



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2004

"Eucharist and Mission"

*My dearest Brothers and Sisters!*¹ The Church's missionary activity is an urgency also at the beginning of the third millennium, as I have often said. Mission, as I stated in the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* is still only beginning and we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service (cfr n. 1). The entire people of God at every moment of its pilgrimage through history is called to share the Redeemer's "thirst" (cfr *Jn* 19,28). This thirst to save souls has always been strongly experienced by the Saints: it suffices to think for example of Saint Therese of Lisieux, patroness of the missions and of Bishop Comboni, great apostle of Africa whom recently I had the joy of raising to the honour of the altars. The social and religious challenges facing humanity in our day call believers to renew their missionary fervour. Yes! It is necessary to re-launch mission "*ad gentes*" with courage, starting with the proclamation of Christ, Redeemer of every human person. The International Eucharistic Congress which will be celebrated at Guadalajara in Mexico in the coming month of October, the missionary month, will be an extraordinary opportunity to grow in choral missionary awareness around the Table of the Body and Blood of Christ. Gathered around the altar, the Church understands better her origin and her missionary mandate. As the theme of World Mission Sunday this year clearly emphasises "*Eucharist and Mission*" are inseparable. In addition to reflection on the bond that exists between the Eucharistic mystery and the mystery of the Church, this year there will be an eloquent reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary, because of the occurrence of the 150th anniversary of the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854-2004). Let us contemplate the Eucharist with the eyes of Mary. Confiding in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the Church offers Christ, the Bread of Salvation, to all peoples that they may recognise Him and accept Him as the only Saviour of mankind.² Returning ideally to the Upper Room, last year, precisely on Holy Thursday, I signed the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, from which I would like to take some passages which will help us, dearest Brothers and Sisters, to live World Mission Sunday this year with a Eucharistic spirit. "The Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist" (n. 26), I wrote, observing how the mission of the Church is a continuity of the mission of Christ (cfr *Jn* 20,21), and draws spiritual energy from communion with his Body and Blood. The goal of the Eucharist is precisely "communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 22). When we take part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice we understand more profoundly the universality of redemption and, consequently, the urgency of the Church's mission with its programme which "has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem" (*ibid.*, 60). Around Christ in the Eucharist the Church grows as the people, temple and family of God: one, holy, Catholic

and apostolic. At the same time she understands better her character of universal sacrament of salvation and visible reality with a hierarchical structure. Certainly "no Christian community can be built up unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist" (*ibid.*, 33; cfr *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6). At the end of every Mass, when the celebrant takes leave of the assembly with the words "*Ite, Missa est*", all should feel they are sent as "missionaries of the Eucharist" to carry to every environment the great gift received. In fact anyone who encounters Christ in the Eucharist cannot fail to proclaim through his or her life the merciful love of the Redeemer.³ To live the Eucharist it is necessary, as well, to spend much time in adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament, something which I myself experience every day drawing from it strength, consolation and assistance (cfr *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 25). The Eucharist, the Second Vatican Council affirms, "is the source and summit of all Christian life" (*Lumen gentium*, 11), "the source and summit of all evangelisation" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5). The bread and wine, fruit of human hands, transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Christ, become a pledge of the "new heaven and new earth" (Rev 21,1), announced by the Church in her daily mission. In Christ, whom we adore present in the mystery of the Eucharist, the Father uttered his final word with regard to humanity and human history. How could the Church fulfil her vocation without cultivating a constant relationship with the Eucharist, without nourishing herself with this food which sanctifies, without founding her missionary activity on this indispensable support? To evangelise the world there is need of apostles who are "experts" in the celebration, adoration and contemplation of the Eucharist.⁴ In the Eucharist we relive the mystery of the Redemption culminating in the Lord's sacrifice, as it is said in the words of consecration: "*my body which will be given for you...;...my blood which will be poured out for you*" (Lk 22,19-20). Christ died for all; and for all is the gift of salvation which the Eucharist renders sacramentally present in the course of history: "*Do this in memory of me*" (Lk 22,19). This mandate is entrusted to ordained ministers through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. To this banquet and sacrifice all men and women are invited so they may share in the very life of Christ: "*He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me*" (Jn 6,56-57). Nourished by Him, believers come to understand that the missionary task means being "*acceptable as an offering, made holy by the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 15,16), in order to be more and more "*one, in heart and mind*" (Acts 4,32) and to be witnesses of his love to the ends of the earth. Journeying through the centuries, reliving every day the Sacrifice of the altar, the Church, the People of God, awaits Christ's coming in glory. This is proclaimed after the consecration by the Eucharistic assembly gathered around the altar. Time after time with renewed faith the Church repeats her desire for the final encounter with the One who comes to bring his plan of universal salvation to completion. The Holy Spirit with invisible but powerful working, guides the Christian people on this daily spiritual itinerary on which they inevitably encounter difficulties and experience the mystery of the Cross. The Eucharist is the comfort and the pledge of final triumph for those who fight evil and sin; it is the "bread of life" which sustains those who, in turn, become "bread broken" for others, paying at times even with martyrdom their fidelity to the Gospel.⁵ This year, as I already mentioned, will be the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Mary was "redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits of her Son" (*Lumen gentium*, 53). I said in the encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*: "Gazing upon Mary, we come to know that transforming power present in the Eucharist. In her we see the world renewed in love" (n. 62). Mary, the first "tabernacle" in history" (*ibid.*, n. 55), shows us and offer us Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cfr Jn 14,6). If "the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist." (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 57). I hope that the happy coinciding of the International Eucharistic Congress with the 150th anniversary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, may offer the faithful, parishes and missionary institutes an opportunity to strengthen their missionary zeal so that in every community there may always be "a genuine hunger for the Eucharist" (*ibid.*, n. 33) This is also a good opportunity to

mention the contribution offered to the Church's apostolic activity by the worthy Pontifical Mission Societies. They are very dear to my heart and I thank them, on behalf of all, for the valid service rendered to new evangelisation and the mission *ad gentes*. I ask you to support them spiritually and materially so that also through their contribution, the proclamation of the Gospel may reach all the peoples of the earth. With these sentiments, invoking the maternal intercession of Mary, "woman of the Eucharist", I gladly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 19 April 2004***IOANNES PAULUS II**

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