

Full text of the Papal Message for Mission Sunday 2009

Reach out with love

On this Sunday, dedicated to the missions, I address first of all you, my brothers in the Episcopal and the priestly ministry, and then you, my brothers and sisters, the whole People of God, to encourage in each one of you deeper awareness of Christ's missionary mandate to 'make disciples of all peoples' (Matt 28: 19) in the footsteps of Saint Paul, the Apostle of the nations.

'The nations will walk by its light' (Rev 21: 24)

The goal of the Church's mission is to illuminate with the light of the Gospel all peoples journeying through history towards God, so that in Him they may be fully realised and accomplished. We must live the longing and the passion to illuminate all peoples with the light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church, so that all may be gathered into the one human family, under God's loving fatherhood. It is in this perspective that the disciples of Christ spread throughout the world work, struggle and groan under the burden of suffering, offering their very lives. Let us once again proclaim strongly what was so frequently affirmed by my venerated Predecessors: the Church works not to extend power or affirm dominion, but to carry, to all, Christ, the salvation of the world. We ask nothing except to put ourselves at the service of all humanity, especially the suffering and the excluded, because we believe that 'the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today... is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity', (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1) which 'has experienced marvellous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself'. (*Redemptoris Missio* 2)

1. All Peoples are called to salvation

In truth, the whole of humanity has the radical vocation to return to its source, to return to God, since in Him alone can it find accomplishment through the restoration of all things in Christ. Dispersion, multiplicity, conflict, enmity will be calmed and reconciled through the blood of the Cross and led back to unity. This new beginning has already started with the Resurrection and the exaltation of Christ, who draws all things to himself, renewing them and enabling them to share in the eternal joy of God. The future of the new creation shines already in our world and, despite contradictions and suffering, kindles hope for new life. The Church's mission is to 'infect' all peoples with hope. This is why Christ calls, sanctifies and sends his disciples to announce the Kingdom of God, so that all nations may become the people of God. It is only in this mission that the true journey of humanity is understood and attested. The universal mission should become a fundamental constant in the life of the Church. *To announce the Gospel must be for us, as it was for the Apostle Paul, a primary and impelling duty.*

2. The pilgrim Church

The universal Church which knows neither borders nor frontiers feels responsible for announcing the Gospel to whole peoples. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 53) It is the duty of the Church, seed of hope by vocation, to continue Christ's service in the world. The measure of her mission and her service is not material or even spiritual needs restricted to temporal existence, instead, it is transcendent salvation, fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 27) This Kingdom, although eschatological in its completeness and not of *this* world (John 18: 36), is, *in* this world and in its history, a force for justice and peace, for true freedom and respect for the dignity of every human person. The Church wishes to transform the world with the proclamation of the Gospel of love, 'that can always illuminates a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working... and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world'. (*Deus Caritas Est* 39) It is to this mission and to this service that I call, also with this Message, all the members and institutions of the Church to participate.

3. Missio ad gentes

The mission of the Church, therefore, is to call all peoples to the salvation accomplished by God through his incarnate Son. It is therefore necessary to renew our commitment to proclaiming the Gospel which is leaven of freedom and progress, brotherhood, unity and peace. (*Ad gentes* 8) I would 'confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church' (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14), a duty and a mission which the widespread and profound changes in present day society render ever more urgent. At stake is the eternal salvation of all people, the goal and the accomplishment of human history and the universe. Animated and inspired by the Apostle of the nations, we must realise that God has a numerous people in all the cities visited by the apostles of today (Acts 18: 10). In fact 'The promise that was made is for you and your children and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God is calling to himself'. (Acts 2: 39) The whole Church must be committed to *missio ad gentes*, until the salvific sovereignty of Christ is fully accomplished: 'At present, it is true, we are not able to see that all things are under him'. (Heb 2: 8)

4. Called to evangelise also through martyrdom

On this day dedicated to the missions, I recall in prayer those who made their lives exclusive consecration to the work of evangelisation. I mention especially those local Churches and those missionaries who bear witness to and spread the Kingdom of God in situations of persecution, with various forms of oppression ranging from social discrimination to prison, torture and death. No small number of them are put to death for the sake of his Name. Still tremendously relevant today are the words of my venerated predecessor, Pope John Paul II: 'The Jubilee remembrance has presented us with a surprising vista, showing us that our own time is particularly prolific in witnesses, who in different ways were able to live the Gospel in the midst of hostility and persecution, often to the point of the supreme test of shedding their blood.' (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Apostolic Letter 41) Participation in the mission of Christ, in fact, affects also the life of those who announce the Gospel, for whom is reserved the same destiny as their Master. 'Remember the words I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too'. (John 15: 20) The Church walks the same path and suffers the same destiny as Christ, since she acts not on the basis of any human logic or relying on her own strength, but instead she follows the way of the Cross, becoming, in filial obedience to the Father, a witness and a travelling companion for all humanity.

I remind old Churches and those more recently founded that they have been placed by the Lord to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and called to spread Christ, the Light of the nations, to the far corners of the earth. *Missio ad gentes* must be a priority in pastoral programmes.

To the Pontifical Mission Societies (Missio) goes my gratitude and my encouragement for their indispensable service of promoting missionary animation and formation and material help for young Churches. Through the Pontifical Institutions communion among the Churches is admirably achieved with exchange of gifts, reciprocal concern and common missionary programming.

5. Conclusion

Missionary impulse has always been a sign of the vitality of our Churches. (*Redemptoris Missio* 2) Nevertheless it is necessary to reaffirm that evangelisation is primarily the work of the Spirit and that before being action it is witness and irradiation of the light of Christ. (*Redemptoris Missio* 26) on the part of the local Church, which sends her own missionary men and women beyond her frontiers. I therefore ask all Catholics to pray that the Holy Spirit will intensify the Church's passion for the mission to spread the Kingdom of God and to support missionaries and Christian communities involved in mission, in front line, often in situations of hostility and persecution. At the same time I ask everyone to offer as a credible sign of communion among the Churches, financial assistance, especially in these times of crisis affecting all humanity, to help the young Churches be in the condition to illuminate the nations with the Gospel of charity. May we be guided in our missionary activity by the Blessed Virgin Mary, star of the New Evangelisation, who brought Christ into the world to be the light of the nations and to carry salvation 'to the ends of the earth'. (*Acts* 13: 47)

Upon all I impart my Blessing.

From the Vatican, 29 June 2009

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