Spirituality
Vatican
Francis, the comic strip
Dr. Tom Catena, a Catholic lay missionary from the United States, examines a patient during

Dr. Tom Catena, a Catholic lay missionary from the United States, examines a patient during rounds in late April at the Mother of Mercy Hospital in Gidel, a village in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan. June 9, 2019 (CNS photo/Paul Jeffrey)

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January 6, 2022
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Living out and proclaiming the Gospel are inseparable aspects at the heart of an authentically Christian life and witness, Pope Francis said in his message for World Mission Sunday.

"Every Christian is called to be a missionary and witness to Christ. And the church, the community of Christ's disciples, has no other mission than that of bringing the Gospel to the entire world by bearing witness to Christ," the pope wrote in his message for the celebration, which will be held Oct. 23.

The theme chosen for the 2022 celebration is taken from the Acts of the Apostles: "You will be my witnesses." The Vatican released the pope's message Jan. 6.

In his message, the pope reflected on three key "foundations of the life and mission of every disciple," beginning with the call to bear witness to Christ.

While all who are baptized are called to evangelize, the pope said the mission is carried out in communion with the church and not on "one's own initiative."

"Indeed, it was no coincidence that the Lord Jesus sent his disciples out on mission in pairs; the witness of Christians to Christ is primarily communitarian in nature," the pope wrote. "Hence, in carrying out the mission, the presence of a community, regardless of its size, is of fundamental importance."

Furthermore, he added, those who follow Jesus are called not only to proclaim the Gospel, but to bear witness to it by the way their live their lives.

"Missionaries of Christ are not sent to communicate themselves, to exhibit their persuasive qualities and abilities or their managerial skills," he said. "The example of a Christian life and the proclamation of Christ are inseparable. One is at the service of the other. They are the two lungs with which any community must breathe if it is to be missionary."

Jesus sent and continues to send his disciples out to evangelize the whole world, the pope said, and that has and continues to involve bearing witness to Christ even amid persecution.

"Due to religious persecution and situations of war and violence, many Christians are forced to flee from their homelands to other countries. We are grateful to these brothers and sisters who do not remain locked in their own suffering but bear witness to Christ and to the love of God in the countries that accept them," the wrote.

Catholics must acknowledge how "the presence of faithful of various nationalities enriches the face of parishes and makes them more universal, more Catholic," he said. "Consequently, the pastoral care of migrants should be valued as an important missionary activity that can also help the local faithful to rediscover the joy of the Christian faith they have received."

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"Christ's church will continue to 'go forth' toward new geographical, social and existential horizons, toward 'borderline' places and human situations, in order to bear witness to Christ and his love to men and women of every people, culture and social status," he wrote.

Lastly, the pope said the call to bear witness must be "strengthened and guided by the Spirit," especially through prayer "when we feel tired, unmotivated or confused."

"Let me emphasize once again that prayer plays a fundamental role in the missionary life, for it allows us to be refreshed and strengthened by the Spirit as the inexhaustible divine source of renewed energy and joy in sharing Christ's life with others," he wrote.

Recalling the example of lay and religious men and women who tirelessly worked to promote evangelization, Pope Francis said that "the same Spirit who guides the universal church also inspires ordinary men and women for extraordinary missions."

"I continue to dream of a completely missionary church, and a new era of missionary activity among Christian communities," the pope wrote. "Indeed, would that all of us in the church were what we already are by virtue of baptism: prophets, witnesses, missionaries of the Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to the ends of the earth!"