The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS EMINENCE CARD. ANTONIO JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ ZUMÁRRAGA
ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS OF QUITO
PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL COMMISSION
OF THE THIRD AMERICAN MISSIONARY CONGRESS

To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Antonio José González Zumárraga
Archbishop emeritus of Quito
President of the Central Commission of the
Third American Missionary Congress

The Third American Missionary Congress being celebrated in Quito is an incomparable opportunity offered by the Holy Spirit to deepen the important experience of the *Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences* as well as the programme of evangelization that resulted from it and which represents a further step in giving an impetus to missionary zeal in America.

In these days, with the theme "*America with Christ: listen, learn and proclaim",* the Lord will be at the centre of your prayers and study sessions, reflection and dialogue. As the true Teacher, he will enlighten you so that, making room in your hearts for his message of love and redemption, you may go forth and bear an abundance of lasting fruits of holiness (cf. Jn 15: 16).

I would like to greet you, Your Eminence, with deep affection and esteem, as well as Archbishop Raúl Eduardo Vela Chiriboga of Quito, those who have carefully prepared this continental meeting and the Cardinals, Bishops, priests, men and women religious and lay people who are taking part in it. To you, to those "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1: 2-3).

In these busy days my Special Envoy, Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez, Archbishop of Santo Domingo, will convey to you my spiritual closeness and my joy in knowing that you are united in the same sentiments and thoughts with a view to the renewal of the ecclesial communities of America through conversion to the Lord Jesus, whose food has always been to do the will of God, his Father (cf. Jn 4: 32-34; Heb 10: 5-10).

To this Congress, like a continental "Upper Room", the Holy Spirit extends his power. With his gifts and charism he continues to impel the Church to proclaim the Good News of Salvation to each person - in particular those who do not know Christ or have perhaps forgotten him - and to bring this proclamation to the very ends of the earth.

The Congress will also be the setting for the solemn inauguration of a "Continental Mission" through which, by combining pastoral efforts and evangelization initiatives, the different particular Churches in Latin America and the Caribbean will intensify their work to make the Lord better known, loved, followed and praised in those blessed regions. He triumphed over sin and death, he offers us his forgiveness daily, he teaches us to forgive and calls us to live a life far from selfishness which enslaves us and he fills us with love that uplifts us and makes us worthy.

The present moment offers us a providential opportunity to listen once again, with simplicity, purity of heart and faithfulness to Christ who reminds us that we are not servants but his friends. He instructs us to remain in his love without conforming ourselves to the dictates of this world. Let us not be deaf to his Word. Let us learn from him. Let us imitate his way of life. Let us be sowers of his Word (cf. Mk 3: 14; Jn 8: 33-36; 15: 1-8; 17: 14-17). Thus, with our entire life, with the joy of knowing we are loved by Jesus whom we can call our brother, we will be effective instruments so that he may continue to attract everyone with the mercy that sprang from his Cross. Dear brothers and sisters, with docility and power, with the charity that the Holy Spirit has infused into our hearts, I encourage you to share this treasure with others because there is no greater richness than enjoying Christ's friendship and walking by his side. It is worth the effort to dedicate our best energies to this great task, knowing that divine grace precedes us, sustains us and accompanies us in the fulfilment of our mission. Therefore, in persevering prayer, in fervent meditation on God's Word, in obedience to the Magisterium of the Church, in the dignified celebration of the Sacraments and in witnessing to brotherly charity, may you find the strength you need in order to identify with Christ's sentiments and thus to be his coherent and generous disciples, proclaiming with your personal example that Christ is the Son of God, the Redeemer of man, the solid rock on which to build our existence. May you drink the life-giving water that flows from the Saviour's side and that satiates with its crystal freshness all who thirst for justice, peace and truth, those who are oppressed by being locked in by sin, by the tarnish of relativism, by the hardness of hearts and by the obscurity of violence. May you feel Christ's consolation and offer the balm of his love to the troubled, to those oppressed by suffering or who have been wounded by the coldness of indifferentism or the scourge of corruption. These challenges demand that individualism and isolation be overcome. They require the strengthening of a sense of ecclesial belonging and loyal

collaboration with Pastors, in order to form Christian communities that are prayerful, harmonious, fraternal and missionary.

The most important service we can offer our brethren is the clear and humble proclamation of Jesus Christ who came into this world so that we might have life, and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10: 10). "A truly credible witness of holiness and commitment" is expected of us who, without any merit on our part, are his disciples. "If we desire and offer this holy witness, we do not live less but better, because when God asks more it is because he is offering far more" (*Final Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences,* n. 352).

In the face of the difficulties of a sometimes hostile environment, in the face of the scarcity of immediate, spectacular results or of the inadequacy of human means, I invite you not to let fear get the upper hand, or to be disheartened by discouragement or to let yourselves be dragged down by apathy. Remember the words of Jesus the Good Shepherd: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16: 33).

In this circumstance I have wished to offer each one of the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America and the Caribbean a triptych in which Christ appears in glory, in the act of welcoming all with open arms. He goes before us in the journey of life and will help us to aspire to holiness, in such a way that the missionary within every baptized person is reawakened and the hesitation or mediocrity that often assails us is overcome.

In the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, we will always find a model of perfect dedication to her divine Son. As she did at Cana of Galilee, she continues to urge us to do whatever the Lord tells us (cf. Jn 2: 5). Beside her, trusting that her tender love will never forsake us, we would like to learn at the school of Jesus every day and to hear again from his lips: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28: 19). As I invoke her maternal protection, I impart to those attending this Congress the implored Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to all the sons and daughters of America.

From the Vatican, 12 August 2008.

BENEDICTVS PP. XVI

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