



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE NATIONAL DIRECTORS OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 1 June 2018*

[[Multimedia](#)]

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am happy to offer you a cordial greeting and warm welcome on the occasion of your General Assembly. I thank Cardinal Filoni for his kind words of introduction and I greet the new President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, who is taking part in this annual meeting for the first time. To all of you I express my deep gratitude for your efforts to raise missionary awareness among the People of God, and I assure you of my closeness in prayer.

A fascinating journey lies ahead of us: the preparation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, which I announced [during last year's celebration of World Mission Day](#). I heartily encourage you to see this preparatory phase as a great opportunity to renew missionary commitment throughout the Church. It also represents a providential occasion for renewing our Pontifical Mission Societies. Things always need to be renewed: hearts, activities and organizations, because otherwise we end up turning into a museum. We have to renew things, lest we become a museum! You are well aware of my concern about the risk of your work being reduced to the merely financial aspect of material assistance (important as this is) so that the Societies – despite their Christian inspiration – become agencies just like so many others. This is certainly not what their founders and [Pope Pius XI](#) wanted when they instituted and structured the Pontifical Societies in the service of the Successor of Peter. For this reason, I have once again proposed as timely and urgent for renewing missionary awareness in today's Church a grand and

courageous insight of [Pope Benedict XV](#) in his Apostolic Letter [Maximum Illud](#): the importance of an evangelical approach to the Church's mission in the world.

This shared goal can and must help the Pontifical Mission Societies to grow in a sense of spiritual communion, reciprocal cooperation and mutual support. If the renewal is to be authentic, creative and effective, the reform of your Societies will entail a genuine re-founding and reshaping in accordance with the demands of the Gospel. This does not simply mean rethinking your motivations in order to do better what you already do. The missionary conversion of the structures of the Church (cf. Apostolic Exhortation [Evangelii Gaudium](#), 27) calls for personal holiness and spiritual creativity. It is not merely about renewing the old, but about letting the Holy Spirit create newness. It is not about us, but the Holy Spirit. We need to make room for the Spirit and to allow the Spirit to create newness, to make all things new (cf. *Ps* 104:30, *Mt* 9:17, *2 Pet* 3:13, *Rev* 21:5). He is the principal agent of mission: he is the “boss” of the Pontifical Mission Societies, not ourselves. Do not be afraid of the new things that come from the crucified and risen Lord: these are beautiful novelties. But be on guard against other novelties that are unacceptable. Novelties that do not come from him! Be bold and courageous in your mission, always cooperating with the Holy Spirit in communion with Christ's Church (cf. Apostolic Exhortation [Gaudete et Exsultate](#), 131). This boldness means pressing forward with courage, with the zeal of those who first proclaimed the Gospel. Your regular book for prayer and meditation should be the Acts of the Apostles. Go there to find your inspiration. And the protagonist of that book is the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean that you, the Pontifical Societies along with the [Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples](#), are organizing the Extraordinary Missionary Month, to “recalibrate” yourselves evangelically? I believe it simply means *missionary conversion*. We need to recalibrate – this was the insight of Benedict XV – starting from the mission of Jesus. To reassess our efforts to collect and distribute material aid in the light of our mission and the formation that it requires, so that missionary integrity, awareness and responsibility can once again be part of the ordinary life of the entire holy and faithful People of God.

“Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on Mission in the World.” This is the theme chosen for the Missionary Month of October 2019. It emphasizes that the call to mission is a call rooted in Baptism and addressed to all the baptized. Mission is a “being sent forth” that brings about conversion both in those who are sent and in those who receive their message: in Christ, our life is a mission! We *are* mission, because we are God's love poured out, God's holiness created in his own image. Mission, then, is our own growth in holiness and that of the whole world, beginning with creation (cf. *Eph* 1:3-6). The missionary dimension of our Baptism thus becomes a witness of holiness that bestows life and beauty on our world.

Renewing the Pontifical Mission Societies, then, means taking to heart, with a serious and courageous commitment, the holiness of each individual and of the entire Church, as family and community. I urge you to renew the nature and the activities of the Pontifical Mission Societies

with genuine creativity, placing them at the service of the mission, so that our primary concern is the lived holiness of missionary disciples. Indeed, to cooperate in the salvation of the world, we need to love the world (cf. *Jn* 3:16) and to be ready to give up our lives to serve Christ, the one Saviour of the world. We do not have a product to sell. It has nothing to do with proselytizing; we are not selling a product. We have a life to communicate: God, his divine life, his merciful love, his holiness! It is the Holy Spirit who sends us, accompanies us and inspires us. He is the source of our mission. It is he who guides the Church forward, not us. Not even the Pontifical Mission Societies! Let us ask ourselves: do I let him take the lead? Or do I want to domesticate him, put him in a cage, in all those worldly structures that, in the end, make us think of the Pontifical Mission Societies as a business firm, something we own, albeit with God's blessing? No, this must not be the case. We have to ask ourselves this question: Do I let him be the one, or do I put him in a cage? He, the Holy Spirit, does everything; we are simply his servants.

As you know, in October 2019, the Extraordinary Missionary Month, we will celebrate the Synod for the Amazon. In response to the concerns expressed by many of many faithful, laity and pastors alike, I wished to convoke this meeting in order to pray and reflect on the challenges faced in the evangelization of these South American lands that are home to important particular Churches. I hope that the conjuncture of these two events may help us fix our gaze on Jesus Christ while addressing problems and issues, resources and needs; may it also help us renew our commitment of service to the Gospel for the salvation of the men and women living in those lands. We pray that the Synod for the Amazon can help provide a more evangelical approach to missionary work in this area of the world that is so troubled, so unjustly exploited and so much in need of the salvation of Jesus Christ.

When Mary went to Elizabeth, she did not do so on her own, as a missionary. She went as a servant of that Lord whom she carried in her womb. She said nothing about herself; she simply brought the Son and sang the praises of God. One thing, though, is true; she went in haste. She teaches us this faithful *haste*, this spirituality of haste. The haste born of faithfulness and adoration. Mary was not the protagonist, but the handmaid of the sole protagonist of mission. May this image help us. Thank you!