



A Newsletter from the Missions Office/Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States  
Catholic Diocese of Columbus, Ohio

## *When we follow Christ “a sugar and spice and everything nice” sort of life is not a guarantee*

*To monthly mission donors:  
“Thank you for your support!”*

On behalf of His Excellency Frederick F. Campbell, the Bishop of Columbus, and Father Andrew Small, OMI, the National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States, I would like to thank you for your prayers, sacrifices and financial support for the missions.

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A few years ago I read a book called “The Prayer of Jabez.”

The book sold millions of copies to people who wanted to believe that Christians would not experience hardships and sufferings.

The book was based on an obscure prayer in the Old Testament: “O that you would bless me and enlarge my territory; let your hand be with me and keep me from harm so I will be free from pain” (1 Chronicles 4:9-10).

The message of the book was that if you would truly pray for God to bless you in this way and be used by God in His Kingdom, good things would happen to you. God would enlarge your territory.

There is nothing wrong with that. But many who read the book interpreted it differently. They understood that God would bless them with material things and other signs of outward prosperity.

But the message doesn’t square with what Jesus said about taking up our cross daily or about dying to one’s own self. The problem is that even if God enlarges our territories, a “sugar and spice and everything nice” sort of life is not guaranteed.

Look at the Apostle Paul. Indeed, his territory was enlarged. God made him the Apostle to the Gentiles. God used him to write letters, many of which are included in the New Testament. Yes, his territory was enlarged – but his life was not an easy one.

He was in prison frequently; flogged and beaten severely; exposed to death again and again. Once he was stoned; three times he was shipwrecked. He was constantly on the move. He had been in danger from rivers, from bandits, from his own countrymen, and from Gentiles; in danger in the city and in the country; in danger from false brothers. He had labored and toiled and had often gone without sleep; he knew hunger and thirst (2 Cor. 11:23-27).

We had better think twice before praying the Jabez prayer. The Bible is replete with people through whom God worked but who paid a great price. John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod; most of the twelve disciples died martyrs; over the centuries millions have been martyred for their faith in Christ.

Thousands of missionaries have lived difficult lives of sacrifice in relative poverty and deprivation as God expanded their work and ministries in places where they served.

Jesus does not promise that all His followers will be protected from hardships and sufferings. Christians get cancer, lose loved ones, suffer financial setbacks, just like everyone else. But Jesus can also use our tragedies to expand our territory in ways that show a skeptical world a different way to live.

Does God bless those who commit to follow Jesus? Of course He does. Sometimes God blesses those who follow Jesus in material ways – with money, with success, with good health and happy families. But these are not guaranteed. Sometimes God’s blessings come through our sufferings and not through our bank accounts. Peter says that we should not be surprised when painful trials come, as though something strange is happening to us. We are to rejoice that we participate in Christ’s own suffering (1 Peter 4:12-14).

God always blesses us – by His love for us and the meaning He brings to our lives, whether in hardship or in prosperity. God also blesses us through our sacrifices for Him as we feel the privilege of being tools in His hands.

## ***Without a Mother, God's Tenderness in our Hearts Can Grow Dim***

"Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart!" (Lk 2:19). At 15 years old Gabriel appeared to her to tell her that she would get pregnant and yet she would remain a virgin; that the baby she was going to have would be the Son of God.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> month of her pregnancy, she had to travel with Joseph to register in Bethlehem. There were no Holiday Inns on the way and they traveled not in an air conditioned car, but on back of a donkey.

And there was no warm welcome for them in Bethlehem. They could not even find a motel where God could be born. They had to settle for a barn. And the Son of God was born in manger where animals feed.

Mary did not try to understand what was happening to Joseph, her and Jesus – she just treasured and pondered in her heart.

She protected and guarded in her heart the coming of God to his people. Deep within her heart, she listened to the heartbeat of her Son in her womb.

In doing so, Mary learned to listen to the heartbeat of God in history.

She learned how to be a mother and gave Jesus the experience of being a son.

Jesus learned from Mary to listen to the yearnings, the troubles, the joys and the hopes of the people.

Mary did not deliver speeches, or perform great deeds. But she guarded Jesus' life and mission. She guarded everything that Jesus loved.

Mary watched the beginning of the early Christian community. She was a mother to many. She sowed hope in those who were in difficult situations.

Mary is the mother of the Church. She is our mother. She gives a mother's warmth - the warmth that shelters us in times of trouble. She keeps the tenderness inaugurated by her Son from being extinguished from the Church.

A mother is a symbol of tenderness. Mary shows us that humility and tenderness are not signs of weakness. Rather, they are signs of strength.

Mary teaches us that we do not have to mistreat others in order to feel important.

We have a mother. We are not orphans. Mary helps us conquer our individualistic and egocentric tendencies – our lack of openness and our indifference. Without a mother, a society is cold and merciless.

We see God's goodness in Mary's maternal face, in the maternal face of the Church, in the faces of our own mothers. Without a mother it is difficult to experience God's tenderness.

Without a mother, God's tenderness grows dim in our hearts, in our nation and in our world. Without a mother we forget that life is a gift we have received - a gift we are called to share.

In Mary we realize that we are a people that belong to one family – God's family.

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***Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else. (Margaret Mead)***

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## ***Quip:***

If you could kick the person responsible for most of your troubles, you would not be able to sit down for six months.

## ***Quest:***

Tact is the ability to put your best foot forward without stepping on anyone's toes.

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## ***Pope Francis' January Prayer Intention:***

Religious Minorities in Asia: that Christians, and other religious minorities in Asian countries may be able to practice their faith in full freedom.

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## ***A Joke a Priest can Tell... LOL!***

Jemima was taking an afternoon nap on New Year's Eve before the festivities. After she woke up, she confided to Max, her husband, 'I just dreamed that you gave me a diamond ring for a New Year's present. What do you think it all means?'


"Aha, you'll know tonight," answered Max, smiling broadly.


At midnight, as the New Year was chiming, Max approached Jemima and handed her small package. Delighted and excited she opened it quickly. There in her hand rested a book entitled: "The Meaning of Dreams."

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