



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI FOR THE 83rd WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2009

"The nations will walk in its light" (Rev 21:24)

On this Sunday, dedicated to the missions, I turn first of all to you, my brothers in the episcopal and the priestly ministry, and then to you, my brothers and sisters, the whole People of God, to encourage in each one of you a deeper awareness of Christ's missionary mandate to "make disciples of all peoples" (Mt 28:19), in the footsteps of Saint Paul, the Apostle of the nations.

"The nations will walk in its light" (Rev 21:24). The goal of the Church's mission is to illumine all peoples with the light of the Gospel as they journey through history towards God, so that in Him they may reach their full potential and fulfilment. We should have a longing and a passion to illumine all peoples with the light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church, so that all may be gathered into the one human family, under God's loving fatherhood.

It is in this perspective that the disciples of Christ spread throughout the world work, struggle and groan under the burden of suffering, offering their very lives. I strongly reiterate what was so frequently affirmed by my venerable Predecessors: the Church works not to extend her power or assert her dominion, but to lead all people to Christ, the salvation of the world. We seek only to place ourselves at the service of all humanity, especially the suffering and the excluded, because we believe that "the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today... is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1), which "has experienced marvellous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 2).

1. All Peoples are called to salvation

In truth, the whole of humanity has the radical vocation to return to its source, to return to God, since in Him alone can it find fulfilment through the restoration of all things in Christ. Dispersion, multiplicity, conflict and enmity will be healed and reconciled through the blood of the Cross and

led back to unity.

This new beginning can already be seen in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, who draws all things to himself, renewing them and enabling them to share in the eternal joy of God. The future of the new creation is already shining in our world and, despite contradictions and suffering, it enkindles hope for new life. The Church's mission is to spread hope "contagiously" among all peoples. This is why Christ calls, justifies, sanctifies and sends his disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God, so that all nations may become the People of God. It is only in this mission that the true journey of humanity is understood and attested. The universal mission should become a fundamental constant in the life of the Church. *Proclamation of the Gospel must be for us, as it was for the Apostle Paul, a primary and unavoidable duty.*

2. The Pilgrim Church

The universal Church, which knows neither borders nor frontiers, is aware of her responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to entire peoples (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53). It is the duty of the Church, called to be a seed of hope, to continue Christ's service in the world. The measure of her mission and service is not material or even spiritual needs limited to the sphere of temporal existence, but instead, it is transcendent salvation, fulfilled in the Kingdom of God (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 27). This Kingdom, although ultimately eschatological and not of this world (cfr *Jn 18:36*), is also in this world and within its history a force for justice and peace, for true freedom and respect for the dignity of every human person. The Church wishes to transform the world through the proclamation of the Gospel of love, "that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working ... and in this way ... cause the light of God to enter into the world" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 39). With this message I renew my invitation to all the members and institutions of the Church to participate in this mission and this service.

3. *Missio ad gentes*

The mission of the Church, therefore, is to call all peoples to the salvation accomplished by God through his incarnate Son. It is therefore necessary to renew our commitment to proclaiming the Gospel which is a leaven of freedom and progress, brotherhood, unity and peace (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 8). I would "confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14), a duty and a mission which the widespread and profound changes in present-day society render ever more urgent. At stake is the eternal salvation of persons, the goal and the fulfilment of human history and the universe. Animated and inspired by the Apostle of the nations, we must realize that God has many people in all the cities visited by the apostles of today (cfr *Acts 18:10*). In fact "the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (*Acts 2:39*).

The whole Church must be committed to the *missio ad gentes*, until the salvific sovereignty of

Christ is fully accomplished: "At present, it is true, we are not able to see that all things are in subjection to him" (*Heb 2:8*).

4. *Called to evangelize even through martyrdom*

On this day dedicated to the missions, I recall in prayer those who have consecrated their lives exclusively to the work of evangelization. I mention especially the local Churches and the men and women missionaries who bear witness to and spread the Kingdom of God in situations of persecution, subjected to forms of oppression ranging from social discrimination to prison, torture and death. Even today, not a few are put to death for the sake of his "Name". The words of my venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, continue to speak powerfully to us: "The Jubilee remembrance has presented us with a surprising vista, showing us that our own time is particularly prolific in witnesses, who in different ways were able to live the Gospel in the midst of hostility and persecution, often to the point of the supreme test of shedding their blood" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 41).

Participation in the mission of Christ is also granted to those who preach the Gospel, for whom is reserved the same destiny as their Master. "Remember the words I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too" (*Jn 15:20*). The Church walks the same path and suffers the same destiny as Christ, since she acts not on the basis of any human logic or relying on her own strength, but instead she follows the way of the Cross, becoming, in filial obedience to the Father, a witness and a travelling companion for all humanity.

I remind Churches of ancient foundation and those that are more recent that the Lord has sent them to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and he has called them to spread Christ, the Light of the nations, to the far corners of the earth. They must make the *Missio ad gentes* a pastoral priority.

I am grateful to the Pontifical Mission Societies and I encourage them in their indispensable service of promoting missionary animation and formation, as well as channelling material help to young Churches. Through these Pontifical Institutions, communion among the Churches is admirably achieved via the exchange of gifts, reciprocal concern and shared missionary endeavours.

5. *Conclusion*

Missionary zeal has always been a sign of the vitality of our Churches (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 2). Nevertheless it must be reaffirmed that evangelization is primarily the work of the Spirit; before being action, it is witness and irradiation of the light of Christ (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 26) on the part of the local Church, which sends men and women beyond her frontiers as missionaries. I

therefore ask all Catholics to pray to the Holy Spirit for an increase in the Church's passion for her mission to spread the Kingdom of God and to support missionaries and Christian communities involved in mission, in the front line, often in situations of hostility and persecution.

At the same time I ask everyone, as a credible sign of communion among the Churches, to offer financial assistance, especially in these times of crisis affecting all humanity, to enable the young local Churches to illuminate the nations with the Gospel of charity.

May we be guided in our missionary activity by the Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of New Evangelization, who brought Christ into the world to be the light of the nations and to carry salvation "to the ends of the earth" (*Acts 13:47*).

To all I impart my Blessing.

From the Vatican, 29 June 2009

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

© Copyright 2009 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana