

Section 26

“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved”

(Second part)

Fr. Chevalier started sending missionaries abroad in the turbulent times of 19th century France. In those days, in several areas of France, religious were especially persecuted by state-officials. Consequently, in November 1880, MSC fathers, brothers and students were expelled from France. *“I then had the profound sorrow of seeing all my confreres dispersed, our dear Basilica closed and sacrilegious seals affixed to its doors,”* writes Fr. Chevalier in his Personal Notes (p. 34; Daily Readings November 5). He himself could stay in France, because years before, the Archbishop of Bourges had appointed him as parish priest of St. Cyr in Issoudun. However, to continue to serve as parish priest, he had to behave like a diocesan priest, and was not permitted to appear in public as the Superior General of a religious Institute. Since the closing of the Basilica and the confiscation of the monastery by local authorities, he had to govern the Congregation from the presbytery.

In the middle of these very disheartening circumstances, Fr. Chevalier received a letter from the Vatican, dated March 25, 1881, requesting the Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart to accept the Mission of Melanesia and Micronesia in Oceania - a vast region already for many years without a Catholic Mission. Against the negative advice of his councilors, who, not without reasons, maintained that this Mission went far beyond the strength of the young Society, Fr. Chevalier put his trust in the Sacred Heart and took the decision to accept the offer. Though he was still unsure whom to send, he considered the foreign missions to be one of the principal ends of the Society, to which he had given the motto: *“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved”* - a saying that up to and including today expresses the participation of the Chevalier Family in Christ’s mission.

In our days, missionaries of the Good News of the Gospel face trials not unlike those met by Fr. Chevalier and his confreres. In his Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Evangelii Gaudium*’, Pope Francis describes the many challenges evangelization has to deal with in today’s society. These challenges, the Pope writes, *“may take the form of veritable attacks on*

religious freedom or new persecutions directed against Christians. In some countries these have reached alarming levels of hatred and violence.” However, in other places, the Pope states, *“the problem is more that of widespread indifference and relativism, linked to disillusionment...”* (Evangelii Gaudium 61).

For the Pope, these challenges are no ground for lessening our commitment to mission. On the contrary, the Pope states that today: *“Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization.”* In addition, he continues by affirming that *“indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 121).

A Reflective Moment

*“May the world of our time,
which is searching, sometimes with anguish,
sometimes with hope,
be enabled to receive the Good News,
not from evangelizers who are dejected,
discouraged, impatient or anxious,
but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor,
who have first received the joy of Christ”*
(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, n. 10).

*“Every person is worthy of our giving. ...,
Every human being is the object of God’s infinite tenderness,
and he himself is present in their lives. ...
Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life,
that already justifies the offering of my life. ...
We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls
and our heart is filled with faces and names!”*
(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, n. 274)