the sureness of her female instinct, without any thought about how she would be received by her townsfolk who had kept her out of their horizon, she dared reach out to them with her soul-stirring story and walked them to Jesus to have their own experience of him. If, as Jesus himself said, no prophet or missionary was ever accepted in his own country, the happy Samaritan woman from Sychar proved to be a blessed exception to the rule.

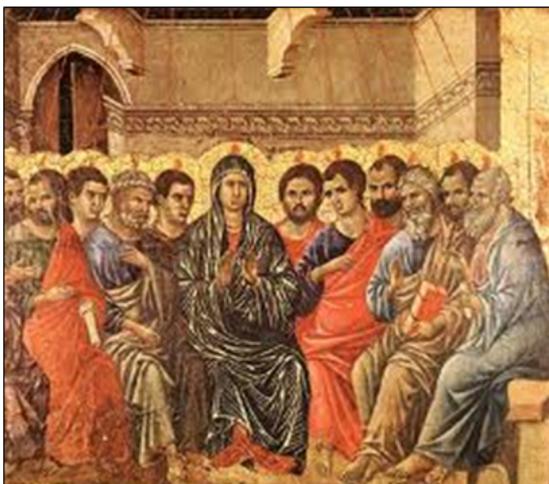


Is it about these informally-called apostles that Pallotti wrote:

“We must imitate Jesus Christ who is the Apostle of the Eternal Father. Therefore, the life of Jesus Christ which is His apostolate ought to be the model of apostolate for everyone. As all are called, even obliged to imitate Jesus Christ, so all in proportion to their condition and state in life, are called to the apostolate”.

The tower of Babel stands as an antithesis to the cenacle. There men were on an arrogant mission of their own to build a tower for themselves, a tower the top of which reached the heavens, God’s throne. The end result of this mission was simply confusion and division among humankind. However, at Pentecost the walls erected by human pride were burnt and blown away by the fire and wind of God bringing a unity that bridged the barriers of language, nationality and culture. The Cenacle thus stands for the final goal and end of Jesus mission when the whole human community would in the words of Isaiah say, “come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths”, thus constituting the final Cenacle.

This was also a dream and prayer of Pallotti, “That there may be one flock and one shepherd.” The Cenacle does indeed eke us to dream of a global Cenacle. But we shouldn’t imagine that this Cenacle would seat people in the upper room doing away with all their differences. Rather in this Cenacle people would have their hearts as wide as God’s so that they would consider the differences as wealth in the global community rather than walls that divide. “What God has united, let no man put asunder.”



In the missionary history of the Pallottines, the Cenacle is not an archaeological upper room lost in history with the house of which it was a part; nor is it simply a remembered space which recedes further and further into the past thereby losing its spiritual charge. On the contrary, for every generation of Pallottines the Cenacle forever is a living space in which they gather together after the manner of their founder to meet the Risen Lord and together with Mary and the Apostles wait for the Holy Spirit to be anointed and sent out as zealous apostles.

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reflections of a nurse

Working as a nurse, especially in a hospital operating theatre or intensive care unit can be a memorable experience for anybody in the nursing profession. I consider it one of the nobler professions – rather apostolates! – because it is a way of participating in the saving and healing action of God. The gospels are full of narratives of healing on the part of Jesus, because it was his mission to offer the fullness of life to all who came in contact with him. The commitment of St Vincent Pallotti to the healing ministry is well known to all. He even risked his very life on several occasions in order to become “health to the sick”. This experience gains an added faith dimension when the nurse in question is a religious sister like myself – a *Pallottine* religious sister in this case.

Working as a nurse, particularly in the context above, demands many hours of dedicated, fast and intensive activity performed with the greatest concentration and professionalism. We are standing – if not running – practically the whole time. The doctors performing the operations have to be supplied with all the necessary equipment in time. Though they are used to these activities on a day to day basis, there is often little margin for error. Errors, if fatal, will not go unaccounted for, as they did in the past. So that brings even additional pressure on the entire team.



Going beyond the activities themselves, I have often felt that human life always hangs by a thread. From the time a patient is put on anaesthesia until waking again, he/she seems to take flight into eternity, a real death experience for sure. Every precaution is taken for a safe return to life but it cannot be denied that one has slept and so was not among the living! Happily, in most cases, the patient comes back to life with better health and vitality. As Psalm 23:4 reassures us: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”.

A second aspect that has often struck me is one’s total dependence on others especially in such moments. As a child we start off completely dependent on others and we conclude our lives in the same way. Nobody has ever walked down to his own grave! While there is a space for



healthy independence at certain stage in everyone's life basically we remain always dependent on others. Just as an uncared for infant can die, a patient on an operation table or in the intensive care unit can also die if he or she is deprived of the vital supplies of life. This reality of total dependence is expressed by the word "nothingness" by our founder, St Vincent Pallotti.

I remember a particular experience that touched me profoundly. Once a Supreme Court judge was admitted to our hospital, a very powerful man who was even given special protection. He had advanced cancer and life was slowly ebbing away from him. As the days passed, he lost not only health but also the will to live. From a position of power he became really powerless like a child. He demanded every gesture of care and attention. "Vanity of vanities", said the Preacher, "vanity of vanities; all is vanity" – how true these words of the Scripture are!

On another occasion, a powerful politician was in a critical condition and he continued to utter: "I want to live longer with my child!"



A nurse exposed to all these life and death experiences on a daily basis cannot go untouched by them. What is important is that they contribute to her own human growth and spiritual integration.

In short, working as a nurse, especially assisting at crucial life-saving interventions, can truly be a faith-experience. We learn the true meaning of life, of suffering and even of death. At times our human efforts can extend the life-span of a person by a few years but beyond that every medical doctor is impotent. How nice it would be when we can live healthy! How nice it would be when we can live with the constant awareness that we need God and others always! How foolish it would be when we boast of our self-sufficiency and challenge the Creator of life himself:

"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!"

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