



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI FOR THE WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2011



“As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21)

On the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, at the beginning of a new millennium of the Christian era Venerable John Paul II forcefully reaffirmed the need to renew the commitment to bear the proclamation of the Gospel to everyone, sharing “the enthusiasm of the very first Christians” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 58).

It is the most precious service that the Church can render to humanity and to all individuals who are seeking the profound reasons to live their life to the full. This same invitation therefore resonates every year during the celebration of World Mission Day. Continuous proclamation of the Gospel, in fact, also invigorates the Church, her fervour and her apostolic spirit. It renews her pastoral methods so that they may be ever better suited to the new situations — even those which require a new evangelization — and enlivened by missionary zeal: “missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others! It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support” (John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2).

Go and proclaim

This objective is continually revived by the celebration of the Liturgy, especially of the Eucharist which always concludes by re-echoing the mandate the Risen Jesus gave to the Apostles: “Go...”

(Mt 28:19). The Liturgy is always a call “from the world” and a new missionary mandate “in the world” in order to witness to what has been experienced: the saving power of the word of God, the saving power of Christ’s Paschal Mystery.

All those who have encountered the Risen Lord have felt the need to proclaim the news of it to others, as did the two disciples of Emmaus. After recognizing the Lord in the breaking of the bread, “they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the Eleven gathered together” and reported what had happened to them on the road (Lk 24:33-34).

Pope John Paul II urged the faithful to be “watchful, ready to recognize his face and run to our brothers and sisters with the Good News: ‘We have seen the Lord!’” (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* n. 59).

To all

The proclamation of the Gospel is intended for all peoples. The Church is “by her very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, she has her origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, n. 2).

This is “the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize” (Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 14). Consequently she can never be closed in on herself. She is rooted in specific places in order to go beyond them. Her action, in adherence to Christ’s word and under the influence of his grace and his charity, is fully and currently present to all people and all peoples, to lead them to faith in Christ, (*cf. Ad Gentes*, n. 5).

This task has lost none of its urgency. Indeed “The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion... an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service” (John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 1). We cannot reconcile ourselves to the thought that after 2,000 years there are still people who do not know Christ and have never heard his Message of salvation.

And this is not all; an increasing number of people, although they have received the Gospel proclamation, have forgotten or abandoned it and no longer recognize that they belong to the Church; and in many contemporary contexts, even in traditionally Christian societies, people are averse to opening themselves to the word of faith. A cultural change nourished by globalization, by currents of thought and by the prevalent relativism, is taking place. This change is leading to a mindset and lifestyle that ignore the Gospel Message, as though God did not exist, and exalt the quest for well-being, easy earnings, a career and success as life’s purpose, even to the detriment of moral values.

The corresponsibility of all

The universal mission involves all, all things and always. The Gospel is not an exclusive possession of whoever has received it but a gift to share, good news to communicate. And this gift-commitment is not only entrusted to a few but on the contrary to all the baptized, who are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9), so that they may declare his wonderful deeds.

All activities are involved in it. Attention to and cooperation in the Church's evangelizing work in the world cannot be limited to a few moments or special occasions nor can they be considered as one of the many pastoral activities: the Church’s missionary dimension is essential and must therefore always be borne in mind.

It is important that both individual baptized people and ecclesial communities be involved in the mission, not sporadically or occasionally but in a constant manner, as a form of Christian life. The World Mission Day itself is not an isolated moment in the course of the year but rather a valuable opportunity to pause and reflect on whether and how we respond to our missionary vocation; an essential response for the Church’s life.

Global evangelization

Evangelization is a complex process and entails various elements. Among them missionary animation has always paid special attention to solidarity. This is also one of the objectives of World Mission Day which, through the Pontifical Mission Societies, requests aid in order to carry out the tasks of evangelization in mission territories. It is a matter of supporting institutions necessary for establishing and consolidating the Church through catechists, seminaries and priests, and of making one’s own contribution to improving the standard of living for people in countries where the phenomena of poverty, malnutrition — especially among children — disease, the lack of health care and education are the most serious.

This is also part of the Church’s mission and in proclaiming the Gospel, she takes human life to heart fully. The Servant of God Paul VI reaffirmed that in evangelization it is unacceptable to disregard areas that concern human advancement, justice and liberation from every kind of oppression, obviously with respect for the autonomy of the political sphere.

Lack of concern for the temporal problems of humanity “would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbour who is suffering and in need” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nn. 31, 34). It would not be in harmony with the behaviour of Jesus who “went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity” (Mt 9:35).

Thus, through co-responsible participation in the Church's mission, the Christian becomes a builder of the communion, peace and solidarity that Christ has given us, who cooperates in the implementation of God's saving plan for all humanity. The challenges that this plan encounters calls all Christians to walk together and the mission is an integral part of this journey with everyone. In it – although in earthenware vessels – we bear our Christian vocation, the priceless treasure of the Gospel, the living witness of Jesus dead and Risen, encountered and believed in in the Church.

May World Mission Day revive in each one the desire to go and the joy of “going” to meet humanity, bringing Christ to all. In his name I impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and, in particular, to those who make the greatest efforts and suffer most for the Gospel.

From the Vatican, 6 January 2011, the Solemnity of the Epiphany.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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