

## Homily

06 October 2019 – 110<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Abbot Francis Pfanner – Langen, Austria

The month of October is dedicated to Mission. This year, Pope Francis declared “An Extraordinary Mission Month” with the theme, “Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World.” Among the many reasons for this, is that the Holy Father wants to remind us of the centenary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* by which Pope Benedict XV called on all Catholics to bring the Good News to all peoples.

During this month, the Church reminds us all as the baptised that the very reason for the Church’s existence is Mission. Each of us is to carry out the mission of Christ, that is, to invite all people to enter into an intimate relationship with Christ and by so doing share in the sanctifying and redeeming life of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. During this month, we are invited to walk closely with and learn from the lives of the saints especially those who were missionaries.

Pope Francis’ call to the whole Church to renew itself and become ever more converted to Christ is providential for us as we marked 110 years since the death of Abbot Francis Pfanner.

My dear Sisters and Brothers, I would like to propose, that during this Extraordinary Missionary Month, we pay special attention to an extraordinary missionary from Langen, Abbot Francis Pfanner. Today we gather here on this very soil that moulded and shaped him; today we stand on these very grounds he walked and worked; today we climb (oh well, we hoped to until the rain ruined our plans) the very mountains and hills that he climbed and see the very beauty he saw in his home town. We are here today to give thanks to God for revealing his saving love for people of all tongues, cultures, tribes and races through Abbot Francis. What a privilege it is to be here today and still what a privilege to be associated with such a loyal, zealous, credible and passionate priest, monk, missionary, Founder and Servant of God!

Pope Francis has demonstrated to us again and again that mission must take first place in the lives of all the baptised. When he refers to the Church as a “field hospital” or as one who “ventures out,” I cannot think of any better person who embodies these characteristics than Abbot Francis Pfanner and his companions – the Brothers, Sisters and Priests.

During this special anniversary of his death and during this Extraordinary Missionary Month, let us take time to reflect on the lessons we can draw from this son of Langen. I have to caution you though, that while I speak about Abbot Francis, we are to keep in mind that he never acted alone but had the support and assistance of his faithful and capable companions, especially the Brothers and later on the Sisters.

***Ora et Labora:*** for Abbot Francis, this was not merely a slogan but rather a way of life. As human beings we are shaped by our environment and seeing this beautiful and tough terrain of Langen, it is no wonder that Pfanner was tough, courageous and hard working.

**Zeal for the salvation of souls:** he burnt with zeal for the salvation of all. As people of Langen and indeed all of us, how can his example enkindle in us the fire for missionary outreach within this parish, our families, and our communities? He would not rest until everyone has made a personal encounter with Christ. “Wenn keiner geht, gehe ich!” Can we honestly say the same today?

**Priority of mission** over all other concerns no matter how noble they may be: this brought a lot of pain and trouble. But he never gave up. “Lont nit lugg!” was his saying and he lived by this conviction to the end.

**Bridge builder:** through Abbot Francis, we the Family of Mariannahill – the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, the Missionaries of Mariannahill, the people of Banja Luka represented here today, all of us are forever married to you our dear people of Langen. This union was possible through your son, who is our Father and Founder, Abbot Francis Pfanner. He is the link, the bond, the bridge between all of our nations, languages, cultures, tribes and races.

In a warring, racially and socially divided South Africa, for instance, he built bridges between races and established non-racial schools and worked for the empowerment of the girl child and women through education and skills development programmes. How about us today? Are we building any bridges here in Austria and the rest of Europe faced with the rise of nationalism and populism; the challenges and opportunities associated with immigrants; the growing number of those who choose not to believe in God? If, not, what are we waiting for?

**The proclamation of the Gospel goes hand in hand with human and integral development and care for our common home:** I come from Mariathal, one of the historical and most beautiful mission stations founded by Abbot Francis. I can testify that for the Trappists evangelization was inseparable from social development. I grew up in a mission station where the Missionary Sisters of Precious Blood and the Brothers and Priests of the Missionaries of Mariannahill not only preached the Gospel and ran some of the best schools in the country but also tilled the soil in the expansive farm at Mariathal.

**Using the media for evangelization:** it is easy to imagine that Abbot Francis today would be using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and other platforms to reach out especially to young people. Could it be that this is one area we need to improve on? Let us remember that we have one of the most beautiful and amazing stories ever told, that is the story of Abbot Francis Pfanner and Mariannahill. How unfortunate that we seem content with keeping this marvellous story to ourselves!

As we remember him today at this celebration of the Eucharist, let this be an opportunity to thank God for such a precious heritage. Let us today and every day celebrate this visionary from Langen who allowed himself to be possessed by the Holy Spirit and accepted the call to be priest, monk, missionary, Founder and Father of many nations. Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Mariannahill, let us cry out to God today and say, “Lord, increase our faith” (Luke 17:5), and make us, like Abbot Francis Pfanner, instruments of your saving love for our sisters and brothers.

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