



The Holy See

THE HOLY FATHER'S MESSAGE FOR WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2000

22 October 2000 Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. The annual recurrence of *Mission Sunday*, which will be celebrated this coming 22 October 2000, is a call for renewed awareness of the Church's missionary dimension and a reminder of the urgency of missionary activity "*ad gentes*", which "is a matter for all Christians, for all Dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations" (Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 2).

This year the Day is enriched with significance in the light of the Great Jubilee, a year of grace, the celebration of the salvation which God, out of his merciful love, offers to all humanity. To recall the 2,000 years since the birth of Jesus means to celebrate also the birth of mission: Christ is the first and the greatest missionary of the Father. Born with the incarnation of the Word, missionary activity continues in time through the proclamation and witness of the Church. The Jubilee is a favourable time for the whole Church to work, thanks to the Spirit, with new missionary impulse.

I therefore address a special, heartfelt appeal to all the baptized to be heralds of the Gospel with humble courage, responding to the call of the Lord and the needs of the men and women of our day.

I am thinking of the Bishops, priests, men and women religious, the laity; I am thinking of catechists and other pastoral workers who, at different levels, make the mission "*ad gentes*" the very reason of their existence, persevering despite great difficulties. The Church is grateful for the dedication of all those who very often "sow in tears ..." (cf. *Ps* 126: 6). They must know that their efforts and their suffering will not be lost, indeed they will be leaven which causes to germinate in the hearts of other apostles a desire to give themselves to the noble cause of the Gospel. On behalf of the Church I thank them and I encourage them to persevere in their generosity: God will reward them abundantly.

2. I also think of many others who could begin or increase commitment to proclaim the Gospel of Life. In different ways, all are called to continue in the Church the mission of Jesus. This is a title of glory: the one sent is associated in a singular way with the person of Christ to do his same works,

as the divine Master himself says: "those who have faith in me will do the works I do and greater far than these" (*Jn* 14: 12). Each one is called to cooperate according to their particular life situation. In this season, a season of grace and mercy, I am particularly aware that all the Church's forces must be committed to the new evangelization and the mission "*ad gentes*". No believer, no institution in the Church can avoid this supreme duty to proclaim Christ to all peoples (cf. Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 3). No one can feel that they are dispensed from offering their collaboration with the mission of Christ which continues in the Church. Indeed, more than ever timely is the command of Jesus: "You go to the vineyard too" (*Mt* 20: 7).

3. How could we fail here to make special mention, with affection and deep emotion, of the many missionaries, martyrs for the faith who, like Christ, have given their life, shedding their blood? They have been numerous, also in the 20th century in which "the Church became once again a Church of martyrs" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 37). Yes, the mystery of the Cross is always present in the life of Christians. I wrote in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*: "Throughout Christian history, martyrs, that is 'witnesses' have always been numerous and indispensable to the spread of the Gospel ..." (n. 45). There come to mind the words of Paul to the Philippians: "For it is your special privilege to take Christ's part - not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him ..." (*Phil* 1: 29). The same Apostle encourages Timothy, his disciple, to suffer with him for the Gospel without being ashamed, assisted by the power of God (cf. *1 Tm* 1: 8) The entire mission of the Church, and in particular the mission "*ad gentes*" needs apostles willing to persevere to the end, faithful to the mission received, following the same path traveled by Christ, "the path of poverty, obedience, service and self-sacrifice, even to death ..." (Decr. *Ad gentes*, n. 5). May the witnesses of the faith whom we commemorated, serve as models and encouragement for all Christians so that the proclamation of Christ is seen as a duty proper to every Christian.

4. In this work the Christian is not alone. It is true that there is no proportion between human strength and the grandeur of missionary activity. The most common and authentic experience is to feel unworthy of such a task. But it is also true that "our strength comes from God who has made us ministers of a New Covenant" (*2 Cor* 3: 5b-6a). The Lord never abandons those whom he calls into his service. "Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... and know that I am with you always, until the end of the world" (*Mt* 28: 18-20). The Lord's lasting presence in his Church, especially in the Word and the sacraments, is a guarantee of the effectiveness of mission. Today this mission is carried forward by men and women who have experienced salvation in their own fragility and weakness and they witness this to their brothers and sisters, knowing that all are called to the same fullness of life.

5. As I said before, the prospective of the Great Jubilee, which we are celebrating, induces us to ever greater missionary commitment *ad gentes*. Two thousand years since the beginning of the mission, there are still vast geographical, cultural human and social areas in which Christ and his Gospel have not yet penetrated. How can we fail to hear the call emerging from this situation?

A person who has experienced the joy of encountering Christ cannot keep it for himself; he must share it. We must answer the unvoiced call for the Gospel arising from all over the world, the same call that reached the Apostle Paul in his second journey: "Come to Macedonia, and help us!" (*Acts* 16: 9). Evangelization is "help" offered to man, since the Son of God became man to make possible for man what he alone could not attain: "God's friendship and grace, the supernatural life which alone can bring fulfilment to the deepest aspirations of the human heart.... Proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth, true God and perfect Man, the Church opens to all people the prospect of being 'divinized' and thus of becoming more human. This is the one path which can lead the world to discover its lofty calling and to achieve it fully in the salvation wrought by God" (Bull *Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 2).

We must also be deeply convinced of the fact that evangelization is also a valuable service to humanity, since it prepares it to achieve the plan of God, who wishes to unite to himself all men and women and render them a people of brothers and sisters liberated from injustices and filled with feelings of authentic solidarity.

6. I wish now to look towards the numerous agents of the specific mission *ad gentes*: Bishops in the first place and their co-workers, the clergy, recalling at the same time the work of missionary institutes, male and female. A special word I feel must be devoted to catechists in mission territories: "the term catechists belongs above all to the catechists in mission lands.... Churches that are flourishing today would not have been built up without them" (Ap. Exhort. *Catechesi tradendae*, n. 66).

The Council's Decree on missionary activity speaks of them: "Likewise worthy of praise are the ranks of men and women catechists, to whom missionary work among the nations owes so very much. Animated with an apostolic spirit, they, by their immense efforts, make an outstanding and altogether necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church" (Decr. *Ad gentes*, n. 17). Working with great effort and missionary zeal, they undoubtedly offer most effective support to missionaries in many tasks. Not rarely, due to a scarcity of ministers, they are responsible for vast areas where they lead small communities, acting as animators in prayer, in liturgical celebrations of the Word of God, in explaining doctrine and in organizing charitable work.

Because their role is so important, still more necessary is their formation, or "more careful doctrinal and pedagogical training, continuing spiritual and apostolic renewal" (Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 73). Theirs is a task which is always necessary. I hope commitment throughout the Church in this duty will be ever greater. The formation of catechists, as that of all missionary personnel, is a pastoral priority; it is - so to say - an "investment in persons", since only evangelizers and teachers well prepared for their work can contribute effectively towards building up the Church.

7. Vast is the field and much remains to be done: therefore the cooperation of everyone is

necessary. No one, in fact, is so poor that they have nothing to give. We share in missionary activity first of all through prayer, during liturgy or in the secret of our room, through sacrifice and offering up our sufferings to God. This is the first sort of cooperation which everyone can offer. It is also important not to neglect economic support, vital for so many particular Churches. It is known that the money collected on this Day, under the responsibility of the Pontifical Mission Societies, is devoted entirely to the needs of the universal mission. On this occasion I wish to express deep gratitude to this praiseworthy ecclesial institute which for 74 years has organized this Day, animating in a missionary sense the entire People of God, recalling that all, from children to adults, from Bishops to priests, from religious to the laity, are called to be missionaries in their own local community, opening themselves as well to the needs of the universal Church. The missionary animation and cooperation promoted by the Pontifical Mission Societies presents missionary activity to the People of God as a gift: a gift of self, of one's material and spiritual goods for the benefit of the whole Church (cf. Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 81).

This year, moreover, the Day will be marked with particular solemnity in Rome with the celebration of the International Missionary Congress, which will bring together members of the Pontifical Mission Societies from every corner of the world, representing the local Churches of every continent, as a sign of the universality of Jesus' message of salvation. I myself, God willing, will have the joy of presiding at this important celebration.

8. Dear brothers and sisters, may these words of mine be an encouragement for all those who have missionary activity at heart. Celebrating the Jubilee of the Holy Year 2000, "the whole Church is even more committed to a new missionary advent. We must increase our apostolic zeal to pass on to others the light and the joy of the faith and to this high ideal the whole People of God must be educated" (Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 86). The Spirit of God is our strength! The Spirit, who manifests his power in the mission of Jesus sent "to announce the good news to the poor ... and to proclaim a year of the Lord's grace" (*Lk* 4: 18), has been poured into the hearts of all believers (cf. *Rom* 5: 5) to enable us to be witnesses of the Lord's works.

May the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Christ and Mother of believers, a woman totally docile to the Holy Spirit, help us to repeat in every circumstance her "yes" to God's plan for salvation, at the service of the new evangelization.

With these sentiments to all of you who work unsparingly in the great mission "*ad gentes*" and to your communities, I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 11 June 2000, Solemnity of Pentecost.

