
For the mission... burning hearts, journeying onward. And lifelong formation

"Missionary proclamation is not only the result of individual enthusiasm, nor is it a spontaneous impulse. The theme of these days, 'Burning hearts, journeying onward', sheds light on the fact that bearing witness to the Gospel in our cities and the streets of the world stems from a meaningful and profound encounter with Jesus. Just as it happened to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Lord helps us to reinterpret our own experience and to give a new direction to our existence.

Speaking to SIR, Fr **Giuseppe Pizzoli**, General Director of the Missio Foundation, a pastoral agency of the Italian Bishops' Conference, described the theme of the Days of Missionary Spirituality (27-30 August) currently taking place at the Domus Pacis Conference Centre in Assisi. The Days of Assisi feature a rich programme that includes biblical meditations, conferences, debates and liturgies. The event is marked by many informal encounters, including the participation of missionaries with worldwide experience, leaders and volunteers of diocesan missionary centres, lay Catholics, women religious and priests. Many young people have had missionary experiences during the summer months," continues Fr Pizzoli, "and they have been offered formation opportunities by our diocesan centres. This service to the Gospel requires more than just a geographical or cultural background; it requires an understanding of the local reality, knowledge of the local societies and the Churches to be served. Above all, it means listening to God's will for our lives. This is what vocation is all about. And that is why formation is so important: it is about preparing to meet Jesus in people's lives."

Liturgy is one of the themes on the agenda of this year's Domus Pacis meeting: why? "In fact, the theme of liturgy is being addressed for the first time this year. When we speak of mission, we rightly think of the proclamation of the word and many charitable activities. But the Pope's message for this year's Missionary Day - explained the director of Missio - is an invitation to place the encounter with Christ at the centre, so that the words of Jesus may find true missionary meaning. The liturgy is the culmination of the encounter with the Lord; in the journey of missionary growth that belongs to all the faithful, 'being' with Jesus is a fundamental aspect. For this reason, it is equally important that the liturgy reaches the hearts of young people, of the men and women of today. Today, the Holy Mass is not always enjoyed to the full, in order to make hearts 'burn', as it happened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who discovered their missionary vocation during the breaking of the bread by Jesus. In our communities, it is essential that the liturgy be characterised as revelation and encounter with Jesus." **Formation is a priority of the Missio Foundation.** "We need to learn how to translate the Council into concrete action," Pizzoli remarked. "It opened up countless paths... With the Second Vatican Council, the mission took on a central role in the life of the Church, but for us, in many cases, it is still peripheral. An accessory. The Council helps us to understand the challenges we face today, and the great missionary vocation follows this line: to share the gift and grace of God's love with all humanity. Pope Francis affirmed this in clear terms in *Evangelii Gaudium*. And he reminds us again and again in the messages for Missionary Day: each person is a disciple-missionary. And for this we need a conversion, a change of heart." **Several missionaries who are temporarily on holiday in Italy gather in Assisi.** After so many years in the mission, they still feel the need for formation. "Their participation is truly exemplary," says Fr Pizzoli. "Their heart is at the service of the Gospel and of humanity. And they are here to grow, to continue to grow in faithfulness to the Word of the Lord, to his invitation to bring the Good News to the remotest corners of the earth." Among them were the Bishop of Istanbul, some young people and a nun who had recently arrived from Mozambique. She had witnessed the murder of Sister Maria De Coppi. There is a nun who has returned to Guinea-Bissau after 30 years, and a young couple from Milan, with their two young sons, who are already *fidei donum* in Peru. "It is amazing. They have so much to teach us, and yet they are here to remind us that we are always on a journey, that there is always something to learn. By listening to Jesus. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus."

