



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE YOUNG MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL SOCIETY  
OF THE MISSIONARY CHILDHOOD**

*Saturday, 14 June 2003*

*Dear Children and Young People,*

1. I greet you all with great affection, together with the priests and animators who have accompanied you. Thank you for coming here in such large numbers, on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the Pontifical Society of the Missionary Childhood.

I greet Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and I am grateful to him for his words to me on your behalf. I then extend my thanks to those in charge of the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood who have prepared today's event, to the Directors of the Diocesan Missionary Offices and to the representatives of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

I am delighted to be with you today, also because 10 years ago - on the 150th anniversary of your association - I was unable to meet you.

2. Today you are renewing your commitment to the service of the Missions, reflecting on the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "Here I am! Send Me!" (Is 6: 8). In your hearts and on your lips, God places three little words which are so important in the Bible: "*Here I am*". They were spoken by the Son of God when he came into the world, and his whole life was his constant prompt response of "here I am" to the heavenly Father.

"Here I am" was the Virgin Mary's response to the Angel of the Annunciation who brought her God's announcement. With it, Our Lady humbly accepted the mission of becoming Mother of Jesus, and hence, Mother of the Church.

"*Here I am*", you must learn to answer too, dear little missionaries, asking Jesus and Mary to help you. If you generously obey God's will, you will be able to experience the joy felt by so many missionary Saints down the centuries who spent their lives for the Gospel.

It is beautiful to see the *Pontifical Society of the Missionary Childhood* as an *immense choir* made up of children from all over the world, who together sing their "here I am" to God with prayer, enthusiasm and concrete commitment! This has been going on for 160 years, ever since the Holy Spirit called your society to life, suggesting to Mons. Charles de Forbin-Janson, Bishop of Nancy in France, that *he should turn precisely to boys and girls*, and ask them to help the children in China.

3. Since then the motto of the Missionary Childhood continues to be "*Let children help children*". But how? First of all, *with prayer*. As I reminded you in the Message I addressed to you last 6 January, every small missionary should be committed to reciting a "Hail Mary" every day for his or her distant peers.

The second commitment is to try to meet their needs concretely with your own savings. *From a tiny seed, the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood has now grown into a majestic tree.*

Of course, *great and deep changes* have taken place in humanity between the mid-19th century and our day. In the so-called "north" of the globe, living conditions for children have improved, but economic and social development has not always been accompanied by human development in the full sense. A loss of values has been recorded and it is often precisely the smallest who pay the highest price for this, apart from the fact that widespread areas of poverty still exist in the developed nations.

In the "south" of the planet, *the cry of millions of children*, condemned to die of hunger and diseases linked to poverty, is becoming more heartrending and directly addresses everyone.

4. Dear Children of the Missionary Childhood! *You are the first to respond* to this call. You form a chain of solidarity across five continents, and you offer the poorest children an opportunity to "give" and the richest to "receive" in giving. Continue to play the lead role in this "exchange of gifts" which helps build a better future for everyone.

Be witnesses and prophets of Christ, as the theme of the 160th anniversary of the Missionary Childhood suggests: "*...and you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High*". May Our Lady help you say to God "*Here I am, send me!*". Turn to her with trust, during this year that is dedicated to the Rosary, with this popular prayer that you certainly know well and already recite. *Many children in the world pray the Rosary*, as did the blessed children, Francisco and Jacinta of Fatima, and the Pope gladly joins them every day.

Dear children and young people, when you go home, take my greeting to your family and friends along with my Blessing, which I willingly extend to the whole Pontifical Society of the Missionary Childhood.

---

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana