



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF LYONS

*To the Most Reverend Louis-Marie Billé Archbishop of Lyons  
President of the Bishops' Conference of France*

1. The bicentenary of the birth of Ven. Pauline-Marie Jaricot, celebrated from 17 to 19 September 1999 in Lyons and Paris, gives me the opportunity to be deeply united in the prayer and thanksgiving of the Church in France, especially of your Archdiocese, as well as that of Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect of the *Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*, whose presence shows the attention and attachment of the universal Church to the work of the humble woman from Lyons. Indeed, it was from Lyons, where she was born and where she always lived, that Pauline-Marie Jaricot began the *Society for the Propagation of the Faith*, to which her name has remained linked. I extend a cordial greeting to all who have gathered on this happy occasion to pay homage to this true daughter of the Church, who dedicated her whole life to the missionary growth of the entire Church. As Pope Leo XIII wrote to Julia Maurin on 13 June 1881, "by her faith, her trust, the force of her mind, her gentleness and her serene acceptance of all crosses", Pauline showed herself a true disciple of Christ. To continue the work she undertook to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, I encourage the Catholics of France to acquire a deeper knowledge of this exceptional vocation, which enhances a long tradition of witnesses to Christ, going back to the martyrs of Lyons and St Irenaeus.

2. This commemoration is an opportunity to recall the timeliness of Pauline's message and activity. At a very early age, with simple and practical insight, she started a work which has continued to grow throughout the world. Because she was moved by the poor and by the misery of those who did not know God, Pauline started a collection for the Church's missionary work, asking each person for a sacrifice which would help unite us to God (cf. St Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 10, 6) and which is, as St Irenaeus said, the true sign of "communion with our neighbour" (*Adversus Haereses*, IV, 18, 3) as well as a sign of sharing and solidarity among brothers and sisters; thus she showed her zeal for a universal apostolate and responded to Christ's plan to save all men and women: "To give the light of the Gospel and the grace of Redemption to the many people who

have yet to receive them or to restore them to those who have lost them; this was her ambition, as great as that of Christ himself", according to the very words of Mons. Jean Lavarenne, a Lyons priest and President of the *Central Council of the Propagation of the Faith*.

3. In addition to her concern for the mission *ad gentes*, she worked to evangelize the working milieus of her region, clearly seeing the difficulties of their situation. She sought to organize a social project based on Christian values, in order to establish justice in the world of work. Her endeavour failed at the time, but mysteriously prepared for a renewal of the Church's social involvement, which would be developed in Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum novarum*. With "her work for workers", she suffered humiliation in the last years of her life. Pauline's lay vocation thus led her to take on other apostolic commitments and also to be concerned for our "separated brethren".

4. As the numerous notebooks she left testify, she found her energy for mission in a profound and intense spiritual life. Her great prayer initiative, the "*Living Rosary*", reveals her love for the Virgin Mary, which prompted her to live in the shadow of the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière. Her daily life was illumined by the Eucharist and by adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. She very soon expressed her desire to become a "living Eucharist", to be filled with Christ's life and to unite herself deeply with his sacrifice, thus living two inseparable dimensions of the Eucharistic mystery: thanksgiving and reparation. This is what prompted the Curé of Ars to say: "I know someone who has many very heavy crosses and carries them with great love; it is Miss Jaricot". Her spirituality was marked by her longing to imitate Christ in all things.

5. Highlighting this person, distinguished at a young age by an unprecedented spirit of initiative, should encourage love for the Eucharist, a life of prayer and the missionary activity of the whole Church, whose goal is to be united with her Saviour, to make him known and to draw all humanity to him. Pauline's witness reminds us that "*mission is an issue of faith*" (Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, n. 11). Concerned to extend the Church on all the continents, as in her own surroundings, she inspired great missionary zeal in her own time. Learning from Pauline, the Church must find encouragement to strengthen her faith, which opens people to love others, and to continue her missionary tradition in its most varied forms. In this perspective, I invite the local communities to promote the missionary spirit, more extensive cooperation and an ongoing exchange of gifts, which means openness to the Church's universality (cf. Instruction of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Cooperatio missionalis*, nn. 5; 20). The communities that give and those that receive are both filled with grace by the Lord.

I greet all those who have agreed to become *fidei donum* missionaries; I give thanks for the communities which sent them and those that received them. I am delighted with the efforts that the Churches are making to welcome young people from recently established Churches, priests, men and women religious, seminarians and lay people, enabling them to acquire a human, spiritual, philosophical and theological formation so that they can return to their countries and express in their own culture what they have learned elsewhere.

I also call on the whole Church to share ever more generously with communities and individuals who lack the basic necessities; by so doing, Christ's disciples reveal to their brothers and sisters, as in a mirror, the tender, loving face of our Father in heaven (cf. St Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses*, 4, 9). I ask you, Archbishop, to express to all who work for the Pontifical Mission Societies in Lyons and in Paris my gratitude as universal Pastor, as well as my encouragement in their generous efforts, inviting them to ever closer collaboration for love of Christ and his Church. By taking very special care of the so-called mission Churches, may this institution be for the baptized a beacon that guides their missionary involvement, while stressing the need to "reaffirm that a full and lifelong commitment to the work of the missions holds pride of place" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 79)! May she ceaselessly repeat St Paul's cry: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 *Cor* 9: 16). I also extend a warm greeting to everyone in your country and throughout the world who take part in this missionary network of fraternal solidarity with humility and discretion.

Pauline Jaricot invites us to pay renewed attention to the poor and to love them unceasingly. We are called to share what we have received. As Pauline showed, mission is an issue for all the baptized, since everyone, in her own modest words, can be "the match that lights the fire". The blaze of her apostolate was due to her concern not to act alone; her practical intelligence led her always to personalize her action, to involve those close to her and to create far-reaching ramifications of solidarity and prayer.

6. With the approach of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Church is called to renew her missionary commitment in the footsteps of those who, down the centuries, have proclaimed the Good News of the Risen One by their words, by their exemplary lives and by their concrete acts of solidarity.

As I entrust you to the intercession of of Our Lady of Fourvière, St Theresa of Lisieux, patroness of the missions, and the missionary saints, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, as well as to Cardinal Jozef Tomko, to everyone in Paris and Lyons taking part in the commemorative celebrations, and to those throughout the world who contribute to the Church's mission through the work of the *Pontifical Mission Societies*.

*Castel Gandolfo, 14 September 1999.*