



18 October 2018, 10.30 a.m. | Thursday, 28th Week, Year II
2 Timothy 4:10-17 | Psalm 145 | Luke 10:1-9
Senior Citizens' Day

COMPANIONS FOR LIFE'S MISSIONARY JOURNEY

My dear sisters and brothers, Fr Clifford was asking you whether you know your neighbour. At the beginning of the Mass, the priest greets you in the name of the Lord Jesus. But it is also our responsibility to greet each other. So I suggest to you that you turn to your neighbour, shake hands with them and thank them for coming to this get-together. So please turn towards each other and shake hands with a smile.

A very good morning to you, and welcome to this Eucharist. As a senior citizen myself, I am happy to celebrate this Eucharist. I experience both the joys and the struggles of getting older. Sometimes I can't imagine my age. Do you know how old I am? Above sixty, definitely? Seventy-one, yes. I thank the Lord for giving me the health and energy to work. On a light note – every year, my bishop gives me a new responsibility in addition to being parish priest. I was dean of this area, and in June, I was asked to work in the Family Service Centre at Mahim, and I also work for a German church organisation called Missio. At the end of the month, I am going to Myanmar for a meeting of directors of pastoral centres in Asian countries, which I had previously gone to organise. And so, I thank the Lord for my health and strength. I do my work trusting that God will take care of me, but I know sometimes it is tough and we also experience challenges in life.

Today is also the feast of St. Luke. He was known to be a physician, a doctor. And so it is very appropriate that we celebrate this Mass on the feast of not just a doctor of theology but also a doctor of the body. He was a well-educated person, and from his writings we can see that he was cultured and able. And so, as we celebrate this Eucharist, we can ask that all our ailments and sicknesses be healed by the loving God through the intercession of St. Luke.

Let us begin by placing before the Lord our sickness, caused by our sin and negligence.

My dear sisters and brothers—senior citizens like me—my few words to you this morning on this occasion and on the feast of St. Luke are based on two things: on Luke himself and on what each one of us can do, no matter what our age or condition.

The first reading begins with these words: 'Demas has deserted me'. St. Paul is saying that a companion who was close to him on a missionary journey has deserted him. His name was Demas, and he went to Thessalonica. 'Crescens has gone to Galacia and Titus has gone to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me'. Three of Paul's companions whom he needed for the journey have deserted him, but one person has stayed on. What does this say about Luke? That he is faithful, he is reliable, he is dependable. And so St. Paul could rely on him for his work and for his missionary journeys.

All of us need companions, and that's why in today's gospel, Jesus didn't send his disciples out alone. The gospel says he sent them out in pairs. You need a companion to support you in your journey, in your work, in your mission. All of us need people with us for whatever work God gives us. I know that you, as elders, are sometimes blessed with family members who are very supportive, and sometimes, family members who might have deserted you to go abroad or to some place where their lives could be better. Sometimes you may think, 'I slogged all my life and now, in my old age, when I need them, they have deserted me'.

St. Paul also experienced being deserted, and he can identify with you in case you are alone and you don't have a companion in your home to walk with you through these difficult moments of life. Remember, the Lord Jesus is there to walk with you.

I will also say something very practical, and this is what I've been saying to the community leaders in our parish: Make sure that there is no neglected elderly person in the home. If there is a person who is elderly and alone, give them telephone numbers of neighbours who will rush to their help. I know for instance, if you have diabetes, your sugar levels could fluctuate. If you suffer from blood pressure problems, suddenly your pressure could shoot up. And if you are alone, you can get nervous. So you need somebody as your companion. If you have no family members, neighbours can also be good people who can support you. Make contact with them. I have told the community leaders to give our senior citizens the phone numbers of people in the neighbourhood. But in case they have not given you any contact person, ask your neighbours. A neighbour is most often ready to help. Don't feel shy to ask. Be humble and ask. As I grow older, I also like to have somebody around, and I ask for help, sometimes from a younger priest or from parishioners, maybe to take me to the hospital for some sort of treatment or examination. So don't hesitate to ask for a companion. St. Paul needed somebody and he was lucky he had a medical person like Luke to be his companion on his missionary journeys.

The second thing is that Jesus gives his disciples a mission. You may say, 'What mission do I have in life? My life is towards its end. I have nothing more to contribute to the world'. When visiting homes, I often tell elderly people, 'Don't be afraid. You still have a mission in life. If you are alive, if your heart is beating, if your mind is working, one of the greatest missions that you can undertake is to pray for people around you'. The world today is getting more and more busy. And in their busyness, people often forget God. Elderly people can pray for those who are busy – family members, neighbours, people in need, people in hospitals, people who are on difficult journeys of life. You still have a mission. Don't believe that your life is over. Your life is over only when you reach the cemetery – not for the burial of somebody else, but for your own burial. So you still have time and you still have a place and a mission in life.

These are my few small words to you: Be like St. Luke – a faithful person, a reliable person. Maybe you could tell a person in the neighbourhood who is to undergo an operation, 'My prayers are with you. I'm going to sit at home and pray'. I know my own brother, who is getting also a little older—I'm the youngest in the family—when somebody who is sick tells him to pray in his home, he lights a little candle during the time of the surgery and he remembers to pray for that person in need. We could do the same: have a little candle at your altar – be careful; if you are not there, don't leave it on because it could topple and your house will burn, so keep it in a safe place and pray for people around you. That is one of the most wonderful missions that you can do. In the Church, we also have the monastic life – we recently celebrated the feast of St. Teresa of Avila, who was a great woman of a silent, prayerful life. I think prayer is not a waste of time. You fulfil your mission by praying for others.

I pray for each one of you, that your journey at this stage in life may be joyful and spiritual.



Fr Cleophas Fernandes
Parish Priest, St. Pius X Church