

## 14C

*A young man, when interviewed, said that he was looking for guidance from the Lord as to where he should go to work as a missionary. When considering it deeply one day whilst out walking, a van passed up the road with Brazil Nuts written in big colourful letters across it. That was it – the Lord wanted him to go to Brazil. The sceptical interviewer then asked: ‘What would you have done if the van had Mars Bar written across it?’*

Judging by today’s gospel, a missionary vocation calls for a little less naivety than our young friend had.

On Wednesday we celebrated the feast of SS Peter and Paul and during the homily I quoted Blessed Pope Paul VI as saying that the church exists in order to be missionary.

Today we find Our Lord sending 72 disciples out on a mission. When we talk about the missions, what first springs to mind are all those men and women who go overseas to establish the Church and set up mission stations in other lands and cultures. More often than not, especially in Africa, these mission stations will include a church, a school, a dispensary, sometimes a hospital and even a mill for grinding corn. Worldwide, the Catholic Church runs over five thousand hospitals and ten thousand orphanages not to mention thousands upon thousands of schools.

If the Catholic Church were to cease operations especially in a lot of underdeveloped countries, the situation for its people would be catastrophic as far as medical, educational, spiritual and even practical needs of its people were concerned. Strange how the secular press, which is often hostile towards the church, never mentions these things.

We can conclude from the above that mission is not just about preaching a gospel message of eternal salvation, which, of course it is, but also concerns itself with people’s quality of life in the here and now. The salvation of our souls often works in

tandem with the salvation of our bodies and if our bodies are undernourished or diseased or we are without basic education we cannot operate properly. We could call this a more 'holistic' approach to missionary work. *One little seven year old African boy was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. He replied, "alive". That's where missionary work begins.*

We can talk about heaven until the cows come home but it will probably be the last thing on the mind of a person who goes to bed hungry every night as a lot do. For them heaven is a square meal every day. Jesus, in sending out the 72, advised them to eat what was set before them and not overindulge. The problem with a lot of people in our part of the world is that we over-eat and drink while others go hungry.

Missionary work falls within the scope of every Christian's vocation. On the day of reckoning Our Lord will ask us if we fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, and welcomed the unwanted. He won't ask us how many spiritual 'highs' we've had. But then again converting love into action is in itself a most uplifting spiritual experience.

At the end of today's gospel Jesus says that the missionaries who bring peace to the troubled and healing to the sick are very close to the Kingdom of God. This will ensure that one day they will possess it eternally.

.