



The Holy See

WORLD MISSIONARY DAY

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday 22 October 2000

1. "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mk 10: 45*).

These words of the Lord, dear brothers and sisters, resound today, World Mission Sunday, as *good news for all humanity* and as a programme of life for the Church and for every Christian.

Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, recalled this at the beginning of our celebration, as he informed us of the presence this morning in this square of delegates from 127 nations, who have taken part in the World Mission Congress, and of the scholars of various denominations who have come for the International Missiological Congress. I thank Cardinal Tomko for his opening address to me and for all the work that he, along with the members of the Congregation over which he presides, carries out to serve the proclamation of the Gospel in the world.

"The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". These words tell us how the divine Master presents himself. Jesus describes himself as the one who came to serve and that it is precisely service and total self-giving even to the cross that reveals the Father's love. His face as a "servant" in no way lessens his divine greatness, but sheds new light on it.

Jesus is the "great high priest" (*Heb 4: 14*), the Word who "was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (*Jn 1: 2-3*). Jesus is the Lord who, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (*Phil 2: 6-7*); Jesus is the Saviour, whom "we can confidently approach". Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (*Jn 14: 6*), the shepherd who gave his life for the sheep (*Jn 10: 11*), the head who leads to life (*Acts 3: 15*).

2. *Missionary commitment arises like the fire of love from the contemplation of Jesus* and the attraction that he holds.

Christians who have contemplated Jesus Christ can only feel enraptured by his splendour (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 14) and

bear witness to their faith in Christ, the one Saviour of mankind. What a great grace is this faith which we have received as a gift from on high, not as a result of any merit of our own (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 11)!

This grace in turn becomes a *source of responsibility*. It is the grace that makes us preachers and apostles: this is why I said in the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* that "mission is an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us (n. 11). And again: "Unless the missionary is a contemplative, he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way" (n. 91).

It is by fixing our gaze on Jesus, the missionary of the Father and the high priest, author and perfecter of our faith (cf. *Heb* 3: 1; 12: 2), that we learn the meaning and style of mission.

3. He came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life for all. In Christ's footsteps, the gift of self to all men and women represents *a fundamental imperative for the Church as well as an indication of the method for her mission*.

Self-giving means above all recognizing the other's value and his needs. "The missionary attitude always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for 'what is in man', for what man has himself worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which "blows where it wills" (*Redemptor hominis*, n. 12).

As Jesus revealed God's solidarity with the human person by totally assuming his condition, except for sin, so the Church wishes to be in solidarity with "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 1). She approaches the human person with the discretion and respect of one who has a service to perform and believes that *the first and greatest service is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus*, to make the Saviour known, the one who revealed the Father and, at the same time, revealed man to himself.

4. The Church wants to proclaim Jesus, the Christ, the son of Mary, *by following the way that Christ himself did*: service, poverty, humility, the cross. Therefore, she must forcefully resist the temptations that today's Gospel allows us to glimpse in the behaviour of the two brothers who wanted to sit "one at the right and one at the left" of the Master, but also of the other disciples who showed that they were not indifferent to the spirit of rivalry and competition. Christ's words draw *a clear dividing line* between the spirit of domination and that of service. For one of Christ's disciples, being first means being "the servant of all".

It is an inversion of values, which can be understood only by looking at the Son of man "despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (*Is* 53: 3). These are words which the Holy Spirit will enable the Church to understand in relation to the mystery of Christ. Only at Pentecost will the Apostles receive the ability to believe in the "power of weakness" revealed in the Cross.

At this point *my thoughts turn to the many missionaries* who, day after day, in silence and without the support of any human power, proclaim and, even before, bear witness to their love for Jesus, often to the point of giving their lives, as has recently happened. What a sight opens before our heart's eye! How many brothers and sisters generously spend their energies on the far frontiers of God's kingdom! They are Bishops, priests, religious and lay people who are a living

image of Christ for us, showing him concretely as the Lord who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life out of love for the Father and for his brethren. My appreciation goes to them all, along with my warm encouragement to persevere with confidence. Courage, my brothers and sisters! Christ is with you.

But the entire People of God must be at the side of those who labour in the front lines of the mission "*ad gentes*", with each one making his contribution, as the founders of the Pontifical Mission Societies understood and stressed so well: everyone can and should participate in evangelization: even the young, even the sick, even the poor with their mite, just like the widow whom Jesus held up as an example (cf. *Lk 21: 1-4*). *Mission is the work of all God's People*, each one in the vocation to which Providence has called him.

5. Jesus' words about service are also *a prophetic message about a new style of relationships* to be fostered not only in the Christian community but also in society. We must never lose hope of creating a more fraternal world. Unregulated competition, the desire to dominate others at any cost, the discrimination caused by those who believe themselves superior to others, the unbridled pursuit of wealth are at the origin of injustices, violence and wars.

Jesus' words then become *an invitation to pray for peace*. Mission is the proclamation of God who is Father, of Jesus who is our older brother, of the Spirit who is love. Mission is humble but impassioned collaboration in the plan of God, who wants humanity to be saved and reconciled. At the summit of human history according to God there is a project of communion. Mission must contribute to this project.

Let us ask the Queen of Peace, Queen of the Missions and Star of Evangelization, for the gift of peace. Let us invoke her maternal protection on all who generously work to spread the name and message of Jesus. May she obtain for us such a living and ardent faith that the proclamation of the truth of Christ, the only Saviour of the world, may be heard with renewed force by the men and women of our time.

Lastly, I would like to recall the words I spoke 22 years ago in this square: "Do not be afraid! Open the doors to Christ!".

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