



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO MISSION SOCIETIES**

Thursday, 15 May 1997

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear National Directors,
Dear Collaborators of the Pontifical Mission Societies,*

1. I am pleased to address my cordial welcome to each one of you. I greet and thank in particular Archbishop Charles Schleck, Adjunct Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, for his cordial words expressing the sentiments of all. I likewise greet the general secretaries and national directors, who have gathered in Rome for the annual general assembly of these worthy institutions.

Your meeting this year coincides with two important anniversaries: the 175th of the foundation of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the 75th of the *Motu Proprio Romanorum Pontificum*, with which my venerable Predecessor, Pope Pius XI, granted the title "Pontifical" to the Societies for the Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Childhood and St Peter the Apostle. And I am certain that the celebration of these two exceptional events will help increase the missionary zeal of the People of God.

2. It is now a well-established tradition that your general assembly should take place every year in May. This year, to recall the foundation of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, you have wished to hold a special pastoral session to reflect on the figure and work of two extraordinary women: Venerable Pauline Marie Jaricot and the patroness of the Missions, St Therese of the Child Jesus.

The former, a young lay woman born in Lyons in 1799, was particularly concerned about the

problems of Catholic missions in her time. As the member of an association founded by the Fathers of the Foreign Missions of Paris, she was a pioneer of organized missionary co-operation. In fact, with the women employees in the silk factory run by her sister and brother-in-law, she resolved to help the missions with prayers and a small weekly contribution.

Inspired by this initiative, which earned Venerable Pauline Marie the title of foundress of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, on 3 May 1822 a group of lay people gave the association for the Propagation of the Faith a more universal character. Motivated by boundless charity, they stated: "We are Catholics; consequently we must not support this or that specific mission but all the missions in the world". Precisely for this reason they chose as their motto *Ubique per Orbem*, adopted later by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the other Mission Societies.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, Pauline Marie, a young woman attentive to the voice of the Spirit, prophetically anticipated what the papal Magisterium and the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council were later to emphasize in highlighting the missionary nature of the whole People of God and the specific contribution to the Church's evangelizing activity that the laity are asked to make.

Following the example of this courageous woman, you are called today to promote ever more fraternal co-operation between the Churches, inspiring and forming many co-workers for the missionary cause. Seek to instil in them zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel and willingness to support the effort of the younger Churches. This co-operation will be effective if it is continually supported by prayer, sacrifice and the constant desire for holiness. Only this atmosphere of spiritual and apostolic endeavour will be able to establish the conditions for the development of numerous missionary vocations and the generous support of missionary activities.

4. The other figure you have chosen to consider at your assembly is St Therese of the Child Jesus, proclaimed "patroness of the missions" by my venerable Predecessor Pope Pius XI on 14 December 1927. This year we are celebrating the centenary of her death. Although she was called to contemplative life, Therese of the Child Jesus lived in full harmony with the missionary reality of the universal Church. Her supreme desire was to love the Lord and make him loved, working for the glorification of the Church and the salvation of souls, as she stresses in the prayer in which she offers herself as a holocaust to merciful love.

Little Therese's experience represents an exceptional form of dedication to the cause of evangelization, which is rooted in the path of holiness, an indispensable presupposition of any missionary vocation. As I recalled in the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, "*the universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission*. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission. This was the earnest desire of the Council, which hoped to be able 'to enlighten all people with the brightness of Christ, which gleams over the face of the Church, by preaching the Gospel to every creature'. The Church's missionary spirituality is a journey towards holiness" (n. 90).

5. Dear national directors, this is your task: seek by every possible means to foster a renewed missionary zeal in all Christian communities. Based on this apostolic impetus, each of the Societies — the Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Childhood, St Peter the Apostle and the Missionary Union — is called to carry out its specific and irreplaceable task, “since they are the means by which Catholics from their very infancy are imbued with a genuinely universal and missionary spirit; they are also the means which ensure an effective collection of resources for the good of all the missions ... the fostering of lifelong vocations *ad gentes*, in both the older and younger Churches” (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 84).

Dear brothers and sisters, as I hope that the preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will be a further occasion of renewed commitment to the service of the Gospel cause for you all, I entrust you and your co-workers to the motherly protection of Mary, Star of Evangelization, and I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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