



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION
OF THE SECOND AMERICAN MISSIONARY CONGRESS
HELD IN GUATEMALA CITY**

To Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruño

Archbishop of Guatemala

President of the Second American Missionary Congress 1. The Second American Missionary Congress that is being held in Guatemala City on the theme "Church in America, your life is mission", gives me the opportunity to greet all those present with great affection and to remember with deep gratitude the warm welcome you gave me, as a pilgrim of love and hope, on my last Journey to this Continent, during which I had the joy of canonizing Br. Pedro de San José de Betancur. In a certain way, the canonization of this extraordinary missionary was the prelude to this Congress. May his powerful intercession and the witness of his holiness guide you at this Assembly, from which the universal Church is executing with hope an abundant harvest of faith, holiness and missionary generosity. I would like first of all to greet Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruño, Archbishop of Guatemala, and my numerous Brothers in the Episcopate who are meeting at this continental missionary Cenacle. I also address my affectionate greeting to all those who have collaborated in the preparation of the Congress and each one of the participants: priests, men and women religious, the lay faithful and especially, the young people and children. My Special Envoy, Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, brings you the witness of my spiritual closeness and interest in this important event. I am thinking in particular of you who have received the Lord's call to proclaim him *ad gentes*, a vocation of self-sacrifice and holiness that brings you to serve all the men and women and all the peoples of the earth. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation and saying to Zion, "Your God is King!" (Is 52: 7). 2. Dear brothers and sisters, the history of the evangelization of the American Continent reveals the intimate relationship between holiness and mission. Looking at this missionary work in a historical perspective, it is truly gratifying to note the great impact that the Gospel and Christian life have had on the first communities, as well as the witness of the many holy missionaries they inspired. In this blessed land, from the very beginning of evangelization and in the course of its interesting history, the Lord's Spirit has created beautiful fruits of holiness in men and women who, faithful to the missionary mandate of the Lord, have dedicated their lives to proclaiming the Christian message, even in circumstances and conditions that were heroic. Their personal holiness and that of their communities were unquestionably at the root of this marvellous missionary dynamism. Today too, a new impetus to the mission *ad gentes* in America and from America needs holy missionaries and ecclesial communities. This call to mission is linked to the vocation to holiness, which is "a fundamental presupposition and an

irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 90). As regards this universal call, we must become aware of our own responsibility in spreading the Gospel. Cooperation in the mission *ad gentes* must be a sign of mature faith and of a Christian life capable of producing fruits, so that the neediest particular Churches may receive a human and spiritual impulse that helps them walk with their Pastors. To achieve this, "it is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and coordinate ecclesial resources, or delve more deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith. What is needed is the encouragement of a new 'ardour for holiness' among missionaries and throughout the Christian community, especially among those who work most closely with missionaries" (*ibid.*).³ Following my Pastoral Visits to the different Nations, in some of which the Gospel has only recently been proclaimed, I have formed the deep conviction that humanity is awaiting with ever greater longing for "the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom 8: 19). Indeed, many people want to find the mystery of holiness and communion that is fundamental to the Church and is also the epiphany of "that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us (cf. Rom 5: 5), to make us all 'one heart and soul' (Acts 4: 32)" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 42). Millions of men and women who do not know Christ or who know him only superficially live the hope - sometimes unconsciously - of discovering the truth about man and about God, about the way that leads to liberation from sin and from death. For this humanity that yearns or feels nostalgic for the beauty of Christ, for his bright and serene light that shines on the face of the earth, the proclamation of the Good News is a vital task that cannot be postponed. Your Congress is facing this task. Respond promptly, therefore, to the Lord's call. Show your desire to be joyful witnesses and enthusiastic apostles of the Gospel to the very ends of the earth, witnessing to a holy life!⁴ Since the joyful experience of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I have pointed out the way of holiness as the foundation on which the pastoral programme of every particular Church must be founded. It is a matter of "re-proposing wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 31). Dear brothers and sisters, this requires an appropriate and patient pastoral training - a training in holiness - that must be distinguished by the primacy it gives to Jesus Christ, to listening and to proclaiming his Word, to full and active participation in the sacraments, and to fostering prayer as a personal encounter with the Lord. All pastoral activity must focus on Christian initiation and formation which, by helping to develop and reinforce the faith of those who are involved in it and attracting those who are still distant, is the best guarantee that the particular Churches in America will develop an effective process of cooperation and mission animation. This must indeed be "central to Christian life" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 83).⁵ Encouraged by the Holy Spirit and by the witness of the growing number of missionaries *ad gentes* from your Countries, I would like to repeat to this large Assembly, which is a sign of the unity of all the peoples of the Continent, what I said in the past in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, addressing your Christian Communities: "The particular Churches in America are called to extend their missionary efforts beyond the bounds of the Continent; they cannot keep for themselves the immense riches of their Christian heritage. They must take this heritage to the whole world and share it with those who do not yet know it. Here it is a question of many millions of men and women who, without faith, suffer the most serious kind of poverty. Faced with this poverty it would be a mistake not to encourage an evangelizing effort beyond the Continent with the excuse that there is still much to do in America, or to wait until the Church in America reaches the point, basically utopian, of full maturity" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 74). Your particular Churches have a great responsibility in the work of evangelizing the contemporary world. They will bear an abundant harvest in this new missionary springtime, "if all Christians and missionaries and young Churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time" (n. 92). Beloved brothers and sisters, it gives me deep joy to know that your Congress, for which you have prepared together during the Missionary Holy Year, will accept this call and give concrete and effective responses to the Gospel mandate of the mission that is life for the Church in America. As in

previous Missionary Congresses, I ask the Lord to grant us to live an intense experience of communion and that Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother and Evangelizer of America, "the model of that maternal love which should inspire all who cooperate in the Church's apostolic mission for the rebirth of humanity" (*ibid.*, n. 92), will accompany you with her tenderness and protect you with her powerful intercession. As I encourage each and every one of you to live in your own particular Church in a spirit of communion and service, I renew to you my invitation to carry out the mission in today's world, and I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 25 October 2003* **JOHN PAUL II**

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