



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN A SYMPOSIUM COMMEMORATING
THE 10th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENCYCLICAL
"REDEMPTORIS MISSIO"**

Saturday, 20 January 2001

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. I welcome you with deep joy on the occasion of your interesting symposium which is being held 10 years after the publication of the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*. I thank the organizers of this conference and greet everyone with affection. In particular, I greet and thank Cardinal Jozef Tomko for his kind words introducing our meeting.

This symposium at the dawn of the new millennium is meant to shed light on the primary value of evangelization in the life of the Ecclesial Community. The mission *ad gentes*, in fact, is the first task that Christ entrusted to his disciples. In this regard, the words of the divine Master sound particularly eloquent: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... and lo, I am with you ... until the close of the age" (*Mt 28: 18-20*).

And the Church, ever mindful of the Lord's command, never ceases to care for her members, to re-evangelize those who have fallen away and to proclaim the Good News to those who do not yet know it. "Without the mission *ad gentes*", I wrote on this subject in the Encyclical we are commemorating today, "the Church's very missionary dimension would be deprived of its essential meaning and of the very activity that exemplifies it" (n. 34).

Bearing all this in mind, from the beginning of my Pontificate I invited every person and people to open the doors to Christ. This missionary concern has spurred me to make many apostolic

journeys, to give an ever greater note of missionary openness to the entire activity of the Apostolic See and to foster constant doctrinal reflection on the apostolic task that belongs to every baptized person. The Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, whose 10th anniversary we are celebrating, arose in this context.

2. When I published this Encyclical 10 years ago, it was the 25th anniversary of the approval of the Second Vatican Council's Missionary Decree *Ad gentes*. In a certain way, then, this Encyclical could be considered a commemoration of the entire Council, whose purpose was to make the Church's message more understandable and her pastoral activity more effective for spreading Christ's salvation in our times.

However, this was not merely a commemorative text recalling the Council's insights. By returning to the great Trinitarian themes of my first three Encyclicals, I intended instead to stress forcefully the perennial urgency that the Church senses about her missionary mandate, and to point to new ways of carrying it out among the people of the present era.

I would like to reaffirm these motives here, since missionary activity among peoples and human groups who are not yet evangelized remains necessary, particularly in certain parts of the world and in particular cultural contexts. On closer sight, then, the mission *ad gentes* has become necessary everywhere in recent years, because of rapid, massive migrations that are bringing non-Christian groups to regions with an established Christian tradition.

At the centre of missionary activity is the proclamation of Christ, the knowledge and the experience of his love. The Church cannot evade Jesus' explicit mandate, since she would deprive people of the "Good News" of salvation. This proclamation does not lessen the proper autonomy of certain activities such as dialogue and human advancement, but, on the contrary, bases them on diffusive charity and directs them to a witness that is always respectful of others in the careful discernment of what the Spirit inspires in them.

3. The Jubilee Year, which marked a providential surge of religious enthusiasm for the Church, has just ended. In my Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, I pointed out to believers of every age and culture the need to put out again into the deep, setting out anew from Christ. It is clear that for the mission *ad gentes* this means new vigour, a renewal of pastoral methods. If every people and nation are entitled to know the joyful message of salvation, our principal duty is to open the doors to Christ for them through proclamation and witness. If at times the proclamation of the Gospel and public adherence to Christ is impeded for various reasons, Christians still have the possibility to cooperate in the work of salvation through prayer, example, dialogue and humanitarian service.

The Church, rooted in Trinitarian love, is missionary by nature, but she must become so *de facto* in all her activities. She will be so if she fully lives the love that the Spirit sows in the hearts of

believers and which - as the Fathers teach - is the "sole criterion for judging what is to be done or not done, changed or not changed. It is the principle which must direct every action, and the end to which that action must be directed" (ibid., n. 60).

4. Dear brothers and sisters, 10 years have passed since I attempted, with the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, to mobilize the Church for a global mission *ad gentes*. Now, at the beginning of a new century and millennium, I repeat this invitation. May every particular Church, every community, every association and Christian group feel co-responsible for this extensive action wherever they live and work. In fact, for all the states of life in the Church - priests, religious and laity - there are unprecedented opportunities for cooperation today. Situations are multiplying in which Christ's faithful come into contact with non-Christians. There are occasions in which it is also possible to work at the international level to defend human rights, to promote the common good and to foster better conditions for spreading the message of salvation (cf. ibid., n. 82).

However, we must never forget that the evangelizer's fidelity to his Lord is the basis of his missionary activity. The holier his life is, the more effective is his mission. The call to mission is a constant call to holiness. How could we fail to recall what I wrote in this regard in the Encyclical? "The universal call to holiness", I noted then and repeat today, "is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission" (ibid., n. 90). Only in this way will Christ's light, reflected on the Church's face, be able to illumine the people of our era.

This is the principal task of Peter's Successor, who is called to guarantee and to promote the communion and universal mission of the Church. It is the duty of the Roman Curia and of the Bishops who share this lofty ministry with him. It is also a responsibility which no believer, whatever his age or condition, can escape.

Aware of this responsibility, dear brothers and sisters, let us also respond generously to the Holy Spirit's constant call. May Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, intercede for us, and may the holy patrons, Theresa of the Child Jesus and Francis Xavier, help us by their example and protection.

With these sentiments, I gladly bless you all and the ecclesial service you carry out each day.