



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE NATIONAL MISSIONARY CONGRESS OF IRELAND *Praised be Jesus Christ!* To all of you assembled at Knock to celebrate the National Missionary Congress: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:3). I know that you have not only gathered for reflection on the great theme of *the missions*, but you have also come as pilgrims to pray at the National Shrine of Our Lady. Your goal is indeed a lofty one: through the grace of the Holy Spirit *to renew the missionary fervour and commitment of Ireland*. In order to do this—in order to accomplish this aim—you are endeavouring to stir up within yourselves, and within the whole Church in Ireland, a renewed consciousness of the missionary vocation of all the People of God. The Second Vatican Council truly calls each of us to this awareness. In this regard, families must realize the responsibility, and the great dignity that is theirs, to pray and to work for the cause of the missions. And children, and the sick, and all the categories of the ecclesial community have to know and appreciate the contribution that only they can make to the Kingdom of God. To renew effectively missionary fervour and commitment means that young people have to hear, amid the many discordant voices of modern society, the strong but gentle call of Christ. They have to be encouraged to accept his wonderful invitation: to follow him in generosity and love, in sacrifice and joy—actually to leave all things and go forth to spread the Gospel of salvation. To renew missionary ideals means, moreover, making sure that the nature of evangelization is crystal clear. In the words of Paul VI: "There is no true evangelization, if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22). Yes, evangelization means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity; it means transforming humanity from within and making it new. Evangelization, and therefore all missionary activity, entails a clear proclamation that the gift of God's grace and mercy is found in his beloved Son, *that salvation is in Jesus Christ*. The missionary sets forth to diffuse a message of hope and brotherly love, and he knows from the beginning, in his heart, that he cannot proclaim the new commandment of Christ without also promoting, with justice and in peace, the true, authentic advancement of man. By missionary activity the local Church is implanted, and built up by word and sacrament. And today, in a changed world, missionary activity often means service—humble, generous and fraternal—to a local Church, so that, in turn, this local Church may become missionary, and thus fulfil its own vocation. With changed conditions in the world and in the Church, missionary service takes on new aspects and requires new adaptability; it demands new sensitivity to the needs of the Christian communities. But the message is always the same: "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). The success of all missionary initiatives depends on the effective guarding and teaching of the Catholic faith as transmitted by the apostles—faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God and Redeemer of man. Missionary effectiveness requires the transmission of this unbroken faith. During the Holy Year Paul VI, who loved Ireland so much, reminded the Irish pilgrims of the boast and the commitment made by Saint Columban to Saint Gregory the Great in Rome. And today, I repeat these words as a challenge to your Congress: "All we Irish ... are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul ... ; the Catholic faith is maintained

unbroken" (Paul VI, *Address*, 27 August 1975). And as Successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ, I appeal today for new missionary generosity, to give witness by word and example—even to the ends of the earth—to this unbroken Catholic faith. I call for a new generation of priests and religious to take their places—in the spirit of the saintly missionaries of the past—alongside their brothers and sisters in the local Churches. Dear young people: Will you accept this invitation? Will you say "yes" to this call? Will you give your lives for the love of Christ and his brethren? And I ask the Irish laity at home and abroad to transmit, especially to their families, with wholesome pride and at the cost of sacrifice, by word and deed, the treasure of their faith. Millions of Irish families throughout the world have given a glorious and attractive witness to Christ and his Church; this must never cease to be. And I pray that everyone—every sector of God's people—will be motivated by *the absolute necessity of sharing the faith with others*. The innermost nature of the Church requires this. The will of God and the glory of the Most Blessed Trinity is at stake. The Church is, and must remain, missionary, until Christ comes again in glory. This then, I am convinced, is an hour of hope for Ireland and the world. It is a time for renewed fidelity, for fresh generosity, and for ardent love. It is once again *the hour of the missions*, the hour of evangelization, the hour to go forth and proclaim "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (*Eph* 3:8). And let us be confident that God will hear our prayer: that this generation of disciples and missionaries will bear much fruit—fruit that will last (cf. *Jn* 15:16). These are my hopes, my desires today that I commend to Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church. In her loving role as Queen of the Missions, she has been close to countless Irish missionaries over the years, sustaining them in joy by her prayers, and giving them, in the midst of their sacrifices, the fullness of her maternal love. She will also stand by this generation and protect them, as they approach the fields of the apostolate "already white for harvest" (*Ibid.*, 4:35). To all of you, sons and daughters of Ireland, brothers and sisters in the faith, I impart my special Apostolic Blessing: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. *From the Vatican, 22 April 1979.* **IOANNES PAULUS PP. II**