

HCEM V: "With Hearts on Fire!"

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San Pedro Center
Winter Park, Florida



Basil Moreau Lecture

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∞ A Spirituality of Mission ∞

∞ Zeal for Mission:
Guidance from Basil Moreau and the Scriptures He Considered Most
Important ∞

Holy Cross Educational Ministries
Notre Dame, Indiana

"Educating Mind and Heart"

A SPIRITUALITY OF MISSION

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I'm really happy to be here and to have this opportunity to share with you about our mission as disciples of Jesus and the family of Holy Cross.

But ... as I begin, I want to put two facts of my personal biography in clear focus: First, except for my seminary education at Notre Dame I never attended a Holy Cross School, and neither have I worked in one. Indeed, again except for a few years back in the late seventies teaching in a new, very rudimentary national seminary in northern Uganda, I have never been a classroom teacher or worked in the administration of any school. So if experience in schools, and particularly in Holy Cross schools, is to inform and enhance our meditation this morning, it will be because you have brought that experience with you into this room and will allow it to interact with what I share. I hope you'll do that. Second, though I've been a Holy Cross religious for 38 years, I cannot call myself a serious student of the writings of Basil Moreau. Many of you have culled our founder's words for guidance in ministry much more than I, and for your reflections – and those of others – which Tom has gathered together in the *Educating Minds and Hearts* sourcebook, I'm grateful. I've enjoyed reading them, and I can't help but think they are producing good fruit for the formation of our schools in the spirit of Moreau and Holy Cross. But I won't be seeking to break open Moreau's writings for more insights this morning. Rather what I offer will come from two main sources: (1) my experience of life and ministry – mostly in rural and urban parish work – as a member of the family of Moreau in East Africa; (2) my attempts to prayerfully ponder, in light of that experience, what Moreau considered the central scripture texts in which his family should be formed – the Sermon on the Mount and the Last Discourse.

I'd like to begin this reflection, on the meaning and spirituality of mission, with a story – it's a true story about a missionary named Mwangi.

Dandora is a low-income housing project on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya. Most, I guess, would call it a slum. It was planned to offer housing to 40,000 but now it is home to more than 200,000 mostly young, unemployed or very underemployed poor people of many languages and diverse ethnic, tribal backgrounds. Holy Cross has pastoral responsibility for the parish there.

Mwangi was nine or ten years old in 1997 when I came to know him. His family lived in a mud and cardboard shelter on the bank of a smelly, polluted river adjacent to Dandora, but because they had no money for food, Mwangi and his siblings scavenged the city dump, located in Dandora, whenever he was hungry. Soon, everyone in Dandora seemed to know Mwangi. He was a cute kid, lively and cheerful. He often rode the buses of Dandora from one end to the other just for fun, talking with people in his bright smart-alecky way to pass the time (the bus drivers never made him pay – he knew them all), and he often popped-in at the parish center to greet and to check if any leftovers from parish feasts or weddings might be available.

By 1997, after many years as pastor, I was no longer living in Dandora but was assigned to our formation house on the other side of Nairobi, but each Wednesday I would make the 45 minute bus trip across town to assist there, helping with the accounts, visiting the sick, and listening to the many who came each day to the center with their problems and needs. The day there would end with Mass at 6:30 p.m. and then I'd get on the bus for the ride back across town to home.

One Wednesday, I was feeling particularly down as I got on that bus. It had been one of those days when nothing seemed to go right, when, in my view, I hadn't been able to help anyone, when I'd lost my patience and temper twice with very needy people who were persistent when I said I just couldn't help, when just listening didn't seem to be enough. Anyway, I found a seat and hung my head, tired and feeling a bit sorry for myself, wondering what I was doing there anyway. After a couple of stops, Mwangi got on. He greeted me in his usual friendly way and I imagine I grunted a return greeting but I really didn't pay him any attention. Mwangi went to the back of the bus. Less than a minute later I heard singing, in English, coming from the back: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; we are weak but he is strong" The other people on the bus turned in surprise – no-one had heard Mwangi speak in English before (I'm guessing he learned the song in one of the many Pentecostal-style tent assemblies that thrive in the slums of Nairobi), and one of them asked him, "Mwangi, what are you doing? Why are you singing in English?" Mwangi answered in Swahili: "Namwimbie huyo mzungu! I'm singing for that white man! Nahitaji! He needs it!" The whole bus load of people began laughing, and I with them. He was right. It was exactly what I needed.

There is much of importance about mission in this story, I think: (1) The story shows mission as the responsibility of every believer – not the special call of a few international travelers; (2) It shows that the distinction between receivers and givers in mission (between mission-sending and mission-receiving) is everywhere blurred – mutuality is the norm; (3) It illustrates how mission always involves (a) a willingness to see from the perspective of another, (b) an enlargement of the heart in compassion for the other, and (c) the courage to act in love of the other.

St. John of the Cross describes mission this way: "When there is no love, put love, and you will find love."¹ That's what Mwangi did! He noticed that I was down (there were many others on the bus who didn't!); he cared (this to me is even more remarkable – many see without really caring); he acted, doing what he could to bring healing. And in doing so he filled the bus, and me, with hopefulness and joy. Jesus loves me this I know...that conviction renewed was the fruit of his mission.

In speaking about mission, we must begin with God. One commentator on John Paul's 1990 encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer* emphasized that the central teaching of that document can be found in its title: It is not our mission we are concerned with here! It's the mission of our Redeemer, our God. The mission that we want to share in, and help others to share in, is not, in the first place, our mission or the mission of the church or the mission of Holy Cross. It is the mission of God as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. That's what we want to be connected with! That's what we want our parishioners, faculty and students to be connected with! In his beautiful prayer on mission Archbishop Romero points us toward the priority of God's mission when he says: "We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs!"² And he rejoices in

¹ See the poem *The Flower of Love* by Jessica Powers, page 8.

² *This is What We are About*, by Oscar Romero, page 8.

this: It means we don't have to do everything, and, he says, that frees us to do something, and do it very well! The mission is God's, not ours. And that is good, freeing news. Our mission must be rooted in God's mission, or it is only self-promotion.

What does this mission of God look like? How can we describe it?

St. Bonaventure speaks of God as "diffusive goodness; goodness diffused." St. John simply names God "Love," and as we all know, genuine love cannot, and does not, sit comfortable, wrapped up in self! Love, by its very nature, stretches toward the other. Our doctrine of Trinity is about this stretching kind of love, it's about mission. Catherine LaCugna entitled her now classic book on the Trinity *God For Us!* To be in mission is to be for another. Trinity is goodness diffused for us, it is love over-flowing for us. Our God is a God-in-mission, sending the Son, sending the Spirit to, as our traditional prayer has it, renew the face of the earth.

Our best understanding of what God-in-mission looks like is gained, of course, by gazing at Jesus. And when we look at him what do we see? We see that God's mission is to seek out the lost, to forgive the sinner, to touch the untouchable, to teach the truth, to embrace the leper, to bless the children, to empower women, to learn from foreigners, to heal the sick, to love the enemy, to include the excluded, to sacrifice self for others ... the list could go on, but what is consistent in this list, I think, is that in the life and teaching of Jesus, God's mission emerges as a reaching out, a kind of stretching exercise, an enlargement of the heart, a moving beyond the normal, expected and accepted boundaries of our love toward those outside, the different, the excluded, the stranger. Mission in the image of Jesus is love thrusting outward, breaking down the barriers of narrowness, comfort, and prejudice that live within each of us.

And we are invited to participate in this mission, as we see it in Jesus. Sometimes I think Jesus speaks only two words to us or, better perhaps, that all the words Jesus speaks can be folded into just two words. The first word is "Come" – "Come to me all you who labor ... come, allow me to love you ... come just as you are, I know all about you, every hair on your head ... come rest in me ... allow me to embrace you and hold you in love." Perhaps particularly when we are down, discouraged, disappointed in ourselves, frustrated in our work, hurt by relationships or loss ... we need to listen for that word, "Come, rest in me; allow me to love you."

But there is another word that Jesus speaks to each of us, to every one of his disciples, and that word is "Go!"-- "Go to the others and show them my love. Go to the most needy ones, the one's feeling left out, the lonely, the poor. Take my love to them." "Go" is the mission word! Whereas "Come" draws us to the center, "Go" sends us to the margins. A song based on a prayer of St. Teresa of Avila gives the reason why: "Christ has no body now but yours, no hands but your hands. We are Christ's body now."³ Our mission is to love as he did.

What does this involve for us? Our Holy Cross constitutions present mission as border-crossing activity, but the borders, they tell us, are not just geographical ones, they are "borders of every sort." What are the borders that we are asked to cross with love and service in the image of Jesus? Here is a list of some of them:

³ *Christ Has No Body but Yours*, a song based on the prayer of St. Teresa of Avila, by Steven C. Warner. It is recorded on *Witnesses to the Saints*, a CD by the Notre Dame Folk Choir. Refer to page 8.

- *Cultural and racial*
- *National – rigid, narrow patriotism*
- *Religious – other belief or no belief*
- *Socio-economic – toward the poor and needy, those excluded from the processes of development*
- *Ideological – those who think differently (in my case, maybe even Republicans!)*

The borders we are to cross, and help others to cross, are the realities of our world that divide and separate us from others, that make us fear the stranger, that keep us from treating one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Mission happens whenever we muster the spiritual courage to move out of ourselves in Gospel love and service across those borders – toward the stranger, the outcast, the different, the poor. Mission happens when, taking Matthew 25⁴ seriously, we offer compassionate solidarity and acts of love to those outside the normal boundaries of our care (the hungry, the thirsty, the naked/homeless, stranger, sick, prisoner). This is the mission we wish to live as disciples of Jesus; this is the mission that we want to help others to embrace as their own.

As we try to give ourselves to the border-crossing mission of Jesus, there are some wonderful discoveries along the way, discoveries that help us overcome fear and hang on to hope. Perhaps the most important and life-giving of these discoveries is the theme of a song I learned from L’Arche, and that I hope we can sing together: *I Come like a Beggar*.⁵ It’s a song about mutuality in mission, that in giving we always receive.

Here are some of my discoveries – lessons learned in mission. I’m sure you can add your own:

Mission is always pilgrimage:

- This means that crossing borders always leads to Holy Ground, to persons, places and cultures where God has already been at work, where God is already present. And so we’re invited to both reverence and hopefulness in mission. Our reverence is not only because the other is a child of God like us, i.e. we see the similarities, but also because the other is a child of God different from us, i.e. we rejoice in the God-created diversity, in the uniqueness of each one. And our hopefulness is in knowing that there is always a face of God out there that I haven’t yet experienced, and so I can expect to receive much that will form my faith and love in wonderful, surprising ways. (The Mwangi experience will not be unusual!) My favorite scripture story of this mutuality in mission is the Visitation (Luke 1:39ff). In all that the angel said, Mary heard the need of Elizabeth. She sets out on a journey to do simple service. She arrives at the door and learns from Elizabeth, in a deeper way, the Good News she carries in her womb. That is a wonderfully common mission experience: Mission is always pilgrimage. Our Holy Cross Constitutions put it this way: “the farther we go in giving the more we stand to receive” (C2.17). Giver and receiver: which one is which?

Enough light is always given:

This is a discovery/lesson learned from the difficult and frustrating, doubting, dark days of mission.

⁴ The entire passage is quoted on pages 9.

⁵ The words to the song are printed on page 9.

When we go to others with the desire to love and serve, God always gives enough light for the next step. Many years ago a friend gave me a pencil drawing of the *Flight into Egypt*. The drawing depicts the usual scene – Joseph walking a bit ahead of Mary, who is seated on a donkey, holding the child – but they are surrounded by darkness – the pencil shading around them is very dark. The effect of this, in looking at the drawing, is the sense that light is being given to them, but we don't know from where, and it is just light enough for Joseph's next step. That has been my experience in mission – light enough for the next step. And my conviction has grown that when we allow ourselves to be led – led by God, led by the poor (by the most vulnerable ones God puts before us), led by the light given – the path we take will be the right one. The light might lead where we'd rather not go – Jesus said as much to Peter: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.*” (John 21:18). It will always be there and it will always lead to what gives life. John Henry Newman's poem is a prayer to be led: “Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom/ Lead thou me on ... I do not ask to see/ the distant scene: one step enough for me ... lead thou me on.”⁶ A corollary of this prayer to be led is that mission is more about loving response to the light given, than personal initiative to achieve a self-determined goal. ***Lead, Kindly Light*** is a mission prayer.

There is always beauty to be experienced:

- Many of you have read Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. My favorite passage in that book has Celie telling her sister: “You know, I think when people walk by purple and don't notice, God gets really pissed off!” There is always beauty to be seen in mission, but we need to choose to look at it! One can live in Dandora and see only garbage, open sewers, ragged beggars, squalor, poverty, dust or mud ... And it's true, all of that is there! But one can choose to look for the beauty as well: the faces of children, the devotion of struggling parents, the hospitality of those with little to share, the generosity toward grieving neighbors, the lively, stubborn faith of the poor, the blue sky above, rainbows after rain ... The person in mission, I think, is called to be the opposite of a cynic. A cynic looks at what is good and says there's got to be some dirt somewhere! One on Gospel mission is willing to enter into what looks ugly and desperate and say there's got to be a light somewhere. In a favorite book of mine, *Love in Chaos*, Mary McAleese, the president of Ireland makes this same point by insisting that mission entails looking for “the green shoots of hope” in every situation. The good news is: green shoots of hope are always there.

Our joy in mission depends on our ability to be at peace with what we cannot do:

- When we look at the problems of our world – disease, hunger, poverty, violence, fear – or even just at the problems that accompany our everyday efforts to love and serve in the image of Jesus, discouragement can overwhelm and paralyze. After 11 years of ministry in Dandora – a work that, in addition to liturgical and catechetical ministry, included development efforts, revolving loan schemes, self-help projects, cooperatives, health education and care, initiatives to overcome police corruption, clean-up campaigns – upon leaving what seemed clear was that the concrete quality-of-life situation there in most every respect was worse than when I had arrived. The big picture was very discouraging. When I expressed this discouragement to a friend, he counseled

⁶ The prayer is quoted on page 9.

this way: Learn to rejoice in little victories. Mother Theresa's famous line, "We are called to be faithful, not successful," became important to me as well. And there is this story from Joan Chittister:

It was a chilly overcast day when the horseman spied the little sparrow lying on its back in the middle of the road. Reigning in his mount he looked down and inquired of the fragile creature, "Why are you lying upside down like that?"

"I heard the heavens are going to fall today," replied the bird. The Horseman laughed. "And I suppose your spindly legs can hold up the heavens?"

"One does what one can," said the little sparrow.⁷

The mission is God's; our call is to do what we can, no more, but also no less! One more reminder helps: We really don't know the results of our work. The scripture that best illustrates this for me is *Luke 8:42-48*. A woman with a hemorrhage touches the cloak of Jesus; he feels power go out of him, but he doesn't know who has been helped. We are often like that in mission: tired at the end of the day, but we don't know who has been helped. But if we've been trying to love and serve in the image of Jesus, someone has been, of that we can be sure. Again, from Mary McAleese: "This is the discipline we are called to: to plant love in hope and to be fully prepared to see no apparent result in our lifetime." And that's okay, because the mission is God's, we've done what we can, and there are occasional "little victories" to cheer us on the way.

Our fruitfulness in mission has more to do with who we are and how we are than with what we do: Who we are – the integrity and witness of our lives as disciples – and how we are – the honesty and kindness of our relationships – are more central to mission than what we are able to do. In a 1974 address to the laity, Paul VI articulated this learning from mission beautifully: "Modern men and women listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers; and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." People will remember our kindness, our compassion, our genuine interest in them, our care and love of them, much more than what we accomplish or build for them. The quality of our presence trumps the quantity of our work every time. The Holy Cross Constitutions point us in the right direction: we go in mission to "those whose lot we share ... not just as servants but as neighbors" (C2:12-13). What confirmed this truth for me most movingly was the experience of living in Uganda at the time of Idi Amin's reign of terror. There was really very, very little that we could do in those days. But we stayed. And the people told us over and over again that our presence was important to their hope. Sometimes in mission all we can do is stand at the foot of the cross, but if we do so in compassion and love, it is more than enough.

⁷ Quoted in *Psalm Journal* by Joan Chittister, OSB, Sheed & Ward.

Praying About Mission

Poems, prayers, songs and stories referenced in Father Tom Smith's talks.

(1) *The Flower of Love*

“Where there is no love, put love, and you will find love.” -- St. John of the Cross

Whoever first plants the seed in any soil
hitherto fallow
and cultivates the shoot with humble toil
near steep or shallow –
they will be first to come upon the flower
whose instant glory
can recreate, in even this trivial hour,
the Eden story.

Blessed are they who stand upon their vow
and are insistent
that love in this bleak here, this barren now
become existent.

Blessed are they who battle jest and scorn
to keep love growing
from embryo immaculately born
to blossom showing.

Primarily for them will petals part
to draw and win them.
It, when the pollen finds their opened hearts,
will bloom with them.

-- Jessica Powers (1948)

(2) *This Is What We Are About*

We plant the seeds
that one day will grow.
we water seed already planted
knowing that they hold
future promise.
We lay foundations that
will need further development
we provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything,

and there is a sense of
liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and do it very well.
It may be incomplete,
a step along the way,
an opportunity for the
Lord's grace to enter
and do the rest.

We may never see
the end results,
but that is the difference
between the master builder
and the worker.

We are workers,
not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets
of a future not our own.

--- Oscar Romero

(3) *Christ Has No Body but Yours*

Based on a prayer of St. Teresa of Avila

*Christ has no body no but yours, no hands but yours.
Here on this earth, yours is the work to serve with the joy of
compassion.*

No hands but yours to heal the wounded world,
No hands but yours to soothe all its suffering;
No touch but yours to bind the broken hope of
the people of God.

No eyes but yours to see as Christ would see;
To find the lost, to gaze with compassion;
No eyes but yours to glimpse the holy joy of the
city of God.

No feet but yours to journey with the poor,
To walk this world with mercy and justice;
Yours are the steps to build a lasting peace for the

children of God.

Through every gift, give back to those in need;
As Christ has blessed, so now be his blessing,
With every gift, a benediction be to the people of
God.

--- *Steven C. Warner, World Library Publications*

(4) *Matthew 4:14-32*

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

(4) *I Come Like a Beggar*

I come like a beggar with a gift in my hand
I come like a beggar with a gift in my hand

By the hungry I will feed you
By the poor I'll make you rich
By the broken I will mend you
Tell me, which one is which?

I come like a prisoner to set you free (X2)

The need of another is the bread that I break (X2)

(5) *Lead, Kindly Light*

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home
Lead thou me on.
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant
scene;
One step enough for me.
I was not ever thus, not prayed that thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path;
But now, lead thou me on.
I loved the garish day, and spit of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.
So long thy power hath blest me, sure it sill
Will lead me on.
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent till
The night is gone:
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

--- *John Henry Cardinal Newman*

**ZEAL FOR MISSION:
GUIDANCE FROM MOREAU AND THE SCRIPTURES
HE CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT**

*Thomas W. Smith, CSC
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From Scripture:

- Zeal for your house consumes me. (Psalm 69:10; John 2:16)
- Do not grow slack in zeal. (Romans 12:11)
- I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. (Revelations. 3:15-16)

From Basil Moreau:

- By zeal is understood that flame of burning desire that one feels to make God known, loved and served. (*Christian Education*)
- If we have faith and the zeal that faith inspires, we will ... be ready to undertake anything ... to suffer anything and to go anywhere ... to save souls that are perishing and to extend the reign of Jesus Christ on earth. (*Rule on Zeal*)
- Without this virtue of zeal among teachers in a school everything changes. Everything there falls apart. (*Christian Education*)

From Contemporary Holy Cross:

- Zeal for mission is the first defining characteristic of the Holy Cross educator. (From *Called to Hope: Some Characteristics of a Holy Cross Educator*, Bro. Stephen V. Walsh, CSC)
- The primary apostolic quality for Basil Moreau is zeal. (From *A Reflection on Basil Moreau's Sense of Mission*, Bro. Joel Giallanza, CSC)
- We perhaps have lived ... without sufficient passion to continue our mission with zeal and confidence. (From *Report to the Council of the Congregation*, Rev. Hugh W. Cleary, CSC, Superior General, November 2003)

Few of us can ponder these words without some nervousness. The nervousness is first of all because few of us feel sufficiently zealous in our work, in our mission. We can be pretty hard on ourselves that way! Most of our life smacks of routine with very little of the heart engaged. Pondering our founder's words – zeal is that flame of burning desire – I couldn't help but think that the old Beatles' song (*sorry, it's by the Doors!*) makes a pretty appropriate prayer: *Come on baby, light my fire!* We have many concerns; but are we consumed by any of them? And, perhaps more to the point, is our most burning concern the right one?

But there is another reason to be nervous in front of zeal. In the *Dictionary Concordance of the New American Bible*, right below the entry on zeal you find the entry on zealots! Zealots are described as a

group of Jewish fanatics who combine religion and nationalism. That sounds uncomfortably familiar, and we know the fanatics are of every persuasion – Hindu, Jewish, Islamic, Maoist, Christian. Zeal divorced from inclusive love is dangerous, destructive stuff!

What helps toward greater zeal in our mission of inclusive love? Basil Moreau, it seems, believed that our mission would be more in the image of Jesus if only we could learn by heart (not just by mind!) two scripture passages: “The Sermon on the Mount”, *Matthew 5, 6, and 7*, and “The Last Discourse”, *John 14, 15, 16 and 17*. In his Rule of 1847, instructing those in charge of formation, he wrote: “Explain Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the Discourse after the Last Supper to the novices. They should learn them by heart ... because we are to reproduce within us the life of Christ.” Moreau assigns us these texts as central for our formation as his family. In spending time with them, I have come to believe that each of these central texts itself has a center: the center of the Sermon on the Mount is the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 1-12); the center of the Last Discourse is the parable of the Vine and Branches (John 15:1-8). Learning 7 chapters by heart may seem daunting, but perhaps we *should* try to learn by heart at least these 20 verses, pondering them over and over again, allowing them to form us! I believe they teach us much about the way to zeal.

The Beatitudes are eight facets of discipleship in the image of Jesus. They are, as one scripture scholar says, a short summary of the teaching of Jesus, the whole gospel in a grain of salt. We really should learn them by heart! And when we do we should take note that there is a beatitude for zeal: a blessing is pronounced on those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This is zeal. Joel Giallanza defines zeal as “a hunger for mission.” This is the beatitude of desire, of longing, of fire! The blessing it offers is for those with a big appetite – a hunger and thirst – for God and God’s reign. God invites us to desire righteousness (justice) as urgently as a person in a desert wants a glass of water (cf. Psalm 63: “*O God, you are my God, for you I long! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts.*”).

But, of course, we hunger for many things. Our appetites are many – food, drink, pleasure, comfort, possessions, popularity, power – and we are aware that when not properly ordered each one of these appetites can become an addiction. Instead of enriching our life, they can take over our life. And we know that addictions destroy – not only the addicted person, but those around him/her. In a world where the endless feeding of appetites is so often exalted as the highest good – advertising always proclaims: you need more, you don’t have enough – we want our lives as disciples of Jesus to proclaim the fullness, happiness and fruitfulness that comes from giving ourselves over to the hunger and thirst for God. *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you besides* (Matthew 6:33). Blessed are those with zeal; they will be satisfied.

The 13th century Afghan, Sufi mystic and poet, Rumi, says there are four birds that keep us from zeal in love:

- The rooster of lust
- The peacock of wanting to be famous
- The crow of ownership, and
- The duck of urgency (impatience, efficiency, results).

I find much truth here, but I would like to add one more bird: a friend of mine in Bangladesh told me to call it a dodo bird because it contributed to its own extinction! It’s the *dodo bird of sloth!*

Sloth – a capital sin by the way! – is the sickness of *no* appetite, the crime of the *unhungry* spirit, and I find myself in the company of this bird a lot! It's the lack of fire within, the willingness to settle for less, just doing the minimum to get by and be accepted, to avoid rocking the boat or getting in trouble, neither hot nor cold. Perhaps it's what Br. William Dunn called "tired blood." When I feel this bird perching on my shoulder, my prayer really is *Come on, God, light my fire!* or, adapting the words of the psalmist, *O God, you are my God, for you I long to long.*

What lights the fire? What helps zeal?

Some of you know Dick Stout. He passed on to me this line from his sabbatical renewal course: The Main Thing is to make the Main Thing the Main Thing! I guess we might say here: The Main Thing needed to come to zeal in mission is to make the Main Thing the Main Thing! We're concerned with so many things! What is the main thing?

There are many scriptural ways of describing the main thing, but the one that I believe Moreau points us toward is found in the parable of the Vine and Branches. In that parable, the main thing is, quite simply, the development of an intimate relationship with Jesus. Nothing is more important to zeal and fruitfulness in mission than getting connected, and staying connected, with Jesus: *I am the vine; you are the branches; apart from me you can do nothing* (John 15:1). Eight times in the brief verses of this parable we find the word "remain" – remain in me, allow me to remain in you. It's a mutual indwelling – we live in him and he in us – and we're asked to remain there, not just for our own sake, but so we can bear fruit for others. The invitation is to a most intimate friendship with Jesus where – as in all good friendship – the friend takes up residence in the heart and mind of the other, and the friend takes seriously whatever the other considers important. And that's the main thing if we want to kindle and keep burning the flame of zeal.

How can we make this main thing – an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus – the main thing in our lives or in our schools? Attention to the central texts proposed by Moreau for our formation, and, I think, attention to the experience of mission in our lives, suggests that there are two essential requirements.

First, **prayer**: We form an intimate friendship with Jesus by spending time with him – good time, quality time, a time for resting and a time for listening. Moreau put it this way: *"It is in prayer that faith is revived, hope is nourished, and love rekindled ... Without it, our soul will become lazy..."* Without it, in other words, the dodo bird will get us! Prayer is essential to zeal. But communion with Jesus in prayer – listening to him, sharing with him, coming to know him – is not only the way to allow God to light a fire within us, it is also the way to preserve the life-giving connection that we want between what we do, how we spend our energy, and the Gospel mission we say we want to serve. Mission, and the nourishing of zeal in mission, requires a contemplative commitment. (This, by the way, was also a central theme of John Paul II's *The Mission of the Redeemer*.)

Two of the beatitudes are, I think, of special importance to this commitment to prayer: *Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, and Blessed are the Meek*. Formed by these beatitudes, we understand our identity before God as we pray. In the first – Blessed are the Poor in Spirit – a blessing is pronounced on those who know they belong to another, know their dependence on the love and goodness of another. They know themselves as children of God, dependent on God, trusting in God. In the second – Blessed are the Meek – the blessing is for those who understand and accept their unique beauty along with their very real weakness and limits as creatures. It's the beatitude of self-knowledge and

self-acceptance. Living in the spirit of these two beatitudes will help us to rest in God and receive in prayer.

There is an image of the Buddha that captures the invitation of these beatitudes: The Buddha sits in lotus position, his ample belly protruding. One hand holds a begging bowl and is lifted toward the heavens; the other hand rests on his knee, with a finger pointing to the ground. It's a posture of prayer, acknowledging dependence and need, and accepting creatureliness (of the earth) and mission (to the earth). The poor in spirit are those who know their dependence upon God and so live life with open hands and with begging bowl lifted high. They live life as recipients, and because of that they're always giving thanks. The meek are those who know they are fragile, earthen vessels, and still never forget that, in the words of Psalm 139, they are wonderfully made, are loved just as they are, and have a unique treasure to share. Both the poor in spirit and the meek find it easy, natural, to rest in God and converse with Jesus, allowing themselves to be embraced by love and rekindled for a mission not their own.

So prayer is the first thing required if we want our relationship with Jesus to deepen and, therefore, our zeal in loving mission to grow.

The second requirement, I've come to believe (and this is perhaps less obvious), is **mercy**. Mercy is the form that love takes with imperfect, sinful people (that's all of us!) in an imperfect, sinful world (that's the only world we have!). There is, of course, a beatitude of mercy, and it's telling that it comes right after the one for zeal. The reason for this, I think, is that mercy protects zeal – the hunger and thirst for righteousness – from self-righteousness and judgmentalism. Mercy urges an approach to other people that refuses to be judgmental and so opens the door to compassion.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. My Aunt Eleanor, who had no children of her own, used to baby-sit at our house when my parents managed to get an evening away from the eight of us. Whenever we would spill milk or break a dish or fall on our face Eleanor's first reaction was always the same – her hands would go up to her head and she'd exclaim: *Oh mercy, mercy, mercy! Oh mercy me! Mercy, mercy! Lord have mercy!* The length of the mercies was in proportion to the crime: bigger mishaps got more mercies! Well, I think Jesus' person, word and example tell us that Eleanor got it right! When things go wrong, when people go wrong, the way of Jesus is mercy. Jesus describes our God as mercy (the lost son), he acts with mercy (the woman caught in adultery; those who crucified him), he twice recalls the words of Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," and he tells us not to get bogged down in details and miss what is really important (the weightier matters), and among them is mercy.

Mercy is a soft word, but a hard virtue. And in the climate of our time, not a popular one. As our fear grows, the way of mercy seems foolish, a nice ideal, but not applicable to the "real world." Punishment and revenge seem much more reasonable choices. So we often find mercy difficult. It's judgment that comes easy, even though we know what Jesus taught about that: *Stop judging that you may not be judged! Stop condemning and you will not be condemned! Forgive (show mercy) and you will be forgiven* (Matthew 7:1).

The reason that mercy is hard and judgment comes easy is, I think, not only our fear. It is because mercy makes demands on us, and judgment only makes demands on the others. Mercy means I have to change – it means I must make an effort to understand, I must move toward the other with compassion, with a desire to enter his/her life and suffering. Judgment only demands that the other

change ... or else! A famous phrase from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (which later became a song) is *walk a mile in my shoes*, stated as what's required for understanding, empathy and compassion, for really entering into the world of another. Well, *walk a mile in my shoes* is only possible with mercy, never with judgment. And that is mercy's connection to zeal: only a merciful heart moves toward the stranger, the different, the poor, even the enemy, with inclusive love. The judgmental mind and heart keeps its distance or moves away. Mercy unites; judgment separates.

So as prayer helps us to deepen our relationship with the Jesus within – listening to him, sharing with him, and coming to know him more deeply through his word – mercy helps us deepen our relationship with Jesus as he comes to us from without – in our world, in one another and, most especially, as he told us in Matthew 25, in the hungry, the homeless, the foreigner, the sick and the criminal.

Before concluding I'd like to offer a few thoughts on how two other beatitudes illumine the task of mission which (remember Mwangi?) is to see, to care, and to act.

Which would you rather be: a sponge or a rock? The difference between a sponge and a rock that I'm interested in here is this: a sponge is hospitable to and changed by what is outside it, it lets the outside in; a rock, on the other hand, resists being changed by what is external to it. Well, no matter what you answered, there is a beatitude for you, and both are important to mission.

First, the beatitude of the sponge: *Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted*. A blessing is here pronounced on those who refuse to harden their hearts and turn away from suffering, those who, like Mwangi, are willing to see and to care. God's desire to give us this blessing is clear in Ezekiel: *I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts of flesh* (Ezekiel 36:26). A soft heart is a heart that mourns for others in the image of Jesus crying over Jerusalem or for Lazarus, his friend. Having a soft heart enables both *com-passion* – the willingness to be with others in suffering, and *respons-ability*, the ability to respond to that suffering, to do what one can (no more, but also no less) to relieve it.

Some years ago news magazines began to report that people were becoming afflicted with “disaster fatigue” and growing tired of the “morning evil report.” I've been told that in Chicago the Dan Ryan Expressway was routed and walled with the specific intent of hiding the poor and the slums from the sight of others. Walking on the streets of Nairobi, I frequently found myself averting my gaze, looking the other way, when passing a limbless beggar. And all this is understandable: it is difficult and frustrating to look at and allow our heart to engage suffering, especially suffering we feel powerless to relieve. But this beatitude urges us to not turn away from the pain of our world or the pain of the person in front of us. It blesses us when we don't allow ourselves to get used to that suffering or grow numb before it. Looking at suffering, drawing close to it in compassion, is a way to increase our zeal.

Blessed Are They Who Mourn, For They Will Be Comforted

And what does it mean to mourn? I asked the multitude.
And an old man stepped forward.

To mourn, he said, is to be given a second heart.
is to care so deeply that you show your ache in person.

To mourn is to be unashamed of tears.
It is to be healed and broken and built up all in the same moment.

Blessed are you if you can minister to others
with a heart that feels,
with a heart that hurts,
with a heart that loves.
And blessed are you if you can minister to others
with a heart that serves
and a heart that sees the need before it's spoken.

To mourn is to forget yourself for a moment and get lost in someone else's pain,
and then to find yourself in the very act of getting lost.

To mourn is to be an expert in the miracle of being careful with another's pain.

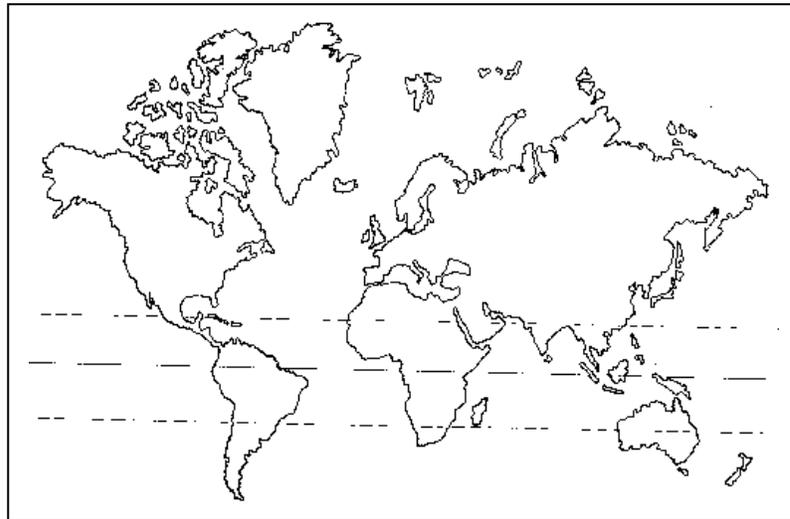
It is to be full of the willingness of forever reaching out to
and picking up
and holding carefully
those who hurt.

To mourn is to sing with the dying
and to be healed by the song and the death.

Finally, the beatitude of the rock, and we get a double dose of this one! It's the only beatitude spoken twice – for emphasis! We're not to forget it: *Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness ... Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me ...* Matthew wrote down the beatitudes in a time of persecution, and we are perhaps tempted to say this beatitude doesn't apply to us. But that, of course, would be wrong. The beatitude simply warns us that we can expect opposition when we try to live Jesus' mission of inclusive love with fidelity, zeal and consistency, and promises a blessing if we don't allow that opposition to sway us. In this world of ours, we can't expect to speak the truth, care for the most vulnerable, and love the enemy – and invite others to do so – without opposition.

A Kiswahili proverb states: *Bendera hufuata upepo* – a flag follows the wind. But a rock does not! We may not be in a time of open persecution in the church, at least not in this country (though 29 Catholic missionaries were killed worldwide in 2003), but fidelity to God's mission, and trying to invite others into that mission, will involve unpopular positions and decisions at times. Making the main thing the main thing – deepening our friendship with Jesus in prayer and allowing him to send us in mercy, across borders of every sort, to the most vulnerable – making that *The Main Thing* we live and teach – is likely to bring some ridicule, some dismissal as irrelevant, and a good deal of protest from those who believe church or school is mainly about something else. This beatitude tells us to expect that, and to be strong, like a rock.

WORLD MAP – MERCATOR PROJECTION



WORLD MAP – PETER'S PROJECTION

