



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2003

Dear Brothers and Sisters,¹ From the beginning, I wished to place my pontificate under Mary's special protection. Further, I have often asked the entire community of believers to relive the experience of the Upper Room, where the disciples "*devoted themselves to prayer, together with ... Mary, the Mother of Jesus*" (Acts 1,14). Already in my first Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, I wrote that only in an atmosphere of fervent prayer are we able "to receive the Holy Spirit coming upon us and thus become Christ's witnesses 'to the ends of the earth', like those who went forth from the Upper Room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost" (n. 22). The Church becomes more conscious that she is "mother" as Mary is. As I pointed out in the Bull *Incarnationis mysterium*, on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Church is "the cradle in which Mary places Jesus and entrusts him to the adoration and contemplation of all peoples" (n. 11). The Church intends to continue on this spiritual and missionary path, accompanied by the Blessed Virgin, Star of the New vangelization, radiant dawn and sure guide for our steps (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 58). Mary and the mission of the Church in the Year of the Rosary². Last October, when I entered the 25th year of my Petrine ministry, I announced a special Year, almost as a spiritual continuation of the Jubilee Year, to be dedicated to the rediscovery of the prayer of the Rosary, so dear to Christian tradition. It is a year to be lived under the gaze of the One who, in accord with God's mysterious plan, with her "yes", made possible humanity's salvation and who continues from Heaven to protect those who turn to her, especially during the difficult moments of their lives. I would like the *Year of the Rosary* to be a favourable occasion for believers on all the continents to deepen the meaning of their Christian vocation. At the school of the Blessed Virgin and following her example, every community will be better able to have its own "contemplative" and "missionary" activity emerge. If the World Mission Sunday, which takes place right at the end of the special Marian year, is well prepared, it will give a more generous thrust to this commitment of the ecclesial community. Confident recourse to Mary, with the daily recitation of the Rosary and the meditation of the mysteries of the life of Christ, will emphasize that the Church's mission must be sustained first of all by prayer. The attitude of "listening", which is prompted by praying the Rosary, brings the faithful close to Mary, who "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2,19). Frequent meditation on the Word of God forms us to live "in living communion with Jesus through — we might say — the heart of his Mother" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 2). A more contemplative Church: the face of Christ contemplated³. *Cum Maria contemplemur Christi vultum!* These words often come to mind: contemplate the "face" of Christ with Mary. When we speak of the "face" of Christ, we refer to his human likeness in which the eternal glory of the Father's only Son shines out (cf. Jn 1,14): "The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 21). Contemplating the face of Christ leads to a deeper, interior familiarity with his mystery. Contemplating Jesus with the eyes of faith impels one to penetrate the mystery of the Trinitarian God. Jesus says: "*He who has seen me has seen the*

Father" (Jn 14,9). With the Rosary we advance on this mystical journey "in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 3). Indeed, Mary makes herself our teacher and our guide. Under the action of the Holy Spirit, she helps us acquire that "serene boldness" which enables believers to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope that motivates them (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 24). Let us always look to Mary, an unequalled model. All the words of the Gospel find an extraordinary echo in her soul. Mary is the contemplative "memory" of the Church, who lives with the desire to be deeply united with her Bridegroom, in order to have an ever greater impact on our society. How do we react to the great problems, the innocent suffering, the injustices perpetrated with arrogant insolence? At the docile school of Mary, who is our Mother, believers learn to recognize in the apparent "silence of God" the Word who resounds in the silence for our salvation. **A holier Church: the face of Christ imitated and loved**⁴. Through baptism all believers are called to holiness. In the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, the Second Vatican Council stresses that the universal vocation to holiness consists in the call of all to the perfection of charity. Holiness and mission are inseparable aspects of the vocation of every baptized person. The commitment to become more holy is closely linked to that of spreading the message of salvation. In *Redemptoris missio* I recalled, "Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission" (n. 90). In contemplating the mysteries of the Rosary, the believer is encouraged to follow Christ and to share his life so that he can say with St Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2,20). If all the mysteries of the Rosary constitute an important school of holiness and evangelization, the *mysteries of light* bring into relief special aspects of our Gospel "*sequela*". The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan recalls that the baptized are chosen to become "sons in the Son" (Eph 1,5; cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). At the wedding feast of Cana, Mary invites the servants to listen obediently to the Word of the Lord: "*Do whatever he tells you*" (Jn 2,5). The proclamation of the Kingdom and the invitation to conversion are a clear mandate to everyone to pursue the path of holiness. In the Transfiguration of Jesus, the baptized person experiences the joy that awaits him. In meditating upon the institution of the Eucharist, he returns often to the Upper Room, where the divine Master left his disciples his most precious treasure: himself in the Sacrament of the altar. In a certain sense it is the words that the Blessed Virgin pronounces at Cana that form the Marian background for all the mysteries of light. Indeed, the proclamation of the Kingdom at hand, the call to conversion and mercy, the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor and the institution of the Eucharist find a special echo in Mary's heart. Mary keeps her eyes fixed on Christ, treasures his every word and shows us how to be genuine disciples of her Son. A more missionary Church: the Face of Christ proclaimed⁵. At no other time has the Church had so many possibilities of proclaiming Jesus, thanks to the development of the means of social communication. For this reason, the Church today is called to make the Face of her Bridegroom shine forth with her more radiant holiness. In this far from easy effort, she knows she is sustained by Mary. From Mary she "learns" to be a "virgin", totally dedicated to her Spouse, Jesus Christ, and a "mother" of many children whom she brings forth to eternal life. Under the watchful gaze of her Mother, the ecclesial community flourishes like a family revived by the powerful outpouring of the Spirit, and, accepting the challenges of the new evangelization, contemplates the merciful face of Jesus in the brothers and sisters, especially the poor and needy, in those far from the faith and the Gospel. In particular, the Church is not afraid to cry to the world that Christ is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14,6). She is not afraid to proclaim joyfully that "good news, which has as its heart and its whole content the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the one Saviour of the world" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 20). It is necessary to prepare capable and holy evangelizers. The fervour of the apostles must not be allowed to weaken, especially in regard to the mission *ad gentes*. The Rosary, if it is fully rediscovered and appreciated, is an ordinary yet fruitful pedagogical and spiritual tool to form the People of God to work in the vast field of apostolic action. A precise mandate⁶. The task of missionary animation must continue to be a serious, consistent duty of every baptized person and of every ecclesial community. The Pontifical Missionary Societies, of course, have a specific and particular

role and I thank them for generously carrying it out. I would like to suggest to all of you that you intensify your praying of the Rosary, privately and in community, to obtain from the Lord those graces that the Church and humanity especially need. I invite everyone to do this: children, adults, young and old, families, parishes and religious communities. Among the many intentions, I would not wish to forget that of peace. War and injustice have their origins in the "divided" heart. "Anyone who assimilates the mystery of Christ — and this is clearly the goal of the Rosary — learns the secret of peace and makes it his life's project" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 40). If the Rosary keeps pace with the speed of our lives, it can become a privileged instrument for building peace in the hearts of persons, in families and among peoples. With Mary, we can obtain everything from her Son Jesus. Supported by Mary, we will not hesitate to devote ourselves generously to taking the proclamation of the Good News to the ends of the earth. With these sentiments, I cordially bless all of you. *From the Vatican, 12 January 2003, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.*

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