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Press Conference to present World Mission Day (18 October 2020)

At 11.30, in the “John Paul II” Hall of the Holy See Press Office, Via della Conciliazione 54, a press conference was held to present the upcoming World Mission Day, to be held on Sunday 18 October 2020 on the theme “Here I am, send me”.

The speakers were Archbishop Protase Rugambwa, secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples; Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, president of the Pontifical Mission Societies; and Fr. Tadeusz J. Nowak, O.M.I., secretary general of the Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Also present in the Hall to recount their experience of missionary life were Sr. Ana Cambongo António, Angola; Don Vignandas Gangula, India; and Marco Gibelli and Lucia Truttero, Italy.

The following are the interventions:

Intervention by Archbishop Protase Rugambwa

Today we present the Holy Father’s Message for the World Missions Day, to take place on Sunday 18 October, entitled “*Here I am, send me*”. The heart of this message refers to how the mission calls to each one of us, personally, in our vocation, and in our membership of the Church in today’s world.

The celebration of this Day is a source of joy to the Universal Church, even if it will be celebrated in a different way in the local Churches this year, due to the particular circumstances we are experiencing because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Pope Francis says:

We have realised that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. ... In this context, the call to mission, the invitation to step out of ourselves for love of God and neighbour presents itself as an opportunity for sharing, service and intercessory prayer. (Message of the Holy Father Francis for World Mission Day 2020).

The Mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church never stops. We, as the Holy Father reminded us in the Extraordinary Missionary October last year, “Baptised and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world”, are called this year to give the concrete answer “Here I am, send me”, just as the prophet Isaiah responded, to be able to carry forth this “mission”.

God who “sent” and supported Jesus is the same who sends us through His Son and supports us with the strength of the Holy Spirit: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (*Jn* 20: 21). “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (*Mt* 28: 18-20). Each one of us is sent to take the love of God to everyone, and above all to those most in need. This means doing God’s will and acting in accordance with the divine plan of salvation.

We must not be afraid! The mission goes ahead thanks to the strength of the Holy Spirit. Without Him we cannot do anything. “*The mission that God entrusts to each one of us leads us from fear and introspection to a renewed realisation that we find ourselves precisely when we give ourselves to others*” (Message of the Holy Father Francis for World Mission Day 2020). Each one of us must listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and let him- or herself be guided by this sure and able force.

All of us who have been baptised have received the power of the Holy Spirit in baptism as a gift and therefore we are called to be agents of this mission; we must respond firmly to God: “Here I am, send me”. (*Is* 6: 8). The Holy Father, in his message for this World Missionary Day, challenges us:

Are we willing to be sent forth at any time or place to witness to our faith in God the merciful Father, to proclaim the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, to share the divine life of the Holy Spirit by building up the Church? Are we, like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, ready to be completely at the service of God’s will (cf. Lk 1:38)?

The mission must touch and transform all sectors and areas of life in order to save humanity and creation: families, jobs, factories, schools, politics, the environment, etc. (see *Lk* 1:38).

We are invited to respond to God’s call, in a free and conscious manner and to be available for the Lord to send us. This is the mission: Who will I send? Here I am, send me!

We joyfully accept this Message of the Holy Father and thank him for the missionary exhortation he offers us. We want, today with him too, to invite all the faithful to reconfirm their willingness and their active participation in the Church’s ever more necessary and urgent mission of evangelisation. In what way? Through prayer, sacrifice, reflection, and material aid for the important purpose of helping and supporting the missionary work that is carried out, in the name of the Pope, by the Pontifical Mission Societies.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Apostles, accompany us in our missionary activities for the salvation of all humanity.

Intervention by Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso

In my brief intervention I will say a few words on the Pontifical Mission Societies and on the Fund instituted on behalf of the Holy Father to support the local Churches in this period of the pandemic.

In his message for World Missions Day, the Pope evokes the importance of the PMS and recalls that, according to a long tradition, the proceeds of this Sunday’s collection are destined for the Pontifical Mission Societies. These, as you know, have supported the missionary work of the Church for almost two centuries with prayer, charity and formation. I wish to underscore that Churches from all over the world collaborate in the universal fund. It is not merely aid from north to south, but a criterion for communication and circularity, where everyone

contributes for the good of all. It is an all but unique example of this form of sharing, also economic, between Churches. It is the task of the Pontifical Mission Societies to finance pastoral projects, and it is therefore inherent to the life of the Church which gradually establishes its structures throughout the world. This too is a specific element. Although the financial issue is neither the first nor the most important for the Pontifical Mission Societies, money is however a necessity, just as every soul needs a body.

In this regard I would like to add a word on the fund instituted on behalf of the Holy Father to assist the local Churches in facing this period of the pandemic. Up to the present, 250 projects have been approved and financed, for a total of 1,299,700 US dollars, and 473,410 Euros. The funds originate from collections carried out in various countries thanks to our national directorates, a total of around 120, and I would like to mention with particular gratitude the Churches in Spain, France and South Korea, which have contributed the most, but also countries such as Rwanda and Bangladesh, which have carried out *ad hoc* collections to demonstrate their participation. The work is not complete, also because, thanks to God, we have other funds available, but it is implemented now in a different way, so as not to confuse the subsidies that normally reach the local Churches in this period with the aid intended to face Covid-19. The biggest problem that many Churches find themselves facing in mission territories has been the closure of the churches; celebrations have not taken place and therefore there have been no collections. As you can easily imagine, many of these ecclesial bodies live simply through the Sunday collection, and do not have a central support system. Therefore, the subsidies have been destined overwhelmingly in favour of the dioceses for the survival of priests and the payment of running costs, but also to religious communities and Catholic schools, as well as to families in particular difficulty. I would like to mention three practical examples:

- Aid to a convent of cloistered nuns in Morocco. These religious sisters, as is well known, live by providence, and due to their vocation they live substantially within their convent
- Support to Christian families in Bangladesh, a tiny and extremely poor minority in a country frequently afflicted by natural disasters;
- Support for various radio and TV stations in Africa, for the broadcasting of catechesis and liturgical celebrations.

They are very simple examples, which however enable you to understand how our work assists the many hidden situations that are often overlooked by the major aid flows. All this makes our presence ever more necessary. Certainly, I am aware that it is often a drop in the ocean of need. But it is a genuine way of indicated communion in the Church, which enables us to participate in the joys and sorrows of other baptized people.

For this reason, the national Directorates are carrying out major work in raising awareness of the upcoming World Day, an element of which you are able to see by visiting our website.

Intervention by Fr. Tadeusz J. Nowak, O.M.I.

The Pontifical Mission Society (*Pontificium Opus a Propagatione Fidei*) provides vital support to particular Churches in Asia, Oceania, Africa and parts of South and Latin America. Thanks to the generosity of Catholics throughout the world, countless numbers of churches, convents, pastoral centres, schools, clinics, and other diocesan structures are now present in territories that are dependent on the *Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*. Thousands of catechists, priests and religious have participated in formation programs and material aid for their work of evangelization in their local Churches. In this way, particular Churches in mission lands, especially in areas where the Gospel has only recently been widely proclaimed, now have a necessary ecclesiastical infrastructure and can better fulfill their mandate to evangelize the nations.

Although the work of the *Pontificium Opus a Propagatione Fidei* is ongoing, the Holy Father has chosen the

penultimate Sunday of October as a day in which the entire Church celebrates mission. On that day, we are all called to pray and offer what we can for missionary efforts and young Churches in mission lands. The success of this missionary animation also depends on the dedicated and zealous service of our National Directors, who are present in some 120 countries around the world. They represent the four Pontifical Mission Societies (*Pontificia Opera Missionalia*) and ensure that the charism of our foundress is alive and active in our day, through mission animation carried out by National Directors and their collaborators.

This year is special for the *Pontificium Opus a Propagatione Fidei*. This past May 26th, the Holy Father approved a miracle through the intercession of our foundress, Pauline Marie Jaricot. The miracle involved a very young girl, who experienced acute suffocation, which resulted in her losing consciousness. Her condition was so grim that she had to be kept alive by artificial life support. From a medical standpoint, there was no hope of recovery for the girl and the doctors suggested detaching her from life support systems. The parents refused to give up and began a novena of prayers through Pauline's intercession. Spontaneously and without any medical explanation, the girl revived and was restored to perfect health.

The miracle was dramatic, but it is Pauline's life story that provides the substance of the quality of holiness, a quality that she radiated throughout her life. She was born to a middle-class family just after the French Revolution. Pauline was a happy child. At the age of 15 she experienced a deep experience of God and at the age of 16 she made a private vow of chastity and consecration to God for life. She became devoted to Eucharistic Adoration, helping the poor and had a deep desire to have the Gospel of Christ reach the ends of the earth. It was in this period that she received the inspiration that would eventually become the *Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith*.

It was a simple concept that had far-reaching consequences. She began to invite ten friends, employees of her father's silk factory, to pray for the missions and each to offer one penny weekly for the Church's mission. Each member of the group was encouraged to find ten other friends to form another group, and so on. What occurred was nothing short of a miracle. These groups of ten multiplied and became teams of a hundred, then of a thousand. In a short time, the movement spread throughout her Diocese of Lyon in France, throughout the country and eventually it became a worldwide network of prayer and charity for the support of the Church's mission. On May 2, 1822, this organization was formally registered as the *Opus a Propagazione Fidei*, known in English as the *Society for the Propagation of the Faith*.

Pauline dedicated her entire life to prayer, helping the poor, especially laborers, and the Church's mission. In 1826, she founded the Living Rosary, which continues to flourish in various parts of the world even today. In time, she would spend her entire family fortune for the poor, wanting to establish better working conditions for manual laborers. Tragically, those she entrusted with the family fortune embezzled the funds and she was forced to declare bankruptcy. In all of her misfortunes, she never for a second doubted God's providence and remained steadfast in prayer and care for others, especially for those who had not yet heard the Gospel or met Jesus Christ. In fact, she died destitute on January 9, 1862. It was only after her passing that her closest collaborators began to make her life and work better known. They always considered her to be a saint.

On May 3, 1922, one hundred years after its founding, the Society was proclaimed Pontifical by Pope Pius XI. After carefully studying her life and writings, she was proclaimed venerable by Pope St. John XXIII in 1962.

Today she is an inspiration for us all, especially for the laity. Pauline is a wonderful example of engaging fully the grace of Baptism for the work of the Kingdom of God and for the mission of the Church.
