

„A Year with Fr. Brisson“



Celebrating the centenary of the death of the Servant of God

THE REVEREND LOUIS BRISSON

(1817-1908)

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by

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Witnessing God's Care

An Oblate (missionary) is essentially an interior man; he is a "story teller", telling God's story that he himself has heard, integrated and deeply reflected upon and now passionately desires to tell others. All know that this story is, from beginning to end, a story of great compassion and forgiveness, of joy and peace. In more academic language our missionary approach could be named "narrative missiology". This method seeks to communicate, inspire and motivate, bring laughter and joy and strengthen trust and faith.

For that reason we Oblates may consider "witness" as a much better term than "missionary," as it expresses personal concern and involvement. Mission without that religious foundation would finally lead to various forms of disrespect and oppression. It shows also that mission must not be mixed up with development aid or social-health care. Whereas missionary activity indeed includes the work for peace and development, these activities do not compose the core of an Oblate mission. Mission is a communicative activity with a concrete faith experience as its subject.

At the same time not every homily shared on Sunday is already a missionary activity because mission is mainly about crossing frontiers. Mission means meeting others; it is a "stepping out of oneself", a moving towards the other; that is, toward what is not known and not familiar. Missionary work involves building bridges and relationships of solidarity between churches, human communities, cultures and religions. This interest for what is entirely other does again not simply arise from any humanist motivation and the spirit of

adventure, but from the religious experience of God's concern for this world and humankind.

Christ identifies with all people, he does not only belong to Christians. The goal of mission, after all, is not the church (e.g. "getting new members") but the coming of the Kingdom of God. Therefore missionary activities are not only found in non Christian countries or in the so called "developing world" but in the traditionally Christian hemisphere as well. There is no need to cross one's own province borders in order to become a missionary as long as one is willing to look beyond oneself and reach out to one's neighborhood, including people of other faith, , the poor, people of other language and other cultures, castes and colors and to share his faith story. Newer approaches of missiology suggest therefore that we no longer speak of "mission countries" but of "mission situations" that can be identified anywhere in the world.

Globally seen, sharing God's story perhaps is most needed in countries of the so called first world today. For one thing, the most important financial and economical-political centers of power are located in the northern hemisphere. There, decisions are made that have far-reaching consequences for billions of people all over the world, and especially for the poor and disadvantaged to whom we must pay special attention, according to the example of Jesus. That is also especially true in the area of globalization, seemingly widening the gap between rich and poor. Together with other religions, Christianity could be in the front line to advocate more justice, the dignity of human life, and the preservation of creation. For another thing, in the West, religion being pushed into the merely private sphere, and religious indifference, are most distinctive.

A new but actually very old direction of mission seems to be on the horizon again. In view of the many difficult issues mission is facing - conflict, inter-religious violence, anti-conversion laws, growing poverty and hunger, urbanization, environmental and globalization issues, ... - there seems to be a growing awareness that it is not us who carry out mission but rather that we participate in what is God's work. This is - of course - found in "Ad Gentes" and our constitutions, but after a period of activism and focusing on social, educational and health issues, mission's other pole is coming more clearly into view today: Instead of working for God and for His people, we join hands with God and do His work.

+ May God Be Blessed +