

Pope Benedict XVI

Message for World Mission Sunday October 19 2008-10-10

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the occasion of the World Mission Day, I would like to invite you to reflect on the continuing urgency to proclaim the Gospel also in our times. The missionary mandate continues to be an absolute priority for all baptized persons who are called to be 'servants and apostles of Christ Jesus' at the beginning of this millennium. My venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, already stated in the Apostolic Exhortation 'Evangelii Nuntiandi': 'Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity' (n. 14). As a model of this apostolic commitment, I would like to point to St Paul in particular, the Apostle of the nations, because this year we are celebrating a special Jubilee dedicated to him. It is the Pauline Year which offers us the opportunity to become familiar with this famous Apostle who received the vocation to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles, according to what the Lord had announced to him: 'Go, I shall send you far away to the Gentiles' (Acts 22: 21). How can we not take the opportunity that this special Jubilee offers to the local Churches, the Christian communities and the individual faithful to propagate the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the world, the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Cf. Rm 1: 16)?

Humanity is in need of liberation

Humanity needs to be liberated and redeemed. Creation itself - as St Paul says - suffers and nurtures the hope that it will share in the freedom of the children of God (cf. Rm 8: 19-22). These words are true in today's world too. Creation is suffering. Creation is suffering and waiting for real freedom; it is waiting for a different, better world; it is waiting for 'redemption'. And deep down it knows that this new world that is awaited supposes a new man; it supposes 'children of God'.

Let us take a closer look at the situation of today's world. While, on the one hand, the international panorama presents prospects for promising economic and social development, on the other it brings some great concerns to our attention about the very future of man. Violence, in many cases, marks the relations between persons and peoples. Poverty oppresses millions of inhabitants.

Discrimination and sometimes even persecution for racial, cultural and religious reasons drive many people to flee from their own countries in order to seek refuge and protection elsewhere.

Technological progress, when it is not aimed at the dignity and good of man or directed towards solidarity-based development, loses its potentiality as a factor of hope and runs the risk, on the contrary, of increasing already existing imbalances and injustices. There is, moreover, a constant threat regarding the man-environment relation due to the indiscriminate use of resources, with repercussions on the physical and mental health of human beings. Humanity's future is also put at risk by the attempts on his life, which take on various forms and means.

Before this scenario, 'buffeted between hope and anxiety... and burdened down with uneasiness' ('Gaudium et Spes', n. 4), with concern we ask ourselves: What will become of humanity and

creation? Is there hope for the future, or rather, is there a future for humanity? And what will this future be like? The answer to these questions comes to those of us who believe from the Gospel. Christ is our future, and as I wrote in the Encyclical Letter 'Spe Salvi', his Gospel is a 'life-changing' communication that gives hope, throws open the dark door of time and illuminates the future of humanity and the university (cf. n. 2).

St Paul had understood well that only in Christ can humanity find redemption and hope. Therefore, he perceived that the mission was pressing and urgent to proclaim 'the promise of life in Christ Jesus' (2 Tm 1: 1), 'our hope' (1 Tm 1: 1), so that all peoples could be co-heirs and co-partners in the promise through the Gospel (cf. Eph 3: 6). He was aware that without Christ humanity is 'without hope and without God in the world' (Eph 2: 12) - 'without hope because they were without God' ('Spe Salvi,' n. 3). In fact, 'anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. Eph 2: 12)' (ibid., n. 27).

The Mission is a question of love

It is therefore an urgent duty for everyone to proclaim Christ and his saving message. St Paul said, 'Woe to me if I do not preach it [the Gospel]!' (1 Cor 9: 16). On the way to Damascus he had experienced and understood that the redemption and the mission are the work of God and his love. Love of Christ led him to travel over the roads of the Roman Empire as a herald, an apostle, a preacher and a teacher of the Gospel of which he declared himself to be an 'ambassador in chains' (Eph 6: 20). Divine charity made him 'all things to all, to save at least some' (1 Cor 9: 22). By looking at St Paul's experience, we understand that missionary activity is a response to the love with which God loves us. His love redeems us and prods us to the *missio ad gentes*. It is the spiritual energy that can make the harmony, justice and communion grow among persons, races and peoples to which everyone aspires (cf. 'Deus Caritas Est', n. 12). So it is God, who is Love, who leads the Church towards the frontiers of humanity and calls the evangelizers to drink 'from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God' ('Deus Caritas Est', n. 7). Only from this source can care, tenderness, compassion, hospitality, availability and interest in people's problems be drawn, as well as the other virtues necessary for the messengers of the Gospel to leave everything and dedicate themselves completely and unconditionally to spreading the perfume of Christ's charity around the world.

Evangelize always

While the first evangelization continues to be necessary and urgent in many regions of the world, today a shortage of clergy and a lack of vocations afflict various Dioceses and Institutes of consecrated life. It is important to reaffirm that even in the presence of growing difficulties, Christ's command to evangelize all peoples continues to be a priority. No reason can justify its slackening or stagnation because 'the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church' (Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation 'Evangelii Nuntiandi', n. 14). It is a mission that 'is still only

beginning and we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service' (John Paul II, Encyclical 'Redemptoris Missio', n. 1). How can we not think here of the Macedonian who appeared to Paul in a dream and cried, 'Will you come by to Macedonia to help us?'. Today there are countless people who are waiting for the proclamation of the Gospel, those who are thirsting for hope and love. There are so many who let themselves be questioned deeply by this request for aid that rises up from humanity, who leave everything for Christ and transmit faith and love for Him to people! (cf. 'Spe Salvi', n. 8).

Woe to me if I do not preach it! (1 Cor 9: 16)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, 'duc in altum'! Let us set sail in the vast sea of the world and, following Jesus' invitation, let us cast our nets without fear, confident in his constant aid. St Paul reminds us that to preach the Gospel is no reason to boast (cf. 1 Cor 9: 16), but rather a duty and a joy. Dear brother Bishops, following Paul's example, many each one feel like 'a prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles' (Eph 3: 1), knowing that you can count on the strength that comes to us from him in difficulties and trials. A Bishop is consecrated not only for his diocese, but for the salvation of the whole world (cf. Encyclical 'Redemptoris Missio', n. 63). Like the Apostle Paul, a Bishop is called to reach out to those who are far away and do not know Christ yet or have still not experienced his liberating love. A Bishop's commitment is to make the whole diocesan community missionary by contributing willingly, according to the possibilities, to sending priests and laypersons to other Churches for the evangelization service. In this way, the *missio ad gentes* becomes the unifying and converging principle of its entire pastoral and charitable activity.

You, dear priests, the Bishops' first collaborators, be generous pastors and enthusiastic evangelizers! Many of you in these past decades have gone to the mission territories following the Encyclical 'Fidei Donum' whose 50th anniversary we celebrated recently, and with which my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pius XII, gave an impulse to cooperation between the Churches. I am confident that this missionary tension in the local Churches will not be lacking, despite the lack of clergy that afflicts many of them.

And you, dear men and women religious, whose vocation is marked by a strong missionary connotation, bring the proclamation of the Gospel to everyone, especially those who are far away, through consistent witness to Christ and radical following of his Gospel. Dear faithful laity, you who act in the different areas of society are all called to take part in an increasingly important way in spreading the Gospel. A complex and multiform *areopagus* thus opens up before you to be evangelized: the world. Give witness with your lives that Christians 'belong to a new society which is the goal of their common pilgrimage and which is anticipated in the course of that pilgrimage' ('Spe Salvi', n. 4).

Conclusion

Dear Brothers and Sisters, may the celebration of World Mission Day encourage everyone to take renewed awareness of the urgent need to proclaim the Gospel. I cannot fail to point out with

sincere appreciation the contribution of the Pontifical Mission Societies to the Church's evangelizing activity. I thank them for the support they offer to all the Communities, especially the young ones. They are a valid instrument for animating and forming the People of God from a missionary viewpoint, and they nurture the communion of persons and goods between the different parts of the Mystical Body of Christ. May the collection that is taken in all the parishes on World Mission Day be a sign of communion and mutual concern among the Churches. Lastly, may prayer be intensified ever more in the Christian people, the essential spiritual means for spreading among all peoples the light of Christ, the 'light par excellence' that illuminates 'the darkness of history' ('Spe Salvi', n. 49). As I entrust to the Lord the apostolic work of the missionaries, the Churches all over the world and the faithful involved in various missionary activities and invoke the intercession of the Apostle Paul and Holy Mary, 'the living Ark of the Covenant', the Star of evangelization and hope, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to everyone.

From the Vatican, 11 May 2008

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