



The Holy See

THE HOLY FATHER'S MESSAGE FOR WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 1997

October 19, 1997

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...; He has sent me to preach good news to the poor " (Lk 4, 18);
"I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this
purpose" (Lk 4,43).*

1. Dearest Brothers and Sisters,

World Mission Sunday is an important celebration in the life of the Church. Indeed we may say that its importance increases the nearer we come to the year 2000. The Church, aware as she is that, apart from Christ, "there is no other name under the heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4,12), today more than ever, makes her own the words of the Apostle: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9,16).

I think therefore that it is opportune, in this prospective, to call attention to some fundamental points contained in the Good News which the Church is called to proclaim and to carry to the peoples of the new Millennium.

2. Jesus Christ, sent by the Father, the first Missionary, is the only Saviour of the world. He is the Way, the Truth and the life; as he was yesterday, he is today and will be tomorrow, until the end of time, when all things will be united in him. The salvation brought by Jesus penetrates the intimate depth of the human person, freeing us from the Evil One, from sin and from eternal death. Salvation is the coming of "new life" in Christ. It is a gratuitous gift of God who seeks our free adhesion: in fact it must be won, day after day, "through abnegation and the Cross" (cfr *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 10). This calls for our personal, untiring co-operation through the will's docile acceptance of the God's plan. This is the way to reach the safe and definitive haven which Christ won through his Cross. There is no alternative liberation, through which we may obtain true peace and joy, that

can only come from an encounter with God-Truth: "You will learn the truth and the truth will make you free" (*Jn* 8,32).

This, in brief, is the "good news" which Christ was sent to bring to the "poor", to the captives of so many forms of slavery in this world, to the "afflicted" of every era and latitude, to all people, since this salvation is for every person, and every man and woman on earth has the right to be told about it: it is a matter of our eternal destiny. "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (*Rom* 10,13), Saint Paul reminds us.

3. No one however, can invoke Jesus, believe in Him, unless they are told about him, unless they hear his name (cfr *Rom* 10,14-15). Hence the supreme command which the Master gave to his disciples before he returned to the Father: "Go ... teach" (*Mt* 28,19); "Preach ..., he who believes and is baptised will be saved" (*Mk* 16,16). Hence the task entrusted to the Church, sent to carry on his own mission, as a "universal sacrament" of salvation (*Lumen gentium* 48) a "channel of the gift of grace" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14), through time for the whole of humanity.

Hence also the "privilege" and "grave obligation" (cf *Message for World Mission Sunday 1996*) which, precisely by virtue of the faith received, falls to every member of the Church: "privilege", "grace" and "obligation" to take part in the global effort for evangelization.

Seeing the many people who, although loved by the Father (cfr *Redemptoris missio* 3), have not yet been reached by the Good News of salvation, Christians cannot fail to avert in their hearts the urgency which shook the apostle Paul, causing him to cry out "woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (*1 Cor* 9,16). To a certain degree, in fact, each of us is personally responsible, before God, for those millions of people who are "without faith".

4. The size of the task and the recognition of the inadequacy of one's energies may at times lead to discouragement, but we need not fear: we are not alone. The Lord himself reassures us "I am with you always; yes, until the end of time" (*Mt* 28,20); "I will not leave you orphans" (*Jn* 14,18); "...if I do not go away the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (*Jn* 16,7).

Let it be consoling then, particularly in times of doubt and difficulty, to keep in mind that however praiseworthy and indispensable human efforts, mission is always primarily the work of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, who is its undisputed "principal agent" (cfr *Redemptoris missio* 21). Mission takes place in the Spirit, it is being "sent forth in the spirit" (ivi 22). It is in fact, thanks to the action of the Spirit, that the Good News "takes shape in human minds and hearts and extends through history" (*Redemptoris missio* 21 cfr *Dominum et Vivificantum* 64).

All Christians, thanks to the "anointing" received in baptism and in Confirmation, can, indeed, should apply the Lord's words to themselves, believing firmly that the Spirit "is" also upon them

and sends them to proclaim the Good News, sustaining with His power every initiative of apostolate.

5. An exemplary answer to the universal call to take responsibility for missionary activity was given in the past by Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, of whose death this year we celebrate the centenary. The life and teaching of Theresa demonstrate the close bond between mission and contemplation. In fact there can be no mission without a life of intense prayer and communion with the Lord and his sacrifice on the Cross.

To sit at the feet of the Master (cfr *Lk* 10,39), is without a doubt the beginning of all authentic apostolic activity. But if this is the point of departure, there follows then a long journey with its obligatory stages of sacrifice and the cross. To encounter the *living* Christ means also to meet the Christ who *thirsts*, Christ nailed to the Cross who down through the centuries cries out his ardent "thirst" to save souls (cfr *Jn* 19,28).

And to quench the thirst of God-Love, and also our own thirst, there is no other way than to love and let ourselves be loved. To love, assimilating deeply Christ's ardent desire "that all people may be saved" (1 *Tim* 2,4); to let ourselves be loved, letting Him use us according to "his ways which are not our ways" (cfr *Is* 55,8) so that every man and woman on earth may come to know him and be saved.

6. Certainly, not everyone is called to set out on mission: "we are missionaries above all because of what we are ... even before we become missionaries in word or deed. (*Redemptoris missio* 23). It is not important "where" but "how". We can be authentic apostles, in a most fruitful way, even at home, at work, in a hospital bed, in a convent cloister ..: what counts is that the heart burn with that divine charity which - alone - is able to transform into light, fire and new life for the whole of the Mystical Body and to the ends of the earth, not only physical and moral sufferings, but also our daily fatigue.

7. Dearest Brothers and Sisters, I hope with all my heart that on the threshold of the new Millennium the whole Church will experience a new impulse of missionary commitment. May every baptised person adopt, seeking to live it to the best of their ability according to their own personal situation, the programme of the Patron Saint of the missions: "In the heart of the Church. my mother, I will be love ... and so I will be everything!".

May Mary, Mother and Queen of the Apostles, who in the Upper Room waited in prayer with the disciples for the outpouring of the Spirit and has accompanied, from the beginning, the heroic journeys of the missionaries, today inspire believers to imitate her solidarity, her loving concern for the vast field of missionary activity.

With these sentiments, while I encourage all initiatives of missionary cooperation throughout the

world, I bless you all.

From the Vatican, May 18th 1997, Solemnity of Pentecost.

©Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana