



Homily by
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15TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME “B”
200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EVANGELIZATION
OF WESTERN AND NORTHERN CANADA

St. Boniface Cathedral, St. Boniface, Manitoba, July 15, 2018

“Go! On with the Mission!”

Am 7: 12-15 • Ps 84 (85) • Ep 1: 3-14 • Mk 6: 7-13

Dear brothers and sisters,

In French, when we conjugate the verb **“aller”** (“to go”) in the present tense, we see that it changes form—from **“je vais, tu vas, il/elle va,”** to **“nous allons, vous allez,”** ending with the original form, **“ils vont.”** The same thing happens in the French imperative: **Va, allons, allez.** Yet, it’s always the same verb, which expresses action and movement so well.

This short reference to the whims of French grammar is not at all trivial if you remember that the verb **“aller”** (to go) is often best expressed in the plural,

“allez” (imperative “Go!”). Could this mean we are most active and undertaking when we function together? Precisely! That is the “missionary drive” lived daringly together—first by the pioneers, and then by all of you—as expressed by the verb *“aller,” “GO!”* In fact, that’s the key to understand the Word of God on this festive Sunday, this Jubilee for the 200 years of evangelization of Western and Northern Canada.

We are gathered here today because men and women responded in great numbers to the call of Christ, because they went beyond the frontiers of their homes and comfort zones to *go* and bear the Good News of the Gospel to the farthest peripheries of this immense territory.

You probably noticed much movement in this Sunday’s Bible texts. The Lord calls persons to join him. He captivates their souls and meets their most basic hopes, then he sends them on mission. That is how the story of salvation began and has continued, ever since the Gospel set on fire the hearts of men and women who had personally encountered Someone who changed their lives: Jesus Christ. Such encounters propelled those disciples to share their faith, their hope and their love. And so they became missionaries. Actually, “disciples” and “missionaries” are two words, two realities proceeding so deeply from the heart, that Pope Francis merged them into a new expression: **missionary disciples**.

How can we encounter Christ and savor the new life he brings us without feeling an irresistible urge to share this Good News? It was here, in St. Boniface, that the mother-Church of all of Western and Northern Canada was born, grew and pursued its missionary drive, thanks to the women and men seared by that encounter, that friendship with Christ. It’s not surprising that the Gospel seed bore so much fruit, and that you can today appreciate its value and celebrate its wonderful development!

When the Gospel carried by witnesses to the Risen Christ arrives in a region, when missionary disciples settle in some corner of a country, a whole new chapter of human history begins, for the Gospel is not limited to words. It is a life project, a family project, a community project. The Gospel message proposes a wide range of values and attitudes that influence society and transform it like leaven in dough. The celebrations of your bicentennial enable you to measure even more accurately the benefits of the Church's action among you.

Celebrating the 200-year presence of Christ's disciples and accomplishments, however extensive they may be, cannot remain a review of the past. It can also be a serious challenge to continue the work begun, since so much still lies ahead. We need only think of the urgency to pursue community relationships in harmony, respect and justice. We need only measure the road ahead to heal the wounds of the past and gather believers—without considering the color of their skin or their socioeconomic origins—bring them together in a Christian community united and in solidarity, ***“so that the world may believe”***¹.

The Bible texts proclaimed today are an invitation to become engaged on mission roads. As in the days of Amos, the Lord chooses someone and tells him, ***“Go, you will be a prophet for my people Israel.”*** To you, the faithful of the Church in Western and Northern Canada, the Lord says, ***“Go, you will be a prophet to my people of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.”***

What time is it in your immense territory? It is time to evangelize! We are well aware of the enormous challenges to be taken up in our country. We find a huge deficit of hope among many of our men and women citizens everywhere. In a country as prosperous as Canada, as rich in human and material resources,

¹ Cf. John 17: 21.

isn't it scandalous to see a large number of individuals and families suffering because they do not have a place in any community; others, especially children, hungering and thirsting for food and affection; many persons painfully striving to escape at least a bit from misery, or plagued by being the everlasting victims of segregation and ostracism? How can we give a Christian answer to so many injustices and inequalities when the Lord says, ***"I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me"***²?

Now is the time to evangelize! Now is the time to leave our comfort zones to ***go*** and meet our brothers and sisters who seek meaning, hope, a just life, safety and peace. We have met the One who fulfills human needs, Christ Jesus. His Gospel is a way of life, for he is ***"the Way, the Truth and the Life"***³. Let us go forth and share him!

Brothers and sisters, yes! Dare to ***go*** on mission! It's not a question of trekking over land and sea, but of opening one's spirit and heart to the needs of those with whom we live and work, our brothers and sisters in humanity awaiting signs of reconciliation, kindness, justice and love. What Jesus asks the twelve Apostles to do in this Sunday's Gospel, he expects us to do as well. He calls us to love the world for which he came and which he saved. He invites us to lend a hand, to serve our neighbor as he did, to put on an apron and maybe even get our hands dirty.

And Jesus entrusts this great mission to our entire Church, not only to the Pope, to bishops and priests. We are all responsible to put the missionary mandate into effect, for Jesus says the same thing to us as he did to his Apostles: ***"Go therefore, make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the***

² Matthew 25: 40.

³ John 14: 6.

commands I gave you"⁴.

Imagine all the ardor and apostolic zeal of Father Joseph-Norbert Provencher and his companions when they embarked on the long journey that would lead them from Quebec City to the Red River, here! Imagine the audacity and courage of the first Sisters of Charity who freely chose to come and work for the mission in a land to be built up!

Dear friends, what the Church needs today is persons of this caliber— young and old—to pursue its evangelizing mission. The Lord needs laborers in his fields because the harvest is plentiful. Here..., you know all about harvests from observing the vast expanses of your prairies. Let us have the courage and audacity of those Ephesians to whom Saint Paul wrote, ***"You too, after hearing the message of the truth and the Good News of your salvation, and believing it, you have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit."*** The Holy Spirit urges us to go forth to evangelize, mainly through the coherent witnessing of our own lives and the evangelical principles to which we are bonded by our baptism.

Dear brothers and sisters of Western and Northern Canada, ***"The love of Christ urges us on!"***⁵ The time has come to put on our walking boots and go out on mission. Great fields of work call upon us and await us. Your origins reveal such a rich cultural diversity. At the arrival of the first missionaries, there were Indigenous peoples, Metis and the English, gradually joined by people from all over the planet. All of this presents real challenges to live together in peace and harmony; but that cultural and spiritual wealth also offers fine opportunities to witness that the Gospel opens one up to a quality of life and enables one to surpass oneself, since the Church is built on the pillars of love and

⁴ Matthew 28: 19-20.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5: 14.

truth.

At the invitation of Jesus, let us **go forth** with what is essential—the love of God that we enjoy thanks to our encounter with the Risen Christ—and **witness** to his living, active presence in our lives. On the way, the Lord will show us how to live together as true brothers and sisters. Don't ever say that it is *mission impossible!* The Lord called Amos when he was just a shepherd boy and made him a prophet. Jesus called humble fishermen of Galilee to make them his apostles, his envoys. The Lord does not choose the able, but enables those he chooses!

All this is possible if we follow the command of the Lord Jesus who tells us: **"Go!"** This mission becomes possible when our response is nourished from the sources of the Spirit and by the audacity of our faith in his presence. Each of us can say: **"Je vais, tu vas, il va** (I go forth, you go, he goes)." Together we count on one another to affirm: **"Nous allons, vous allez, ils vont** (We go forth, you all go, they go)." And the missionary spirit fires our zeal so that every individual may be a figure of Christ, and every community may be a dwelling place for his Church.

Brothers and sisters of Western and Northern Canada, **"Go! On with the Mission!"**