



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE WORLD MISSION DAY 1991**

Dearest Brothers and Sisters!

"God is love", the Apostle John tells us (1 Jn 4:8): love that calls and love that sends. We know in fact, that it is from the "source of love" that is God the Father, that the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit spring. And that this, on the very day of Pentecost — the Solemnity on which I address to you *this message for "World Mission Day"* 4,34 — was given to the Apostles: thanks to the outpouring of the Spirit of love the Church officially appeared to the world and began the mission of proclaiming and communicating to men and women the salvation that God offers them in his Son, calling them to share in his life and to love one another.

The mission, entrusted by Christ to his Church, of evangelizing God's love for human beings — for *each* individual man and woman — and their love for God and among themselves, is still so far from being completed, that it can even be considered as only just begun. This knowledge moved me to address to every member of the Church a special appeal with the Encyclical "*Redemptoris missio*", and now I turn to them again to ask that they consider that appeal as a *renewed call to a renewed mission*, and as motivation for more prompt pastoral action and more enlightened catechesis.

1. Consecrated and sent for the Mission

All of us, members of the Church, moved by the same Spirit, are consecrated, albeit in different ways, to be sent: by virtue of Baptism the Church's own mission is entrusted to us. We are called and we are obliged to evangelize, and this fontal mission, which is the same for all Christians, must become our daily "care", our constant and ever present concern.

How moving and encouraging it is to imagine the communities of early Christians, as they opened

out to the world, which for the first time they looked on with new eyes: with the eyes of those who have come to understand that God's love is to be expressed in the service for the good of our brothers and sisters. The memory of their experience moves me to repeat once again the main thought of the recent Encyclical: "For 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!*" (n. 2). Yes, missionary activity offers us an extraordinary opportunity to rejuvenate and render more beautiful the Bride of Christ and, at the same time, it enables us to experience a faith that renews and strengthens our Christian life, precisely because it is given.

However, the faith which renews life and the mission that strengthens faith cannot remain as hidden treasures or as an exclusive experience of isolated Christians. Nothing is further from the mission than a Christian closed in on himself: if his faith is solid, it is sure to grow and must open out towards the mission.

The first place where this word pair, *faith-mission* should develop is in the *family-community*. At a time when everything seems to concur towards breaking up this primary cell of society, we must seek to make it become, or become once again, the first community of faith, not only in regard to the acquisition of the faith but also to its growth, its sharing and therefore, the mission. The time has come for parents, couples, to see as an essential task of their condition and vocation the work of evangelizing their children and that of evangelizing each other so that it becomes really possible for every member of the family, under all circumstances, — especially during the trials of suffering, sickness and old age — to receive the Good News. This is an irreplaceable form of education to the mission and of a natural formation of missionary vocations, which nearly always is fostered in the family.

Another place, of equal importance, is the *parish community* or the *basic Christian community*, which, through the service of pastors and animators must provide the faithful with food for their faith and must go out in search of the lost and the outsiders, and thus carry out the mission. No Christian community is faithful to its duty unless it is missionary: either it is a *missionary community* or it is not even a *Christian community*, because these are simply two dimensions of the same reality, which is brought about by Baptism and by the other Sacraments. Today, more than ever, now that the mission, also understood specifically as the first announcement of the Gospel to non-Christians, is knocking at the doors of Christian communities of centuries-old evangelization, and is becoming more and more a "mission among ourselves", this commitment takes on the greatest urgency in every community.

Most encouraging, in the face of the new demands of mission today, are also those *movements and ecclesial groups* that the Lord causes to spring up in the Church, so that her missionary service may be more generous, punctual and efficacious.

2. How to co-operate with the Church's missionary activity

If all the Church's members are consecrated for the mission, then they are all responsible for carrying Christ to the world through their own personal efforts. Participation in this right/duty, is called "missionary cooperation" and this necessarily stems from holiness of life: only one who is grafted onto Christ like the branches to the vine (cf Jn 15:5) can produce much fruit. The Christian who lives out his faith and observes the commandment of love, widens the confines of his activity to embrace all men and women through that same *spiritual cooperation*, consisting of prayer, sacrifice and witness, that made it possible for Saint T  r  se of the Child Jesus to be proclaimed co-patroness of the Missions, although she was never actually sent on mission.

Prayer must accompany the path and work of missionaries, so that the announcement of the Word may be made fruitful by divine grace. *Sacrifice*, accepted with faith and borne with Christ, has a salvific value. Because the sacrifice of missionaries needs to be shared and sustained by that of the faithful, everyone who suffers in mind or body can become a missionary, if he or she offers that suffering with Jesus to the Father. The *witness of a Christian life-style*, is a silent but efficacious way of preaching God's word. The men and women of today, who seem indifferent to the search for the Absolute, really feel a deep need for it and they are attracted and moved by holy people who reveal the Absolute by their example.

Spiritual co-operation with missionary activity must tend above all to *promoting missionary vocations*. That is why I turn once again to the young men and women of our times, to invite them to say "yes" if the Lord calls them to follow him with a *missionary vocation*. No other decision is as radical or courageous as this: to leave everything so as to dedicate oneself to the service of those brothers and sisters who have not received the priceless gift of faith in Christ.

World Mission Day unites all the Church's children not only in prayer, but also in commitment to solidarity and sharing of aid and material goods for the mission *ad gentes*. This commitment corresponds to the state of need in which so many people and populations of the earth find themselves. They are our brothers and sisters, in need of everything, who live mainly in those countries identified with the south of the world and which coincide with mission lands. Pastors and missionaries therefore, need immense resources, not only for the work of evangelization — which is certainly the primary work and is also onerous — but also to provide the many material and moral necessities through that work of human promotion which always accompanies every mission.

May the celebration of World Mission Day be a providential stimulus to activate both charitable structures and the effective practice of charity on the part of individual Christians and their communities: it "is an important date in the life of the Church, because it teaches how to give: as an offering made to God, *in* the Eucharistic celebration and *for* all the missions of the world." (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 81)

3. The animation of the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies

In the work of missionary animation and co-operation, which involves all the Church's children, I wish to reaffirm the proper and specific responsibility that falls to the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies, as I also stressed in the aforesaid Encyclical (cf n. 84).

All four of these Societies — Propagation of the Faith, St Peter Apostle, Holy Childhood and the Missionary Union — have in common the purpose of promoting a missionary spirit in the hearts of the People of God. They are a reminder of the universal Church within the local Churches.

In particular I wish to mention the Missionary Union, which is celebrating the 75th anniversary of its foundation. It does a praise-worthy job of stimulating priests, men and women religious and leaders of Christian communities, so that the missionary ideal is realized in suitable forms of pastoral and missionary catechesis.

The Pontifical Mission Aid Societies must be the first to put into practice that which I already stressed in the Encyclical: "Particular Churches should therefore make the promotion of the missions a key element in the normal pastoral activity of parishes, associations and groups, especially youth groups" (n. 83). The Missionary Societies must be the protagonists in this important mandate, in animation, in missionary formation and in the organization of charity for helping the missions.

But, after having drawn attention to the purpose of these Societies, as well as the permanent commitment for the missions, I cannot end this message without addressing the missionaries — priests, men and women religious and lay missionaries spread throughout the world — with a personal and affectionate word of gratitude and encouragement, that they may persevere with trust in their evangelizing activity, even and when its actuation may and does call for the greatest sacrifices, including that of life itself.

Dearest missionaries! My thoughts and my affection, together with the gratitude of the whole Church, accompany you always. You are not only the living hope of the Church, as witnesses and crafters of her universal mission as it is carried out; but you are also a credible and visible sign of that love of God that has called, consecrated and sent us all, but which has given a special mandate to you: the unique gift of a mission *ad gentes*. You carry Christ to the world; and in his name, as his Vicar, I bless you and hold you in my heart. And blessing you, I also bless all those who with love and generosity share in your apostolate of evangelization and promotion of human integral development.

May Mary, Queen of the Apostles, guide and assist the steps of you missionaries and of all those who in any way co-operate with the universal mission of the Church.

From the Vatican, 19 May, — solemnity of Pentecost — in the year 1991, the thirteenth of my Pontificate.

©Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana