

From the July 4, 2010 Issue

The Humble Mission

Jesus was leaving soon. Jesus was about to ascend to the right hand of the Father in heaven when he charged the first believers with continuing his ministry of making disciples. Jesus was also preparing to send the Spirit to empower them for this mission and to fulfill his promise to be with them always. He was sending them into the world on a mission from God.

The Blues Brothers, Jake and Elwood, were also on a mission from God. I was happy to find out recently that even the Vatican recognizes the joy of the movie *The Blues Brothers*.¹ I love its amazing music and absurd comedic sense. Especially enjoyable is Jake and Elwood's belief that they were on a mission from God. In the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, one writer says, "this is a memorable film, and, judging by the facts, a Catholic one."²

While I don't think they were intending to make a purely Christian movie, this movie is certainly informed by a Christian world view. After one brother pays his debt to society, they both decided to help out the orphanage that was once their home. This involves gathering together a community of gifted people (musicians) who use their talents and gifts to raise money, and thus save the orphanage. This idea came to them in the midst of a worshipping community as if from the Spirit himself. Along the way Jake and Elwood survive threats from a country-western band, neo-Nazis, and Carrie Fisher, with an almost supernatural ability. This ongoing protection only served to strengthen their conviction that they were on a mission from God.

One thing I would like to point out is that as their faith increased, their humility increased as well. As their trust in God and confidence in their mission rose, their pride fell. They esteemed others (orphans, nuns, members of the band) better than themselves as they faithfully gave themselves over to their mission from God. This is something I would encourage us all to meditate on more and more: the need for *humility* in fulfilling the mission of Church.

One truth that gives me great encouragement for missions is that God is already there, wherever I go. Whatever I do for the gospel, God has already been working. Jesus said this years ago, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."³ More importantly, I am humbled by the reality that whoever I share the life and love of Jesus with, whether in word or deed, the Spirit of God has already been working in and with them.

Sometimes Christians feel that they are the only ones who have truth or goodness, but it's not true. We see this played out in "The Blues Brothers" as well. Whoever they gather is already gifted for the work. Even some who they do not suspect, like the blind man in the music store, are even more gifted than this band on a mission. The truth is evident, the Spirit who is poured out on all flesh is at work everywhere, with everyone.⁴

Rob Bell put it this way:

Missions then is less about the transportation of God from one place to another and more about the identification of a God who is already there... You see God where others don't. And then you point him out. So the issue isn't so much taking Jesus to people who don't have him, but going to

a place and pointing out to the people the creative, life-giving God who is already present in their midst.⁵

Paul incorporated this truth into his missionary work when talking with Greeks at the *Areopagus*. He corrected their misunderstandings and exhorted them to stop committing idolatry, but Paul also showed respect for what good was already happening among them. In Acts 17:23 Paul says, "now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you." Sometimes we miss what Paul says and move along to the rest of his argument. In the midst of their pagan idolatry, Paul says these Greeks were also worshiping Jesus. "What you worship... I am going to proclaim to you."

What did Paul proclaim to them? Jesus! So Paul admits they were worshiping Jesus. Yes, without knowledge and in the midst of pagan idolatry, but the bad doesn't mean the good doesn't exist. We know from the rest of Paul's theological writings that you cannot worship Jesus without the Spirit's help. So we can conclude that Paul acknowledges that these pagan Greeks already had the Spirit of Christ working in and with them, pointing them to Jesus. These Greeks didn't even understand what was going on, which is why they had an altar to an "Unknown God." Paul's job as a missionary was to point out what the Spirit of Christ was already doing among them and encourage them to avoid what was going against this same Spirit.

My hope, as we go about fulfilling the mission of Jesus in our lives, is that we do so with the humility. I pray this humility is rooted in the humility of Jesus Christ. I want to participate in the humility of the one who emptied himself for the sake of salvation.⁶

This emptying spoken of by Paul in his letter to the Philippians is sometimes spoken of as a hiding of true divinity. But I would like to read it with others who say this emptying is a revealing of God's true nature. God is the God who empties himself and humbles himself for all others. It is this God who has found a way to deal with sin, death, suffering and ignorance. This is the Lord God, Father-Son-Spirit God, who has humbled himself to work everywhere and with everyone, in spite of their rebellion and ignorance.

This is the God who is already there, before I even think about praying for his mission in the world. I follow the One who is at work in all hearts and minds, even before I begin to speak the truth and love of Jesus into another person's life.

May the Father, Son, and Spirit, grant us humility as we make disciples. May we have his wisdom to see the Spirit's work in the lives of all we encounter, as we point out to others the Christ who is already there.

~ Benjamin Martinez

1. Casciato, Paul, ed. "Vatican beatifies Blues Brothers ... well almost". Reuters. June 18, 2010 <http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20100618/film_nm/us_vatican_bluesbrothers>.

2. Ibid.

3. John 5:17

4. Acts 2:17

5. http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/5344.Rob_Bell

6. Philippians 2:7