**Sermon Proper 22B**

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**Text:** *I am reminded of your sincere faith… (2 Timothy 1:1-12)*

Leading into today’s message, I am pleased to acknowledge LWML Sunday at Mount Calvary. The M stands for “Missionary”. God “sends us out” in our particular arenas, in our callings, to whoever has need of hearing the good news – what St. Paul in verse 8 of our Epistle lesson calls the “testimony about our Lord” and “the gospel” (2 Tim 1:8). Each of us is called to this mission.

Christ our Lord commissioned his disciples with making disciples. At the conclusion of Matthew, he said: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matt 28:18-20). This happens when “faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). “How then,” Paul asks in Romans, “will they call on him in whom they have not had faith? And how are they to have faith in him of whom they never heard? And how are they to hear… unless they are sent?” (vv. 14-15) So again: mission, that is, sending, always carries the end of sharing faith.

With whom are we to share this faith? Faith-sharing first occurs within the household of faith. We see this working in the relationship between Paul and St. Timothy, the youthful bishop of Ephesus. “I thank God whom I serve,” Paul writes, as “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” (2 Tim 3, 5). Timothy’s mother and grandmother had been faithful Jews who acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah (Acts 16:1). Sharing the faith with Timothy had been a lifelong endeavour – it did not stop when the Gospel first reached him, but these faithful women continued to shape his life of faith by way of word as well as example. Whether pastors or laity, it is the task of every Christian to continually build the faith of others within our households and the household of faith, the Church. It is fraught with disappointments, but one to which we have been dutifully called.

And as daunting as it may be to share our faith with those who already know it, the baptized community who acknowledge Christ, our missionary task is also to share faith with an unbelieving world. As he writes this letter, Paul, a “prisoner” of the Lord (2 Tim 1:8), is being persecuted for speaking publicly about his faith among the Jewish High Council. He stands accused of preaching an illegal religion, which charge warranted the death penalty; and Paul does not believe he will be acquitted. “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (4:6-7) We are to expect no less. Persecution, ridicule, and all kinds of hostility that lie between may meet us if we make so bold as to share our faith and speak of Christ. But “do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord… but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God”. (1:7)

To prepare us, “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (v. 8) Whether friends and family who are insecure in their faith, or unbelieving members of our community. We have been called to serve with the good news of Christ. We have the promise they will give ear to our mission, by our word and example. It is a grand task which promises greater rewards: but lest we become proud, we also know that it is “not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus… who abolished death and brought life and immortality to life through the gospel” (vv. 9-10). This is good news worth sharing.