February 3rd: Memorial of Saint Ansgar (Oscar), bishop and missionary

Gospel text (*Mk* 16:15-20): Jesus appeared to the Eleven and said to them: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. (…) They went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

Saint Ansgar (Oscar), bishop and missionary (801-865)

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Today we celebrate saint Ansgar (Oscar) (801–865), bishop and missionary, apostle of Northern Europe. Born near of Amiens, he was educated in Benedictine monastic life and soon distinguished himself by his missionary zeal. At a time when Scandinavia was still a frontier land for the Gospel, saint Ansgar understood that the Christian faith could not be imposed, but had to be sown with patience, witness, and charity. Sent first to Denmark and later to Sweden, Ansgar faced dangerous journeys, misunderstanding, and apparent failures, yet he never abandoned the mission entrusted to him.

Appointed bishop of Hamburg and later of Hamburg-Bremen, he understood his episcopal ministry as a service to evangelization: forming small but solid communities, promoting the liturgy, translating the faith into categories understandable to the peoples of the North, and supporting missionaries with a stable ecclesial structure.

His most notable contribution was to unite proclamation and organization: the Gospel needs humble witnesses, but also a visible Church that accompanies and perseveres. Saint Ansgar lived convinced that Christ always precedes the missionary in the hearts of peoples. For this reason, he accepted setbacks with serenity, trusting that the seed would bear fruit in its own time.

—Mission is not measured by immediate success, but by fidelity to the mandate to proclaim Christ to the ends of the world.