

Salvatorians: apostles in the world
Homily Mother House - Rome, 8 February 2023 Milton
Zonta, SDS

Dear Salvatorians, today is an historic day for us. A day of intense joy that extends throughout the Salvatorian world. We are all united in giving thanks for the growth, development, and fruits of the charism of Blessed Francis Jordan. How beautiful to be here around the relics of our Founder, in communion with Salvatorians from other countries, to celebrate together the official approval of the Salvatorian Laity apostolate in the Church.

We all know how important it was to Blessed Francis Jordan that lay Christians should become "apostles in the world." The Founder having the globe at his table, what he desired for most was to see his spiritual children with evangelizing passion in the most diverse contexts of the world. So, this event of the recognition of the Salvatorian Laity apostolate helps us to rekindle the missionary fire that the Founder wanted to see burning in us. "*May all of you be true apostles of Jesus Christ*", the Blessed Founder often wrote in the letters he sent to the Salvatorians working on the peripheries of the world.

When Francis Jordan was calling, forming, and encouraging people to be apostles, religious and lay, he was not thinking of a work for experts, based on competencies moved by professionals. For the Founder, through the baptismal font, each of us becomes an indispensable collaborator in the task of evangelization. All are missionaries. All called to participate in the apostolic action of the Church. In the first place, as the Founder said, through the witness of our lives and, in the second place, with apostolic actions, each one in his own place, in a Church open to the diversity of charisms and services. In all this, we can affirm that: there is no Salvatorian without mission. Mission is the oxygen of Salvatorian life. Without an apostolic mission, the Salvatorian becomes ill and dies. The central mission of the Salvatorian apostle is to make known Jesus Christ and his message of salvation.

On the other hand, if our mission does not spring from intimacy with the Lord, it easily becomes a purely human work. Perhaps we have all known "missionary works" that astonish people by their greatness and effectiveness, but which speak very little of God's love and have the light of the Gospel extinguished. So, our Salvatorian life, following the example of its Founder, needs to cultivate an intimate union with the Person of Jesus and with the Church in which we are inserted. To have this life it is necessary to return continually to the Word of the Gospel which transforms us inside and orients our life towards the mission.

Enlightened by the words of today's Gospel, I would like to underline here three real surprises with which Jesus sends his disciples on mission. I believe that it is good for us to meditate on these three missionary surprises, which are also addressed to each one of us in order to respond to our Salvatorian vocation.

The first surprise is the equipment. To go on mission to unknown places we need to take several things with us, some of which are absolutely very essential. Jesus, on the other hand, does not say what to take, but what not to take: "*Take no bag, no sack, no sandals*" (v. 4). Practically nothing: no baggage, no security, no help. We often think that our apostolic initiatives do not work well because we lack structures, we lack money, we lack means. This is not the way Jesus thought, nor is it the way Francis Jordan thought.

Perhaps we should not lose sight of, nor forget, the beginnings of the Salvatorian mission in various parts of the world. Francis Jordan insisted that we should not rely too much on riches. The more free and simple, small and humble, the more the Holy Spirit guides the mission and the more convincing and evangelizing our witness will be. Mission - let us remember - does not require great speeches, but few words and much witness.

Francis Jordan sent out the first Salvatorians in small groups, because as the Gospel says, mission is done in communion. This is curious: *"Jesus sent them out two by two"* (Lc. 1), says the Gospel. Not alone, not on their own, always with a colleague at their side. Never without the colleague, because there is no mission without communion. So, we can ask ourselves: as Salvatorians, do we think more about what is lacking in our works, or do we think about reaching out to more of the people to whom we are sent and whom we have at our disposal?

The second surprise of mission is the message. It is quite logical to think that, for those who wish to make known Jesus Christ, they must learn what to say, study the contents carefully, prepare convincing and well-articulated speeches. This is true, we all have to do it. On the other hand, Jesus only gives the disciples two sentences. The first one even seems superfluous, since it is a greeting: *"In whatever house you enter, first say: Peace to this household"* (Lc. 5). A disciple of Jesus is always a bearer of peace. Where there are divisions and wars, the Salvatorian speaks of the "Prince of Peace". The Salvatorian is a witness of reconciliation and a bearer of the peace of Jesus Christ. In the words of Francis Jordan, the Salvatorian is a *"Person of God – envoy of Jesus Christ - angel of Peace"*. (DE 1, 160).

After the greeting of peace, the rest of Jesus' message to the disciples is reduced to the few words he repeats twice: *"The Kingdom of God is at hand for you [...] The Kingdom of God is at hand"* (Lc. 9,11). To proclaim the nearness of God, that is the style of Jesus. He made everyone see the nearness, the compassion and the tenderness of God. For us Salvatorians it is about proclaiming the closeness of the Living and True God. That is what is essential. That in Jesus Christ we know that God is near and watches over us like a Father and that we are all brothers and sisters.

The third surprise of the mission: Jesus asks his own to go into the world "like lambs among wolves" (Lc. 3). This might seem that Christ is asking us to live a naïve lifestyle, without any cleverness. This is not what mission is about. What Jesus is asking of us is to fight against all the supremacy and arrogance, voracity, and possession. The person who lives like a lamb does not attack, is not voracious: he stays in the flock, with others, and finds security in his Shepherd, not in force, not in arrogance, not in the greed for money and possessions that causes so much harm.

To this we remember Francis Jordan who said: *"far be it from me to glory save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ"* (DE 1, 71). Countless times he asks us to look to the Shepherd, to the Lamb of God, to Jesus who overcame the world on the cross. Let us ask the Lord to help us to be Salvatorians who have Jesus as their reference point for life and mission. Moreover, the missionary must be prepared for rejection. It is not a prospect that should discourage us. Nor did it discourage the disciples sent by Jesus or the missionaries sent by the Blessed Founder, who, stripped of everything, went to the most distant places to make Known Jesus and his message of salvation.

Dear Salvatorians, may these words of the Gospel that we meditate on this day of thanksgiving rekindle in us the fire of the Salvatorian mission. Let us not forget that the life of those who join the work of Blessed Francis Jordan is the apostolic missionary life. The church and the world need us religious and lay Salvatorians who are passionate about witnessing to Jesus Christ in all places and environments. The identity of the Salvatorian Family is to evangelize!

Many years passed before Francis Jordan was able to see part of his apostolic work approved by the Church. After all the sufferings and difficulties, how great would be his joy to see today the Salvatorian Laity apostolate also recognized! Even more so, that an immense number of lay Christians are active in various apostolates and in different cultural contexts of the world.

I would therefore like to thank you here who represent the International Community of the Divine Saviour (ICDS). Thank you for the diversity of your apostolates and for your commitment to communion and mission with us religious men and women. Now all the more reason the Church expects us - religious and laity - to be witnesses to the charism of helping to make Jesus Christ known to all, by all means and in all places. May our witness have a character of wholeness, communion, and collaboration. May the problems and difficulties, which are always many, not frighten us and may we succeed in moving forward with confidence in Divine Providence, faithful to the apostolic vision of Blessed Francis Jordan.

Dear Salvatorians, let us continue to dream of the Salvatorian Family totally committed to the mission and bearing fruits of its charism and service in the Church. May Blessed Francis Mary of the Cross and Blessed Mary of the Apostles, together with so many religious and lay people who preceded us, accompany us on the path of fidelity to the charism we have received. And *"May Almighty God Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless us, sanctify us, strengthen and multiply us like the sands of the sea and the stars of heavens until the end of time. Amen.* (DE I, 189).