

## **Homily**

A few weeks ago we assembled here in Abingdon to pray, reflect and give direction to the life of our Mill Hill Society in the coming years. We are all aware of the story of our Society founded in 1866 by Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, the third Archbishop of Westminster when he purchased a beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> Century House in the quiet village of Mill Hill in North London. He took up residence there with one student and in effect, the Mill Hill Missionaries, St. Joseph's Missionary Society was born. From these humble beginnings we can look back with pride and gratitude for the great work our missionaries have done in the world. Generations of Mill Hill Missionaries – associates, students, brothers and priests – have followed the inspiration of our founder, Herbert Vaughan, and responded to God's invitation to go out to those in greatest need. With love and service, they have shared and continue to share the Good News.

Standing on the shoulders of our elders - our ancestors - a new generation of Mill Hill Missionaries, from Africa and Asia, are responding with openness, generosity and enthusiasm, as we continue to witness to the joy of the Gospel in some of the poorest and most troubled parts of the world. As new chapters in the story of our Society are written, and inspired by the witness of our younger missionaries, we can look to the future with hope as we open ourselves to the promptings of the Spirit and discern the new directions in which God is guiding us. This is wonderful to behold.

The horizons of evangelisation and the urgent need to witness to the Gospel to all, without distinction, constitutes the vast field of our Mill Hill Missionary apostolate always interpreting the signs of our times. God calls us and invites us to participate in the mission of the Son, entrusted to us, fragile as we may be, to give witness to his mercy and love for all people, especially to those on the margins of society, to those who are often overlooked and to those whose cries go unheard.

As we celebrate the Holy Trinity we are reminded of the great mission given to us from the Highest Authority. We are the witnesses to God's love in the world and we believe that heart is an essential dimension of our lives, in our encounters with Christ and with others in the languages and cultures of the peoples we serve. It is by opening our hearts that we can begin to live out our mission as Members and Associates of Mill Hill.

In all of this we must focus ourselves on what is essential namely that the mission does not only consist of developing to the maximum the good functioning of our Society but allowing ourselves to be carried by the call of Christ. The call "I have come from the Father" shows that it is by leaving that Christ expresses the mission he has received and it is in his leaving that we carry out our mission. A leaving which goes beyond a geographical shift, and which concerns our habits, our securities and our personal landmarks as well.

Wherever we are, we are called to live among a people and a Church, to be born again constantly to this call which we have received and bearing witness to our motto of love and service. In a special way we are asked to share a path with those who do not have the Gospel at the centre of their lives. A dynamic which engages us to bear witness to the love of Jesus, not to impose but allow for the power of attraction as Pope Francis writes in *Evangelium Gaudium*.

We are asked to be missionaries of hope, continually reviewing and placing before God and our Membership the life of our Mill Hill Society, with its yearnings and challenges, so that it is He who gives us light and hope. We are called to create, with our presence in the midst of the world, a society capable of recognizing the dignity of every person and of sharing the gift that each one is to the other.

The Gospel is Good News filled with contagious joy, for it contains and offers new life. It is important to ask ourselves certain questions about our Christian and Mission identity and our responsibility as believers and missionaries in a world marked by confusion, disappointment and frustration, and torn by numerous wars that unjustly target the innocent. What is the *basis* of our Mission? What is the *heart* of our Mission? What are the essential approaches we need to take in carrying out Mission? As a Society we have been doing just that for the past three weeks – however, not everything stops during a Chapter as we take stock. The Mill Hill Ship continued to sail with the above questions being pondered as a number of us gathered here in Abingdon to evaluate and envisage the future.

All of us are asked to speak boldly but also listen humbly as we share our ‘concert of charisms’ in the local churches where we work. Compassion, listening, accompaniment, mercy, discernment, love, inclusion are what we are called to make known to each other as we strive to live a new missionary impulse in our ministry.

We gather from different countries - reflected once again in the new leadership team - but share a common culture linked to our experience – a long tradition and a strong desire to listen to the same voice. It is not about expending a huge amount of effort or performing ‘super human’ acts, all it takes is just one person carrying out one simple loving act of mercy every day to start a revolution and stamp out the virus of indifference. These ‘powerful witnesses,’ make us think of our own lives and how to respond to situations of need all around us.

Again I recall the person of Blessed Pauline Jaricot born into turbulent and violent times in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Her deep faith drove her to persevere with the vision of a world transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Her life and legacy bears witness to the truth that small and simple initiatives, which bring people together in prayer and faith, really can change the world. As we witness the many violent conflicts around the world, there is a desperate need for each and every one of us to act together in small and simple ways to encourage justice, peace and reconciliation in God’s world.

The future is in God’s hands. The Spirit will show us the way forward and hopefully we will be able to respond with enthusiasm. In the meantime we continue to do what we do best – Mission. Our long and impressive record of doing mission throughout the world will inspire, inform and guide future generations of missionaries, wherever they come from.

Our Mill Hill Charism ‘to go to those most in need of God’s grace’ framed in a rich and colourful tradition begun in 1866 will continue long into the future, by the help of God and with the support of God’s people. Our mission points us into the future, where God’s greatest blessing is the blessing we are to each other.

Amare et Servire: AS IN THE PAST, SO IN THE PRESENT, AND INTO THE FUTURE.

Michael Corcoran MHM

General Superior

11<sup>th</sup> June 2022