

MISSION SUNDAY PASTORAL LETTER 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have called you by your name, says the Lord to us in today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah. The Lord calls us by name, not to have an idle chat, but to send us out. Remember the hymn: Whom shall I send and who will go? It's also from Isaiah. Are you ready and willing to reply in life as in song: 'Here am I, o Lord, send me'?

The Gospel, God's Good News to all creation has a name. The Good News is actually a person, not a mere program or a brilliant idea. The name of the Good News is Jesus. Just as the Father sent him he sends us to go out into the whole world to proclaim the Good News. He is the message. He is the driving force and energy behind the sending.

The pope in his annual Mission Sunday message, urges us not stay behind the closed doors of our churches. Open the doors, says the pope, and go out, taking with you the Good News you have heard, the living person of Jesus. Because you receive him in the Eucharist he lives in you. When you live a life full of virtue and charity He also speaks through you.

Because it is him, and not just some idea he is irresistible. So irresistible was this message in the life of St. Francis that he preached it not only to people, but also to the birds and the animals who sat and listened to him.

Going out means we cannot close the doors of our parish to other parishes and communities, looking after ourselves only. To be in a living communion with the body of Christ means, on a practical level, being one with the Catholic parish down the street or in the next town where "the others" live. Without this kind of communion, we damage our Catholic identity.

Today we have a special second collection. As always, we collect as individual parishes and present it to the pope as a collective gift from our diocese. The pope's Pontifical Mission Societies organise its distribution to different parts of the world where it is needed most. Thank you for last year's collection which came to R20 000.

Remember, God loves a cheerful giver, who not only gives a penny, pound or golden coin, but gives his or her whole body and being for proclaiming the Good News, as did Mary when she became the Mother of Jesus our Lord. After all, we only give to God what belongs to Him: our whole selves. May Mary, Mother of Evangelisation, pray for us.

Go out then; you have an irresistible message to proclaim.

✠ **Francisco de Gouveia**

Bishop of Oudtshoorn