

Homily  
August 13, 2023  
20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Fr. Giltus Mathias, CP  
25:15 – 42:40

I'd hoped you wouldn't mind if I came down to talk to you. I figured out this is the brightest spot in the church. I don't want you to miss me. I promise I will be very, very brief. If you don't believe me here are my notes for the homily this morning (holding up a small business card.)

Before I begin, I just want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the archdiocesan mission office, who invited me to experience the life of the faith community here at Our Lady of Lourdes, as well as inviting you to share with you about the Passionist Missions. Also, I'd like to acknowledge and thank your pastor, Fr Rick. He's been an amazing and a very warm host. In fact, he took me out for dinner last night at the Mediterranean restaurant. And if you want to know what is the best food in that restaurant, he's the person to go to.

But I also feel that I owe you all a big sentiment of gratitude. I'll tell you why. I myself was trained by the Passionist Missionaries from the United States of America, in India, through the generosity of so many wonderful people like you. People who live here in the United States. If not for the generosity of people like you, maybe I and other young people like me would not have had an opportunity to discern our vocation to the religious life as Passionists and as priests. – I just want to take this opportunity to thank you all because I firmly believe "I am – because of you all." If you ever wondered what happens to all the donations that you're making to the missions, look what you have done: a tall, dark and a handsome priest. (Laughter) Very well done! Good job!

Currently I live Australia, Sydney. And the Passionists in Australia care for missions in Viet Nam as well as Papua New Guinea. I'm going to talk to you a little bit about the missions in Papua, New Guinea because that's the reason I was invited by the diocese to do so.

Three weeks ago, I was traveling from Sydney, Australia, to come to the United States and I had a non-stop flight from Sydney to Los Angeles. On the plane, there was a young girl in her early or mid-twenties who came and sat next to me. And it didn't take too long for me to realize that she was an extrovert. Before I could say anything, she started introducing herself. And she was telling me who she was and what she was doing, what she was doing in Australia. She told me she was actually from New York, in the United States and she was working for an international company, which had branches in different parts of the world. She was chosen among many other young people, as a person of talent to represent her company for an international conference in Australia. That's what had brought her to Australia, where she had been for two weeks. From the minute she hopped into the plane in New York to the moment she got to New York, she began to tell me every tiny detail of everything that she did.

And without even realizing it, about an hour and a half has passed since we had taken off and she had not given me even one fraction of a second to respond to what she was saying, nor to even say a hello. Finally, when she realized it, she said, "Oh. I am sorry. What about you? Who are you?"

I knew it was my turn. I was probably not going to get another chance the whole rest of the trip. And I wanted to make the best use of my chance. I told her that I was really delighted. I congratulated her, being a young person at the beginning of her career, something like this was amazing.

But what a coincidence. I work for an international company, as well. ("Really!?" ) You know we have branches in every corner of the world that you can possibly think about. She was intrigued. She wanted to know more about it. What do you guys do?

I told her that we do everything that you can possibly imagine. We are in education: nurseries and kindergartens, schools, high schools, colleges, universities. We are in the medical fields: dispensaries, hospitals, medical colleges, advanced research centers. We do social outreach work. We have orphanages, homes for the destitute, homes for homeless people, homes for the elderly. We really take care of human needs from birth to death. To be precise, even beyond death.

She was impressed.

She said she'd never heard of this company. She asked what this company was called.

I told her that this company is called the Catholic Church. (Laughter.) Well. That was the end of the conversation for the rest of the trip.

But isn't that the reality? Sometimes we have the luxury of coming to a beautiful space like this week after week, or as often as we wish. We tend to forget that we are much larger than this tiny space here, as the Catholic Church. You know, I believe that each time we come together in the space like this, we really hold each other in our own needs – some of the needs that we come here with. At the same time, it's important for us to pause, acknowledge and to realize the millions and millions of people across the world, who have the same faith as we do – who have the same share in the Body and Blood of Christ that we take part in.

My presence here, or any priest that visits here, it is an opportunity to open ourselves to the reality of the enormity of who we are as a Christian community that exists beyond these four walls.

In the Gospel today, we see the famous story of Jesus inviting Peter to walk on water. And all of a sudden, Peter stumbles. Immediately, Jesus reaches out, takes his hand, and pulls him up. A beautiful reminder for us, how he's saying that we stumble in our own life at times, especially in our faith journey, that we never have to be afraid because Jesus is always trying to reach out to us. He's holding our hands, pulling us out of the waters, to keep us from drowning.

And responding to a need for the missions across the world is our way of reaching out our hands, holding someone who is stumbling and pulling them out of the drowning water.

Talking about Papua, New Guinea – if you ever happen to visit the tourist side of Papua, New Guinea (not that tourism is very popular, you understand), it's a very beautiful country. We have a saying, "If you ever find a foreigner in Papua, New Guinea, it could be for only one of three reasons: the person could be a missionary; a missionary; or a misfit."

The tourism side of Papua, New Guinea, says "It's a land with a million journeys." With 850 distinct languages and over 650 ethnic groups and tribal groups, beautiful and colorful traditions and practices. Over 80% of the people live in remote areas, with little or no access at all. It may be the land with a million journeys to be discovered.

Papua, New Guinea is one of the countries with abundant natural resources. It's quite unfortunate, due to the corrupt government and the greed of the multi-national companies off-shore, who are interested in the natural resources that are available, especially in the wooded areas, are going deeper into the areas to disturb the natural or normal habitations of these tribal groups, pushing them out of their normal areas of habitation.

Especially the young people are going to urban areas. With no education, with no life skills to survive in an urban setting, the option left for these young people is to join a gang and to become part and parcel of the crime and the violence that is there. This makes this one of the most dangerous countries in which to live.

It's dangerous especially for women. Recent reports say that 70% of the women, and girls as young as five years old have been raped, or have been a victim of gang rape. Another challenging thing about Papua New Guinea is maybe due to the lack of exposure is that their responses to differences in life are very shocking. For example, when you think

about people born with disabilities, they do not have a place in society. It's based on "survival of the fittest." For example, a child born with disabilities is considered a disgrace to the family. Either they are thrown out of society, or they are completely gotten rid of.

So the Passionist Mission in Papua New Guinea was begun in 1955 by missionaries from Australia, towards the northwestern region of the country. And soon, less than five years, the whole region formed into a diocese called Darcy Savournimau, administered by the Passionist Missionary stem cells. You know the Passionist missionaries from the main base would go out into the deeper bush areas. Most of the journeys are on foot for hours, reaching out to people with basic education, basic medical needs, as well as the pastoral care of those people.

We also have a disability center in the main base where we bring children who are born with disabilities and have been thrown out of the society and give them the medical attention that is needed. And if some of their disabilities can be corrected with major medical intervention, then they are brought to Australia for surgery. Then they are brought back to their own country to be integrated into their own society. This center also provides us a space for safety for families, especially women who come out of the bush into the urban areas. Providing assistance for their needs so they won't end up becoming another number in the survey of being a victim of rape or gang rape.

Our other mission is actually in the southern part of the country in the city called Port Moresby, which is a capital city where we operate a parish church like this. It is the largest parish in the entire country, where the Passionist missionaries not only take care of the pastoral needs of the parishioners, but at the same time work among the young people in the streets, providing basic education, providing them the basic life skills to survive in an urban setting. The goal is to keep them from becoming another person breeding violence, becoming a part of the crime that is very prevalent in the country. We teach them how to be better citizens.

We also have a formation center where we train young indigenous men who are interested in discerning a vocation to religious life or priesthood, or to become a missionary. We've been fortunate so far. We have four Passionist priests from the indigenous men and there are about eight of them in the discernment program.

Whenever a missionary comes here, we all know – there's another missionary here talking about their life, how miserable their life is and then they just want to get some dollars and then leave the place. But beyond those few dollars that you might drop every year for the mission causes – first of all I wanted to invite you to remember and to pray for the missionaries, as well as the people that they serve.

Practicing what we believe is the luxury in this part of the world. We forget to understand to what extent people have to go practice what they believe. So please, please do remember the missionaries, as well as the people they serve – not only the Passionist missions, missions across the world.

Secondly, one of the heartbreaking things for me personally is that whenever I visit this part of the world is the absence of so many young people in the pews in your churches. I believe it's very important for us to talk about Mission and the Missionary Life of the Church to younger people, to children, to ignite their curiosity to know how faith is lived and practiced in other parts of the world. If at all they have to grow up in appreciation of what we do here on a weekly basis, I think they need to know that the missionary side of the life of the Church in a very tangible way, brings faith to them.

So, if possible, maybe a week or a month's experience in Mission areas is good. But please, talk to them about missions and the missionary life of the Church.

And thirdly, if possible, extend your hand in generosity so that we can continue to do the work that we do. So, you might find an envelope on your pews like this, with the "Passionist PNG Fund." You can just probably put a donation that you have and drop it in a normal regular collection that happens here. If you think you are not prepared for a

donation today, it's okay. You can take one of these home and probably bring it back to the Parish Office at your own convenience.

In return what we can do is definitely offer our own prayers. Especially Passionist Monasteries in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and in Viet Nam. Maybe through your own generosity God will continue to attend to your own needs, as you struggle through your daily needs, as well.

Maybe we will not be able to change everything in Papua New Guinea. Probably your generosity today might help us to help one young person that comes out of the normal habitat in an urban area to look toward the future with much hope and promise, rather to become another person who ends up becoming part of a gang, breeding violence and crime that happens in the country. Maybe your generosity might help us to help one child born with a disability to know and believe that he or she, too, is created in the image and likeness of God. And that they too, have a place in this world. Maybe your generosity might help us to provide a safe space for another woman who comes out of the bush into the urban area, not to become a victim.

Maybe – who knows? - your generosity might help us train one other indigenous person to be a missionary. Maybe one day right here in this place – I can't promise he'd be as handsome as this one – but definitely a missionary, a priest with a heart. Living with you, experiencing life with you, sharing life with you, building a Church, a community for you, for your children and for your grandchildren, that we all could feel proud and say that we belong to an international company called the Catholic Church. Amen.