

BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN MEN REVILE YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU

MATTHEW 5:11

Monthly Reflection:

October 2023

"I was roughed up and beaten by some men who wanted to steal the money I had with me. Compared with the joy that I witnessed on the faces of the villagers who heard the Good News of Jesus, the suffering that I experienced on the way was nothing." The above remarks at the end of the evaluation meeting of the one-month mission experience in Uganda by one of the participants brought to my mind the words that Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5:11-12).

Our blessed Lord never promised that spreading the Good News about Him would be an easy affair. Instead, He exhorts us to be of good cheer in the midst of tribulation, for He has overcome the world (cf. Jn 16:33). Does the honour of being a Christ-bearer and the joy of souls experiencing liberation through our missionary ventures outweigh the challenges and burdens of a passionate missionary life?

It was indeed so for Peter and John. "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus" (Acts 5:41-42). The same Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to death had warned them not to speak about Jesus but they boldly and publicly preached Jesus immediately. How!? Why!? Herein lies the essence of 'mission'. A person who has Jesus in his heart cannot but talk about Him. For Peter and John, Jesus had become their first love. His word had become a 'fire in their hearts' as it had for Jeremiah (20:9). Paul, who burned with the same fire would proclaim, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).



Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel for His essence is Love and love pours itself out in self-giving. The self-donation of God would be hampered if it did not flow through us! Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel, for the Church is missionary in nature and our personal identity would thereby find itself truncated from the identity of the Church. As Pope St John Paul II taught, 'In the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith" (RM#2).

Humiliation and persecution were an integral part of the missionary journey of the Church and always will be. This missionary month exhorts us to emulate the early apostles for whom humiliation from the enemies of the truth blossomed into joy through the indwelling Spirit. St. Stephen ignored the stones that were flung at him to gaze at the glory of God. Mother Teresa was spat upon but ignoring that, she lovingly asked alms for the poor.

This missionary month invites us to ponder within our hearts the vitality of our faith that ought to manifest in missionary drives. Is the love of Christ burning within our hearts? Does the fear of insults and humiliation hold us back from being who we are? Let us pray that a true missionary conversion may spread across the movement beginning with each one of us. Mission 2033 can be a trigger to discover/rediscovers our missionary identity as a true Catholic and Jesus Youth.

by Santosh Mathew

.....
Santhosh, who lives in Sharjah, UAE with his wife and 4 children is a businessman. He serves as the Coordinator for the African Mission and also as an animator of the Jesus Youth International Council.

