



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

Thursday 11 May 2000

Your Eminence,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear National Directors and Collaborators of the Pontifical Mission Societies,

1. I cordially welcome each of you, particularly Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, who has expressed your sentiments, and I thank him for the kind words he addressed to me. I greet Archbishop Charles Schleck, Adjunct Secretary of this Congregation and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, and the General Secretaries of all four Societies.

I extend a special greeting to you, dear National Directors, who promote missionary cooperation in your respective countries with competence and dedication. Through you I would like to greet all your collaborators, who, spurred by Gospel generosity, are concerned to proclaim God's Word in every place and situation in the world.

2. Today's meeting takes place in the time and spirit of the Great Jubilee, which the universal Church is observing with great fervour. This is an extraordinary year of grace, in which the Christian community is having a deeper experience of God's goodness revealed in the Incarnation of the Son and gratefully proclaimed by the Church to all nations. The words of the Apostle echo in our minds: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6: 2b).

The celebration of the Great Jubilee appears, therefore, as a very timely occasion for reflecting on the mercy which God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, has offered in Christ to all humanity. The Great Jubilee is the "message of salvation", which should ring out in every corner of the world, so that whoever hears it may become, in turn, a witness to it and make it a means of salvation for

every person. We are all called to open our eyes to the needs of the many sheep without a shepherd (cf. *Mk* 6: 34), in order to serve them by making known to them the Lord's name so that they may confess him and share in salvation (cf. *Rom* 10: 9)

3. In particular I would like to recall here all the men and women who, by dedicating themselves "*ad vitam*" to the mission "*ad gentes*", have made this work the *raison d'être* of their lives. They are an incomparable example of devotion to the cause of spreading the Gospel. I thank and cordially bless everyone who, in ways as discreet as they are effective, is involved in the work of promoting missionary awareness and cooperation. There are many of them. Numerous lay people join the priests and consecrated persons, individually or as a family, in the desire to give several years or even their whole life to the mission. They often proclaim the Good News and express their faith in hostile or indifferent surroundings. Dear brothers and sisters, please convey to them my gratitude and encouragement to persevere generously in their zealous missionary commitment. God, who never lets himself be outdone in generosity, will reward them.

The recent [commemoration of the Witnesses to the Faith in the 20th Century](#), celebrated last Sunday at the Colosseum, reminds us that the supreme test of mission is often the gift of one's life to the point of death. "Throughout Christian history, 'martyrs', that is, witnesses, have always been numerous and indispensable to the spread of the Gospel. In our own age, there are many: Bishops, priests, men and women religious, lay people - often unknown heroes who give their lives to bear witness to the faith. They are *par excellence* the heralds and witnesses of the faith" (Encyclical Letter [Redemptoris missio](#), n. 45).

As we thank God for our brothers and sisters in faith, we pray that their missionary work in the Church will always be inspired by great generosity.

4. Dear friends, you are called to raise the consciousness of Christians at the grass-roots level. May your constant desire be to work so that everyone will feel the urgent need to continue the mission of Jesus who, before dying, said to his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (*Jn* 20: 21). Pass on this spirit to those who work with you and to all people of good will who share this same ecclesial mission with you.

In fact, the call to mission is a grace as well as a duty for every baptized person. Those who have made it the priority choice of their lives know this well. Whoever is sent in the name of the Church to proclaim the Good News is associated in a particular way with the person and mission of Jesus himself. In this regard St John says: "As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (*Jn* 17: 18). We are sent into the world by Christ!

Dear National Directors, by virtue of this vocation and mission you are responsible in close collaboration with your lawful Pastors, for missionary formation and promotion among the People of God throughout the world, while always remembering that missionary activity "is a matter for all

Christians, for all Dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations" (Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris missio*, n. 2).

5. Dear brothers and sisters, as you know, your Congregation has decided to hold the "World Missionary Congress 2000" from 18 to 22 October next in conjunction with World Mission Sunday. I am pleased with this timely initiative.

The preparation of this event, preceded by the holding of National Congresses, which involves those responsible for the Pontifical Societies at various levels, is proving to be a favourable opportunity for sensitizing all the People of God to the indispensable missionary task entrusted by the Lord to every baptized person.

Everyone taking part in this important meeting will reflect on the theme: "*Jesus, source of life for all*". I fervently hope that this providential meeting will contribute to the vigorous renewal of a more incisive missionary effort in the Church, in order to continue with enthusiasm and courage the ever timely work of the first evangelization. I also hope that your unsparing commitment to the missions will be blessed with abundant fruit and will inspire many vocations "*ad gentes*". This is the precious contribution asked of you for the new evangelization in which the Church is involved today (cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, n. 2), in order to offer everyone the possibility of drawing abundantly from the sources of living Gospel water.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, continue tirelessly in the task you have undertaken and to which you devote your best energies, without letting yourselves be disturbed by difficulties or hindered by obstacles. Persevere in convinced service to the Church's missionary activity and you will be docile instruments helping to build the civilization of love in the world.

As I entrust you, your activities and your loved ones to Mary, the Star of Evangelization, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you, which I willingly extend to all who collaborate in your tireless work of missionary promotion, formation and cooperation on every continent.

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