

# SoulSpace

THE GOSPEL OF THE FAMILY: JOY FOR THE WORLD

Season colour: **GREEN**

In this series, **Fr Gerard Moloney, C.Ss.R.** anticipates the World Meeting of Families which will take place in Ireland in August 2018.

The Irish missionary tradition is something all Irish Catholics of a certain age are familiar with. We were introduced to the foreign missions at school; we raised money for the missions; we may even have had family members or neighbours who were missionaries.

When we heard the word 'mission' we thought of people like Fr Myers who went to South America or Africa or Asia to spread the Gospel. Mission meant leaving home and family; it meant going to far distant places. Today, we have a broader understanding of mission. It is something every Christian, and every Christian family, is called to engage in. All of us are called to spread the Gospel.

## THE CHALLENGE

Fifty years ago, nobody would have considered Ireland as mission territory in need of evangelisation. It seemed like the faith was deeply imbedded in our DNA, so much so that we could send thousands of priests and religious to work overseas.

Now the situation is different. Fewer people practice the faith, secularisation is on the rise; religion is being pushed to the side. It is clear that Irish society needs to hear the Good News again. It needs the witness of our faith, beginning with the family.

It starts, Pope Francis says, with prayer in the home: "It is essential that children actually see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important. Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelisation than any catechism

class or sermon" (288).

He says that the work of "handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in its evangelising mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside of the family circle. Children who grew up in missionary families often become missionaries themselves; growing up in warm and friendly families, they learn to relate to the world in this way, without giving up their faith or their convictions" (289).

The family is the first and basic missionary territory, where we learn about and witness to our faith every day. To be a missionary is to show our love for God and neighbour by the way we live our lives. ■



*The Holy Father*

“The family is thus an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness, namely solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people, the protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need, commitment to the promotion of the common good and the transformation of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory in which the family lives, through the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.”

Pope Francis, The Joy of Love, 290



Today's readings

## GOD'S WORD TODAY

**Jeremiah 23:1-6**  
**Ephesians 2:13-18**  
**Mark 6:30-34**

The disciples return from their missionary work today and they are full of enthusiasm as they tell Jesus all they have done and taught. Given their need for rest and food, Jesus suggests that they come away to a lonely place where they can recuperate and reflect on their time visiting the villages around Galilee.

Some scripture scholars indicate that Mark's Gospel is unafraid to highlight the weaknesses and failings of the disciples. This is one of those times where

the disciples seem to suggest that their teaching and their work has all taken place under their own authority and not the authority of Jesus.

However, they don't reach their destination. Jesus will have to speak to them later. A crowd of people recognise Jesus in the boat and they gather at the shoreline to greet him. There is a hunger within them to hear Jesus speak. They are like sheep without a shepherd and Jesus is moved with compassion.

His availability to teach and be with people is in itself a message to the accompanying disciples. This selfless and generous act of putting his own needs to one side is the essential part of missionary life with Jesus.



# MISSIONARY CALLING

**Irish society needs to hear the Good News again, beginning with the family.**

More than 40 years ago, RTE television broadcast a documentary, called Padre Joao is a Kerryman. It told the story of Fr Sean Myers, an Irish Redemptorist missionary in Brazil. Fr Sean was – and is – no ordinary missionary. As well as ministering to the spiritual needs of some of the most abandoned people, he caters also for some of their practical needs, providing farm equipment, seeds, even medical help when needed. He sees his role as being more than just a spiritual support to his people.

