



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE WORLD MISSION DAY 1992**

Beloved Brothers and Sisters!

1. World Mission Sunday, instituted in 1926 by Pope Pius XI at the request of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, calls us each year in the spirit of the Church's unity and universality, to a renewed commitment to everyone's responsibility for the spread of the Gospel message.

As we approach the Third Millennium of the Redemption, our universal mission becomes even more urgent. We cannot remain indifferent when we think of the millions of men and women who, like us, have been redeemed by the Blood of Christ, yet still do not have sufficient knowledge of God's love. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can withdraw from the supreme duty of proclaiming Christ to all peoples. Today two-thirds of humanity do not know Christ; they need him and his message of salvation.

Since the Church is by her very nature missionary, evangelization constitutes a duty and a right for every one of her members (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 17; *Ad gentes*, nn. 28, 35-38). The Lord calls us to go beyond ourselves and to share with others the blessings we have received, beginning with the gift of faith, which cannot be considered as a private privilege but must be seen as a gift to be shared with those who have not yet received it. Such activity will benefit faith itself since faith is strengthened when it is shared.

Contribution of prayers and of suffering, and of our very self

2. On World Mission Sunday every particular Church, the youngest as well as those long-established, those freely developing along with those suffering persecution, those with sufficient resources and those weighed down by poverty, feel the duty of reaching out of themselves to share in the responsibility for the mission *ad gentes*.

Responding therefore to the invitation of "Mission Sunday", each member will dutifully participate in the universal mission of the Church most of all through spiritual cooperation, accompanying and sustaining the efforts of our missionaries by prayer. Jesus himself spoke of the need "to pray always" (Lk 18:1) and gave witness through the sacrifice of his very life. As disciples of Christ, let us too offer our life to God, through Christ, the first missionary.

In this regard the prayer and the sacrifice of the sick take on great value when their suffering is intimately associated to the Passion of Christ. Those who are dedicated to the care of the sick will not fail to instruct them and encourage them to offer their suffering in union with Christ Crucified for the salvation of the world (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 78).

Our sacrifice requires concrete and visible expression. For some this means accepting the privileged sacrifice and priceless blessing of a special missionary vocation, "going forth" with the Gospel wherever the Spirit leads.

This "going forth" finds its greatest manifestation in the sending of the Apostles on mission in the New Testament: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We are all missionaries

3. As we celebrate the fifth centenary of the evangelization of the Americas we are reminded of the European missionaries who brought the Gospel to the people they found on those shores. We approach this celebration with humility and truth, giving thanks to God for the blessings he has given to these ancient and noble peoples.

Today we see with joy that missionaries come not only from the more established Churches but also from the Churches of Africa, Asia and Latin America, where many dedicate their lives to the initial proclamation of the Gospel. In many countries the precious and indispensable work of local catechists continues, moved by a strong missionary spirit which makes them untiring animators of faith and hope.

While not all are called to the lifelong missionary vocation *ad gentes*, all must pray for and foster a missionary spirit both in their own hearts and in their faith communities. Bishops and priests particularly must realize they are primarily responsible for this universal mission and the formation of enthusiastic, mission-conscious believers. But it is especially within the family unit that the laity will develop love for the missionary vocation (*Ad gentes*, n. 41) since the family, "the domestic Church", is the privileged place for mission evangelization.

Apostolate of animation for collection of funds

4. So that World Mission Sunday may assume its full significance and value in full solidarity with the missions, it must be prepared with care and lived with real fervour. The celebration of the Eucharist constitutes the central moment in which the missionary problem comes to light and stimulates a responsible sharing on the part of every baptized person, every Christian family and every Church institution. But we must not neglect other means and opportunities for mission animation. We invite those responsible to foster and organize initiatives which will contribute to the success of this "Day". Together with information to encourage the missionary consciousness of every baptized person, collections for mission assistance should be encouraged. This objective is an important part of the Church's responsibility. It was even so for the mission and ministry of Jesus and the Twelve, who were assisted by generous persons. (cf. Lk 8:3).

The material and financial needs of the missions are many and growing daily. Financial sacrifices from the faithful "are essential for sustaining and building up the Church and for showing love" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 81). The Society for the Propagation of the Faith in this regard provides for the universal mission and through its central fund of solidarity avoids any discrimination in the distribution of aid to the Churches, especially the poorest. World Mission Sunday for almost 70 years now constitutes the most important ecclesial mobilization in encouraging spiritual and material cooperation for the missions. In this regard I feel it my duty to recall the wise disposition of my predecessors Pope Pius XI and John XXIII, who stipulated that all offerings collected on World Mission Sunday be destined in their entirety to the needs of the mission *ad gentes*.

There are good reasons for missionary hope and optimism

5. Dear brothers and sisters, insofar as we support the Church's missionary activity, we are faithful to her missionary nature. St Paul charged Timothy "to proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient" (2 Tim 4: 2). Paul's message is now addressed to us. All can, indeed, all must be directly engaged in building up the Church and in helping her members grow and mature in the profession of their faith, for "missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 2).

As we near the jubilee celebration of the Incarnation of the year 2000, I see the dawn of a new missionary age. Although at first sight we may be struck by negative factors in the world picture, we must look beyond these for signs of people drawing ever closer to the Gospel: the rejection of violence and war; respect for the human person and human rights; the desire for freedom, justice and brotherhood (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 86).

It is the same Christian hope that sustains us in committing ourselves fully to the new evangelization and to the mission to the nations. This hope leads us to pray as Jesus taught us: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10; *Redemptoris missio*, n. 86). There is reason for much hope in the increase of missionary vocations especially in the young

Churches, as well as in the fraternal aid among the Churches through the exchange of clergy, in the spirit of the Encyclical *Fidei Donum*.

Words of homage to the missionaries for their witness

6. I end this message with an expression of appreciation and admiration for all workers in the Gospel vineyard throughout the world. We need only to look at the many missionaries martyred in recent years to realize the great spirit of sacrifice of these men and women who consecrate their lives to the service of the Gospel. May the spirit that filled Paul, Apostle to the nations, guide and protect all missionaries and all who witness to Jesus in word, in deed and in the example of their lives.

I offer my gratitude as well to all who support the Church's missionary efforts in prayer, sacrifice and solidarity. May all find in Mary, who offered an unconditional "yes" to God, a model and inspiration for a generous apostolic commitment.

With these sentiments in mind, I cordially impart to all my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of divine favour.

Vatican City, 7 June 1992