Homily for the WYD13 Mass for the New Evangelisation, Colégio Dom Bosco, 26 July 2013

“A mission statement,” according to *Wikipedia*, “is a statement of the purpose of a company, organisation or person.” It includes four things: aims; target audience; what it offers those stakeholders; and, the bottom line, core purpose. The corporate world has picked up this religious idea and run with it big time.

Starbucks, for instance, insists its mission statement “is more than words on a piece of paper – it’s the philosophy that guides how we do business every day.” The mission: “to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time.” Their coffee is ethically sourced, to improve the lives of growers. It’s prepared by people who embrace diversity and treat each other with dignity. They only set up shop where they’re welcome. And they want to “connect with, laugh with and uplift the lives” of their customers. Instead of being pretty about coffee and profits they sound like an evangelical church.

In today’s Gospel Jesus makes His debut (*Lk* 4:14-22). He courageously steps out of the obscurity of His youth into an immense spotlight, right into the role of Messiah. He’s had plenty of time to think about what He’s going to say. Now all eyes in the synagogue are on Him. And we hear His mission statement.

Of the four requirements for a good mission statement, according to the experts, the first is: what’s the aim? Jesus chooses a text from Isaiah (*Isa* 61:1-3) that’s full of promise: of evangelisation, healing, liberation, vindication, blessing ... He has big plans.

Secondly, who’s it for? The poor, captives, blind and oppressed. Not the corporate market, not just people wanting a caffeine hit. It’s those who’ve had bad news who hunger for good. So He targets the financially, emotionally and spiritually poor, those short of resources, opportunities, inspiration and hope. His ‘stakeholders’ are the captive, not just to prison bars but to addictions, compulsions, depression and vice. His ‘market’ are the blind, not just of sight but of insight, the lost and confused. His power is for the powerless, the victims of exploitation, prejudice, injustice and unlove.

What does He offer them? Insight, growth, favour, salvation: Jesus raises up every victim, not just with a temporary pick-me-up, but with a whole change of course, a new joy, a promise of eternity. He *really will* laugh with those who laugh; but He’ll also cry with the weeping, for the Son of man goes down even to the grave to be with human beings wherever they are and redeem them there.

Finally, why does He exist? The whole of the Christian story is an answer to that question: *Cur deus homo*, why did God become man? For now He says: I’ve been sent. *Sent*, in Latin *missio*, is where we get our word *mission* from. And here we see a difference from Starbucks and the rest. You choose a career but you don’t choose a vocation, a calling, a sending. That’s something someone else directs. And for Jesus that
someone else is the Spirit of the Lord. Jesus isn’t just called, anointed and sent, He’s *driven*, impelled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ mission statement is a useful checklist for our own vocational discernment, as we write the mission statement that is our lives. We can ask ourselves whether this passage tells *my* story, explains what *I* am about. Am *I* filled with the Holy Spirit? Am *I* good news for others? Do *I* proclaim the Gospel to them? Am *I* an occasion of forgiveness, healing and liberation? Do *I* show special love for the needy?

To which you might say: hold on, I’m just a young person. I can’t take on the world’s problems. Right now I’m just experimenting, discerning, weighing my options. Eventually I’ll plot my own course. But you can hardly expect me at 20 to be evangelising, let alone helping prisoners escape, which is something to which the civil authorities would not take too kindly. Yet Jesus’ words are urgent: “This Scripture is being fulfilling in your hearing, before your very eyes.” Not later; not after I’ve taken my own good time. Right now the Church must be a missionary Church, a new evangelisation Church, a go-make-disciples Church. Right now each of us individually must be missionaries, evangelisers, GMDs.

Paul offers some thoughts on the ‘how-to’ of all this (Col 3:12-7). Starbucks says it wants barista-missionaries who are diverse and respectful, which is a start. But the ‘desired attributes’ in Paul’s job advertisement for GMDs are: “heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness.” Interestingly, he’s not proposing anything too dramatic here, at least not at first sight. Agents of the new evangelisation don’t have to be PhDs, clashing cymbals or virtual-world gurus. It’s in the quiet and ordinary places that we will cultivate and display Paul’s qualities. God is more in the breeze than the earthquake.

So what’s Paul’s program for GMDs? He offers us a fascinating glimpse into the spiritual lives of early Christians. He says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” – in other words, read and savour the Scriptures. Next he says “teach and admonish each other in all wisdom” – in other words learn about your faith, study it, teach it to others. Then: “sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs ... giving thanks to God the Father through the Lord Jesus” – in other words pray and worship. Three times he says *be thankful* and his word *eucharistoi* is where our word *Eucharist* comes from. Mass, Holy Eucharist and Adoration are our biggest and best thank-you cards to God. And finally, Paul says to live out this Eucharistic gratitude “in word and deed, doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” – in other words live the Christian life to the full, a moral life dressed in the overalls of love.

Christianity is not a ‘spirituality’ in the sense of a pick-and-choose comfy zone. Its constant call is to be more and better. We examine our consciences and face up to the mess. Confession weeds the garden of the souls of various vices. Only then is there room to plant compassion, kindness, humility and other flowers of which Paul spoke.
Word and Sacrament, catechesis and moral life these are the secrets to being and becoming “God’s chosen ones”.

So no more putting your toe in the water and then pulling out, being indecisive or half-hearted in your spiritual life. As we make the Stations of the Cross with our fellow youth and the Holy Father let’s say at each station, yes to Christ, yes to the Father’s will, yes to the mission impossible that He makes possible for us.