

Pope John Paul II's
Message for Mission Sunday

October 22 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. The annual recurrence of *Mission Sunday*, which will be celebrated this coming October 22, 2000, is a call for renewed awareness of the Church's missionary dimension and a reminder of the urgency of missionary activity "*ad gentes*" which "is a matter for all Christians, for all diocese and parishes, Church institutions and associations" (Enc. Let. *Redemptoris Missio* 2).

This year the Day is enriched with significance in the light of the Great Jubilee, a year of grace, the celebration of the salvation, which God, out of his merciful love, offers to all humanity. To recall the 2000 years since the birth of Jesus means to celebrate also the birth of mission: Christ is the first and the greatest missionary of the Father. Born with the incarnation of the Word, missionary activity continues in time through the proclamation and witness of the Church. The Jubilee is a favorable time for the whole Church to work, thanks to the Spirit, with new missionary impulse.

I therefore address a special, heartfelt appeal to all the baptized to be heralds of the Gospel, with humble courage, responding to the call of the Lord and the needs of the men and women of our day. I am thinking of the Bishops, priests, religious men and women, the laity; I am thinking of Catechists and other pastoral operators who, at different levels, make mission "*ad gentes*" the very reason of their existence, persevering despite great difficulties. The Church is grateful for the dedication of all those who very often "sow in tears..." (cfr *Ps* 126,6). They must know that their efforts and their suffering will not be lost, indeed they will be leaven which causes to germinate in the hearts of other apostles a desire to give themselves to the noble cause of the Gospel. On behalf of the Church I thank them and I encourage them to persevere in their generosity: God will reward them abundantly.

2. I also think of many others who could begin or increase commitment to proclaim the Gospel of Life. In different ways, all are called to continue in the Church the mission of Jesus. This is a title of glory: the one sent is associated in a singular way with the person of Christ, to do His same works, as the divine Master himself says: "those who have faith in me will do the works I do and greater far than these". (*Jn* 14, 12). Each one is called to cooperate according to their particular life situation. In this season, a season of grace and mercy, I am particularly aware that all the Church's forces must be engaged for new evangelization and for mission "*ad gentes*". No believer, no institution in the Church can avoid this supreme duty to proclaim Christ to all peoples (cfr Enc. Let. *Redemptoris*

Missio 3). No one can feel that they are dispensed from offering their collaboration with the mission of Christ, which continues in the Church. Indeed, more than ever timely is the command of Jesus: "You go to the vineyard too". (*Mt* 20,7).

3. How could we fail here to make special mention, with affection and deep emotion, of the many missionaries, martyrs for the faith who, like Christ, have given their life, shedding their blood? They have been numerous, also in the 20th century in which "the Church became once again a Church of martyrs" (*Tertium Millennium Adveniente* 37). Yes, the mystery of the Cross is always present in the life of Christians. I wrote in the Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*: "Throughout Christian history, martyrs, that is "witnesses" have always been numerous and indispensable to the spread of the Gospel..." (n. 45). There come to mind the words of Paul to the Philippians: "For it is your special privilege to take Christ's part – not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him..." (*Phil* 1,29). The same Apostle encourages Timothy, his disciple, to suffer with him for the Gospel without being ashamed, assisted by the power of God (cfr *Tm*, 1,8) The entire mission of the Church, and in particular mission "ad gentes" needs apostles willing to persevere to the end, faithful to the mission received, following the same path traveled by Christ, "the path of poverty, obedience, service and self-sacrifice, even to death..." (*Ad Gentes* decree, n. 5) May the witnesses of the faith whom we commemorated, serve as models and encouragement for all Christians so that the proclamation of Christ is seen as a duty proper to every Christian.

4. In this work the Christian is not alone. It is true that there is no proportion between human strength and the grandeur of missionary activity. The most common and authentic experience is to feel unworthy of such a task. But it is also true that our strength comes from God who has made us ministers of a new Covenant" (*2 Cor* 3, 5b-6a). The Lord never abandons those whom he calls into his service. "Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...and know that I am with you always, until the end of the world". (*Mt* 28, 18-20). The Lord's lasting presence in his Church, especially in the Word and the sacraments is a guarantee of the effectiveness of mission. Today this mission is carried forward by men and women who have experienced salvation in their own fragility and weakness and they witness this to their brothers and sisters, knowing that all are called to the same fullness of life.

5. As I said before, the prospective of the Great Jubilee, which we are celebrating, induces us to ever greater missionary commitment *ad gentes*. Two thousand years since the beginning of the mission, there are still vast geographical, cultural human and social areas in which Christ and his Gospel have not yet penetrated. How can we fail to hear the call emerging from this situation?

A person who has experienced the joy of encountering Christ cannot keep it for himself, he must share it. We must answer the unvoiced call for the Gospel arising from all over the world, the same call that reached the apostle Paul in his second journey: "Come to Macedonia, and help us! (*Acts* 16,9). Evangelization is "help" offered to man, since the Son of God became man to make possible for man what he alone, could not attain: "God's friendship and grace, the supernatural life which alone can bring fulfillment to the

deepest aspirations of the human heart...Proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth, true God and perfect Man, the Church opens to all people the prospect of being "divinized" and thus of becoming more human. This is the one path which can lead the world to discover its lofty calling and to achieve it fully in the salvation wrought by God." (Bull *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 2).

We must also be deeply convinced of the fact that evangelization is also a valuable service to humanity, since it prepares it to achieve the plan of God, who wishes to unite to himself all men and women and render them a people of brothers and sisters liberated from injustices and filled with feelings of authentic solidarity.

6. I wish now to look towards the numerous agents of special *ad gentes* mission: Bishops in the first place and their co-workers, the clergy, recalling at the same time the work of missionary institutes, male and female. A special word I feel must be devoted to Catechists in mission territories: "the term Catechists belongs above all to the catechists in mission lands...Churches that are flourishing today would not have been built up without them." (Ap. Exhort. *Catechesi Tradendae*, 66).

The Council decree on missionary activity speaks of them: "Likewise worthy of praise are the ranks of men and women catechists, to whom missionary work among the nations owes so very much. Animated with an apostolic spirit, they, by their immense efforts, make an outstanding and altogether necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church" (Decree *Ad Gentes* 17). Working with great effort and missionary zeal, they undoubtedly offer most effective support to missionaries in many tasks. Not rarely, due to a scarcity of ministers, they are responsible for vast areas, where they lead small communities, acting as animators in prayers, in liturgical celebrations of the Word of God, explaining doctrine and organizing charitable work.

Because their role is so important, still more necessary is their formation, or "more careful doctrinal and pedagogical training, continuing spiritual and apostolic renewal" (Enc. Let. *Redemptoris Missio* 73). Theirs is a task, which is always necessary. I hope commitment throughout the Church in this duty will be ever greater. The formation of catechists, as that of all missionary personnel, is a pastoral priority; it is – so to say – an "investment in persons", since only evangelizers and teachers well prepared for their work can contribute effectively towards building up the Church.

7. Vast is the field and much remains to be done: therefore the cooperation of everyone is necessary. No one, in fact, is so poor that they have nothing to give. We share in missionary activity first of all through prayer, during liturgy or in the secret of our room, through sacrifice and offering up our sufferings to God. This is the first sort of cooperation, which everyone can offer. It is also important not to neglect economic support, vital for so many Particular Churches. It is known that the money collected on this Day, under the responsibility of the Pontifical Mission Societies, is devoted entirely to the needs of the universal mission. On this occasion I wish to express deep gratitude to this praiseworthy ecclesial Institute which for 74 years has organized this Day, animating in a missionary sense the entire people of God, recalling that all, from children to adults,

from Bishops to priests, from Religious to the laity, are called to be missionaries in their own local community, opening themselves as well to the needs of the universal Church. The missionary animation and cooperation, promoted by the Pontifical Mission Societies, presents missionary activity to the people of God as a gift: a gift of self, of one's material and spiritual goods for the benefit of the whole Church (cfr Enc. Let. *Redemptoris Missio* 81).

This year, moreover, the Day will be marked with particular solemnity in Rome with the celebration of the International Missionary Congress which will bring together members of the Pontifical Mission Societies from every corner of the world, representing the local Churches of every continent, as a sign of the universality of Jesus' message of salvation. I myself, God willing, will have the joy of presiding at this important celebration.

8. Dear Brothers and Sisters, may these words of mine be an encouragement for all those who have missionary activity at heart. Celebrating the Jubilee of the Holy Year 2000, "the whole Church is even more committed to a new missionary advent. We must increase our apostolic zeal to pass on to others the light and the joy of the faith and to this high ideal the whole People of God must be educated". (Enc. Let. *Redemptoris Missio* 86). The Spirit of God is our strength! The Spirit, who manifests his power in the mission of Jesus, sent "to announce the good news to the poor...and to proclaim a year of the Lord's grace" (*Lk* 4,18), has been poured into the hearts of all believers (cfr *Rom* 5,5) to enable us to be witnesses of the Lord's works.

May the Most Holy Virgin, Mother of Christ and Mother of believers, woman totally docile to the Holy Spirit, help us to repeat under every circumstance her "yes" to God's plan for salvation, at the service of new evangelization.

With these sentiments to all of you who work sparing no effort in the great mission "*ad gentes*", and to your communities, I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, June 11, 2000, solemnity of Pentecost

John Paul II

THE HOLY FATHER'S MESSAGE FOR WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2001

Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo (Ps 89[88],2) [I will sing the mercies of the Lord forever].

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. With intimate joy we celebrated the Great Jubilee of salvation, a time of grace for the whole Church. Divine mercy, experienced by each of the faithful, prompts us to "put into the deep", remembering with gratitude the past, living with passion the present and looking forward with confidence to the future, convinced that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever" (Heb 13,8) (cf. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 1). This tending towards the future, illuminated by hope, must be the basis of all Church activity in the new millennium. This is the message that I wish to address to every Catholic on the occasion of Mission Sunday, which will be celebrated on 21 October.

2. It is time, indeed, to look forward, keeping our eyes set on the face of Jesus (cf. Heb. 12,2). The Spirit calls us to "direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 3), to witness and to proclaim Christ, giving thanks "for the 'marvels' the Lord has worked for us: '*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*' (Ps 89,2)" (*ibid.*, n. 2). On the occasion of Mission Sunday last year, I reminded you that missionary commitment is born of ardent contemplation of Jesus. A Christian who has contemplated Jesus Christ cannot fail to be captivated by his radiance (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 14) and to commit himself to bearing witness to his faith in Christ, the only Saviour of mankind.

Contemplation of the face of the Lord leads the disciples to contemplate the faces of the men and women of today: the Lord identifies himself in fact with "the least of my brothers" (cf. Mt 25,40.45). Contemplation of Jesus "the first and greatest evangelizer" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 7) transforms us into evangelizers. It makes us aware of his desire to give eternal life to those entrusted to him by the Father (cf. Jn 17,2). God wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tm 2,4) and Jesus knew that the Father's will for him was that he should announce the Kingdom of God to other towns: "for I was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4,43).

The fruit of contemplating the "least of his brothers" is the discovery that every person, although in a way which is mysterious for us, is in search of God, by whom he or she is created and loved. His first disciples discovered this: "[Lord], everyone is searching for you" (Mk 1,37). And the "Greeks", on behalf of future generations, exclaim: "We wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12,21). Yes, Christ is the true light that illuminates every person who comes into this world (cf. Jn 1,9): mankind searches for him, "feeling after him" (Acts 17,27), drawn by an inner attraction the origin of which they themselves do not know. It is hidden in the heart of God, where there beats a desire for universal salvation. Of this, God makes us witnesses and heralds. For this purpose he fills us, like in a new Pentecost, with the fire of his Spirit, with his love and with his presence: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28,20).

3. Another fruit of the Great Jubilee is the attitude that the Lord asks of every Christian, to look ahead with faith and with hope. The Lord does us the honour of placing his confidence in us and calling us to the ministry, showing us his mercy (cf. I Tm 1,12.13). This call is not reserved for a few, it is for everyone, each in his own state of life. In the Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio*

ineunte I wrote in this regard: "This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of 'specialists' but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as *the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups*.... Christ must be presented to all people with confidence. We shall address adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the Gospel message, but taking into account each person's needs in regard to their sensitivity and language, after the example of Paul who declared: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some' (I Cor 9,22)" (n. 40).

The call to mission acquires a singular urgency, particularly if we look at that part of humanity which still does not know Christ or recognize him. Yes, brothers and sisters, mission *ad gentes* is today more than ever valid. I hold impressed on my heart the face of humanity that I have been able to contemplate during my pilgrimages: this is the face of Christ reflected in that of the poor and the suffering; the face of Christ mirrored in those who live like "sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6,34). Every man and woman has the right to be taught "many things" (*ibid.*).

Faced with the evidence of human fragility and insufficiency, the human temptation, for the apostle too, is to send people away. Instead, it is at this very moment that, contemplating the face of the Beloved, each of us must listen again to the words of Jesus: "There is no need for them to disperse.

Give them something to eat yourselves" (cf. Mt 14,16; Mk 6,37). In this way we will experience at the same time both human weakness and the Lord's grace. Aware of the inevitable fragility which marks us profoundly, we feel the need to render thanks to God for what he has done in us and for all that, in his grace, he will still do.

4. How can we fail to recall, in these circumstances, all the missionaries, priests, religious and laity who have made mission *ad gentes* and *ad vitam* their reason for living? With their very life they proclaim "without end the graces of the Lord" (Ps 89). Not rarely this "without end" has come to the point of bloodshed: how numerous were the "witnesses to the faith" in the last century! It is also thanks to their generous giving of self that the Kingdom of God was able to grow. To them goes our grateful remembrance, accompanied by our prayer. Their example gives stimulus and support to all the faithful who can take courage seeing themselves "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12,1) who with their deeds and words made and continue to make the Gospel resound on every continent.

Yes, brothers and sisters, we cannot remain silent about what we have seen and heard (cf. Acts 4,20). We have seen the work of the Spirit and the glory of God show themselves in weakness (cf. II Cor 12; I Cor 1). Still today numerous men and women with their dedication and their sacrifice are for us eloquent manifestations of God's love. From them we receive the faith and we, in turn, are urged on to be announcers and witnesses of the Mystery.

5. Mission is "*the joyful proclamation of a gift* meant for all, and to be offered to all with the greatest respect for the freedom of each one: the gift of the revelation of the God who is Love, the God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (Jn 3,16).... The Church therefore cannot forgo her missionary activity among the peoples of the world. It is the primary task of the *missio ad gentes* to announce that it is in Christ, "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life' (Jn 14,6),

that people find salvation" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 56). This is an invitation to all, it is an urgent call that deserves an immediate and generous answer. We must set out! We must set out without delay, like Mary, the Mother of Jesus; like the shepherds, stirred by the first announcement of the Angel; like Mary Magdalene at the sight of the Risen Lord. "At the beginning of this new century, our steps must quicken as we travel the highways of the world.... The Risen Christ asks us to meet him as it were once more in the Upper Room where, on the evening of 'the first day of the week' (Jn 20,19) he appeared to his disciples in order to "breathe' on them his life-giving Spirit and launch them on the great adventure of proclaiming the Gospel" (*ibid.*, n. 58).

6. Dear brothers and sisters! Mission demands prayer and concrete commitment. Many are the needs for a capillary diffusion of the Gospel.

This year is the 75th anniversary of the institution of Mission Sunday by Pope Pius XI, who accepted a request by the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith to "establish "a day of prayer and propaganda for the missions' to be celebrated on the same day in every diocese, parish and institute of the Catholic world ... and to encourage offerings for the missions" (Sacred Congregation of Rites: *Institution of Mission Sunday*, 14 April 1926. AAS 19 (1927), p. 23 ff.). Since then Mission Sunday has been a special occasion to remind the whole People of God of the permanent validity of the missionary mandate, since "missionary activity is a matter for all Christians, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations" (Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2). It is at the same time an opportune circumstance to reaffirm that "the missions ask not only for a contribution but for a sharing in the work of preaching and charity towards the poor. All that we have received from God life itself as well as material goods does not belong to us" (*ibid.*, n. 81). This Day is important in the life of the Church "because it teaches how to give: as an offering made to God *in* the Eucharistic celebration and *for* all the missions of the world" (*ibid.*). May this anniversary be then an opportune occasion to reflect on the need for greater, common effort to promote the missionary spirit and collect the necessary material aid which missionaries need.

7. In the homily for the closing of the Great Jubilee, on 6 January 2001, I said: "We need to set out anew from Christ with the zeal of Pentecost, with renewed enthusiasm. To set out from him above all in a daily commitment to holiness, with an attitude of prayer and listening to his word. To set out from him in order to testify to his Love" (n. 8).

Therefore:

Set out anew from Christ, you who have found mercy.

Set out anew from Christ, you who have forgiven and been forgiven.

Set out anew from Christ, you who have known pain and suffering.

Set out anew from Christ, you who are tempted by tepidity: the year of grace is endless.

Set out anew from Christ, Church of the new millennium.

Sing as you go! (cf. *Closing rite of the Mass of the Epiphany of the Lord 2001*).

May Mary, Mother of the Church, Star of Evangelization, accompany us on our journey, as she remained with the disciplines on the day of Pentecost. To her we turn with confidence. Through her intercession may the Lord grant us the gift of perseverance in our missionary duty, which is a matter for the entire Church community.

With these sentiments I bless you.

From the Vatican, 3 June 2001, Solemnity of Pentecost.

JOHN PAUL II

Pope John Paul II's Year 2002 Message for World Mission Sunday (20 October, 2002)

"Mission is Proclamation of Forgiveness"

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. The evangelizing mission of the Church is essentially the announcement of God's love, mercy and forgiveness revealed to mankind through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the proclamation of the good news that God loves us and wants all people united in his loving mercy, he forgives us and asks us to forgive others even for the greatest offences. This is the Word of reconciliation entrusted to us because, as Saint Paul says *"God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself not counting men's transgressions against them and he entrusted the message of reconciliation to us"* (2 Cor 5,19). These words are the echo and a reminder of the supreme cry from the heart of Christ on the cross *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"* (Lk 23, 34). This, in synthesis, is the fundamental contents of Mission Sunday, which we will celebrate on Sunday October 20, with the stimulating theme: *"Mission is Proclamation of Forgiveness"*. Although this event is repeated every year with the passing of time it loses none of its special significance and importance, because mission is our response to Jesus' supreme command: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"* (Mt 28, 19).

2. At the beginning of the third Christian millennium the missionary duty is ever more urgent, because as I said in the *Redemptoris Missio* encyclical "The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. Indeed since the end of the Council it has almost doubled. When we consider this immense portion of humanity which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of the Church's mission is obvious". (n. 3).

With the great apostle and evangelizer Saint Paul, we wish to repeat: *"Yet preaching the Gospel is not the subject of a boast: I am under the compulsion I have no choice. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel...it is a charge entrusted to me"*. (1 Cor 9, 16-17). Only God's love, able to make brothers and sisters of people of all races and cultures, can heal the painful divisions, ideological conflict, economic unbalance and violence which still oppresses humanity.

We are all aware of the horrible wars and revolutions, which bloodied the last century and the conflicts, which, unfortunately, still afflict the world almost endemically. However undeniable also is a longing of men and women who, despite dire spiritual and material poverty, have a deep thirst for God and for his loving mercy. The Lord's call to proclaim the Good News is still valid today: indeed it is ever more urgent.

3. In the apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I underlined the importance of contemplating the face of Christ suffering and glorious. The heart of the Christian message is the proclamation of the paschal mystery of Christ, crucified and risen. Contemplating the face of the Crucified one in agony "we confront the most paradoxical aspect of his mystery, as it emerges in his last hour, on the Cross" (n. 25). In the Cross God revealed to us all his love. The Cross is the key that gives free access to "*wisdom which is not of this world, nor of the rulers of this age... God's wisdom, mysterious and hidden*" (1 Cor 2, 6.7).

The Cross, in which the glorious face of the Risen Christ already shines, introduces us to the fullness of Christian life and perfect love, because it reveals God's longing to share with mankind his very life, his love, his holiness. In the light of this mystery the Church, remembering the words of the Lord: "*Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Cfr Mt 5, 48), understands ever more clearly that her mission would be senseless if it did not lead to fullness of Christian life, that is to perfect love and holiness. Contemplating the Cross we learn to live with humility and forgiveness, peace and communion. This was the experience of Saint Paul who writes to the Ephesians: "*I plead with you, then, as a prisoner for the Lord, to live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another lovingly. Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force*" (Eph. 4, 1-3). And to the Colossians he adds: "*Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ's peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace*" (Col. 3 12-15).

4. Dearest Brothers and Sisters, the cry of Jesus on the cross (cfr. Mt 27, 46) is not the anguish of a desperate man; it is the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father for the salvation of all mankind. From the cross Jesus shows the conditions that enable us to forgive. To the hatred with which his persecutors nailed him to the Cross, he responds with a prayer for them. He not only forgives them, he continues to love them, to want their good and to intercede for them. His death becomes the full realization of Love. Faced with the great mystery of the Cross we can only kneel in adoration. "In order to bring man back to the Father's face, Jesus not only had to take on the face of man, but he had to burden himself with the "face" of sin. '*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*'" (2 Cor 5:21) (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 25). The total forgiveness of Christ, also for his persecutors, is the beginning of the new justice of the Kingdom of God for everyone.

During the Last Supper, the Redeemer said to his Apostles: "*I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you too love one another. This is how all will know you for my disciples, your love for one another*". (Jn 13, 34-35).

5. The Risen Christ gives peace to his disciples. The Church, faithful to the Lord's command, continues to proclaim and spread his peace. Through evangelization believers help people to realise that we are all brothers and sisters and, as pilgrims on this earth, although on different paths, we are all on our way to the common Homeland that God, through ways known only to Him, does not cease to indicate to us. The main road of mission is sincere dialogue (cfr *Ad Gentes* 7, *Nostra Aetate* 2); "dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns of self-interest" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 56) nor is it an end in itself. Dialogue, instead, speaks to others with respect and understanding, stating the principles in which we believe and proclaiming with love the most profound truths of the faith that are joy, hope and meaning of life. In fact dialogue is the realization of a spiritual impulse leading "to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful" (ibid 56). Commitment for attentive and respectful dialogue is a *conditio sine qua non* for authentic witness of God's saving love.

This dialogue is linked closely with readiness to forgive, because a person who forgives opens the hearts of others and learns to love and understand others entering into harmony with them. Because the act of pardoning, after the example of Jesus, challenges and opens hearts, heals the wounds of sin and division and creates real communion.

6. The celebration of Mission Sunday offers everyone an opportunity for self-examination on the demands of God's infinite love. Love which calls for faith; love which tells us to put all our trust in Him. "*without faith it is impossible to please Him. Anyone who comes to God must believe that He exists, and he rewards those who seek him*" (*Heb.* 11,6).

On this annual recurrence we are called to pray assiduously for the missions and to cooperate with every means in the Church's activity all over the world to build up the Kingdom of God, "an eternal and universal Kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (*Preface for the Feast of Christ the King*). We are called to bear witness first of all with our life to our total adhesion to Christ and to his Gospel.

Yes, we must never be ashamed of the Gospel and never be afraid of proclaiming that we are Christians, hiding our faith. Instead we must continue to speak to extend the spaces for proclaiming salvation, because Jesus has promised to be with us forever and he is always in the midst of his disciples.

Mission Sunday, the feast day of Mission, helps us discover the value of our personal and community vocation. It stimulates us to reach out to "my least brothers" (Cfr *Mt* 25, 40) through missionaries in every part of the world. This is the task of the Pontifical Mission Societies which have always been at the service of the Church's mission, ensuring that the least ones are not lacking those who break with them the bread of the Word and continue to bring them the gift of inexhaustible love that gushes from the heart of the Saviour.

Dearest Brothers and Sisters, let us entrust this commitment to proclaim the Gospel and indeed the whole evangelizing activity of the Church to Most Holy Mary, Queen of Missions. May she accompany us on our journey of discovering, proclaiming and witnessing to the love of God who forgives and gives peace to mankind.

With these sentiments, to all missionaries throughout the world, to those who accompany them with prayers and fraternal help, to Christian communities of ancient and new foundation, I gladly send my Apostolic Blessing, invoking upon you all the unfailing protection of the Lord.

From the Vatican, 19 May, 2002, Solemnity of Pentecost

John Paul II

Pope John Paul II's 2003 Message for World Mission Sunday (19 October, 2003)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. From the beginning, I wished to place my pontificate under Mary's special protection. Further, I have often asked the entire community of believers to relive the experience of the Upper Room, where the disciples "devoted themselves to prayer, together with ... Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (Acts 1,14). Already in my first Encyclical "Redemptor hominis," I wrote that only in an atmosphere of fervent prayer are we able "to receive the Holy Spirit coming upon us and thus become Christ's witnesses 'to the ends of the earth', like those who went forth from the Upper Room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost" (n. 22).

The Church becomes more conscious that she is "mother" as Mary is. As I pointed out in the Bull "Incarnationis mysterium," on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Church is "the cradle in which Mary places Jesus and entrusts him to the adoration and contemplation of all peoples" (n. 11). The Church intends to continue on this spiritual and missionary path, accompanied by the Blessed Virgin, Star of the New Evangelization, radiant dawn and sure guide for our steps (cf. "Novo Millennio ineunte," n. 58).

Mary and the Mission of the Church in the Year of the Rosary

2. Last October, when I entered the 25th year of my Petrine ministry, I announced a special year, almost as a spiritual continuation of the Jubilee Year, to be dedicated to the rediscovery of the prayer of the Rosary, so dear to Christian tradition. It is a year to be lived under the gaze of the one who, in accord with God's mysterious plan, with her "yes", made possible humanity's salvation and who continues from heaven to protect those who turn to her, especially during the difficult moments of their lives.

I would like the Year of the Rosary to be a favorable occasion for believers on all the continents to deepen the meaning of their Christian vocation. At the school of the Blessed Virgin and following her example, every community will be better able to have its own "contemplative" and "missionary" activity emerge.

If World Mission Sunday, which takes place right at the end of the special Marian year, is well prepared, it will give a more generous thrust to this commitment of the ecclesial community. Confident recourse to Mary, with the daily recitation of the Rosary and the meditation of the mysteries of the life of Christ, will emphasize that the Church's mission must be sustained first of all by prayer. The attitude of "listening", which is prompted by praying the Rosary, brings the faithful close to Mary, who "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2,19). Frequent meditation on the Word of God forms us to live "in living communion with Jesus through -- we might say -- the heart of his Mother" ("Rosarium Virginis Mariae," n. 2).

A More Contemplative Church: the Face of Christ Contemplated

3. "Cum Maria contemplemur Christi vultum!" These words often come to mind: contemplate the "face" of Christ with Mary. When we speak of the "face" of Christ, we refer

to his human likeness in which the eternal glory of the Father's only Son shines out (cf. Jn 1,14): "The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ" ("Rosarium Virginis Mariae," n. 21). Contemplating the face of Christ leads to a deeper, interior familiarity with his mystery. Contemplating Jesus with the eyes of faith impels one to penetrate the mystery of the Trinitarian God. Jesus says: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14,9). With the Rosary we advance on this mystical journey "in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother" ("Rosarium Virginis Mariae," n. 3). Indeed, Mary makes herself our teacher and our guide. Under the action of the Holy Spirit, she helps us acquire that "serene boldness" which enables believers to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope that motivates them (cf. "Redemptoris missio," n. 24).

Let us always look to Mary, an unequalled model. All the words of the Gospel find an extraordinary echo in her soul. Mary is the contemplative "memory" of the Church, who lives with the desire to be deeply united with her Bridegroom, in order to have an ever greater impact on our society. How do we react to the great problems, the innocent suffering, the injustices perpetrated with arrogant insolence? At the docile school of Mary, who is our Mother, believers learn to recognize in the apparent "silence of God" the Word who resounds in the silence for our salvation.

A Holier Church: the Face of Christ Imitated and Loved

4. Through baptism all believers are called to holiness. In the Dogmatic Constitution "Lumen gentium," the Second Vatican Council stresses that the universal vocation to holiness consists in the call of all to the perfection of charity.

Holiness and mission are inseparable aspects of the vocation of every baptized person. The commitment to become more holy is closely linked to that of spreading the message of salvation. In "Redemptoris missio" I recalled, "Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission" (n. 90). In contemplating the mysteries of the Rosary, the believer is encouraged to follow Christ and to share his life so that he can say with St Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2,20).

If all the mysteries of the Rosary constitute an important school of holiness and evangelization, the mysteries of light bring into relief special aspects of our Gospel "sequela". The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan recalls that the baptized are chosen to become "sons in the Son" (Eph 1,5; cf. "Gaudium et spes," n. 22). At the wedding feast of Cana, Mary invites the servants to listen obediently to the Word of the Lord: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2,5). The proclamation of the Kingdom and the invitation to conversion are a clear mandate to everyone to pursue the path of holiness. In the Transfiguration of Jesus, the baptized person experiences the joy that awaits him. In meditating upon the institution of the Eucharist, he returns often to the Upper Room, where the Divine Master left his disciples his most precious treasure: himself in the sacrament of the altar.

In a certain sense it is the words that the Blessed Virgin pronounces at Cana that form the Marian background for all the mysteries of light. Indeed, the proclamation of the Kingdom at hand, the call to conversion and mercy, the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor and the institution of the Eucharist find a special echo in Mary's heart. Mary keeps her eyes fixed on Christ, treasures his every word and shows us how to be genuine disciples of her Son.

A more Missionary Church: the Face of Christ Proclaimed

5. At no other time has the Church had so many possibilities of proclaiming Jesus, thanks to the development of the means of social communication. For this reason, the Church today is called to make the face of her Bridegroom shine forth with her more radiant holiness. In this far from easy effort, she knows she is sustained by Mary. From Mary she "learns" to be a "virgin", totally dedicated to her Spouse, Jesus Christ, and a "mother" of many children whom she brings forth to eternal life.

Under the watchful gaze of her Mother, the ecclesial community flourishes like a family revived by the powerful outpouring of the Spirit, and, accepting the challenges of the new evangelization, contemplates the merciful face of Jesus in the brothers and sisters, especially the poor and needy, in those far from the faith and the Gospel. In particular, the Church is not afraid to cry to the world that Christ is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14,6). She is not afraid to proclaim joyfully that "good news, which has as its heart and its whole content the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the one Savior of the world" ("Rosarium Virginis Mariae," n. 20).

It is necessary to prepare capable and holy evangelizers. The fervor of the apostles must not be allowed to weaken, especially in regard to the mission "ad gentes." The Rosary, if it is fully rediscovered and appreciated, is an ordinary yet fruitful pedagogical and spiritual tool to form the People of God to work in the vast field of apostolic action.

A Precise Mandate

6. The task of missionary animation must continue to be a serious, consistent duty of every baptized person and of every ecclesial community. The Pontifical Missionary Societies, of course, have a specific and particular role and I thank them for generously carrying it out.

I would like to suggest to all of you that you intensify your praying of the Rosary, privately and in community, to obtain from the Lord those graces that the Church and humanity especially need. I invite everyone to do this: children, adults, young and old, families, parishes and religious communities.

Among the many intentions, I would not wish to forget that of peace. War and injustice have their origins in the "divided" heart. "Anyone who assimilates the mystery of Christ -- and this is clearly the goal of the Rosary -- learns the secret of peace and makes it his life's project" ("Rosarium Virginis Mariae," n. 40). If the Rosary keeps pace with the speed of our lives, it can become a privileged instrument for building peace in the hearts of persons, in families and among peoples. With Mary, we can obtain everything from her Son Jesus. Supported by Mary, we will not hesitate to devote ourselves generously to taking the proclamation of the Good News to the ends of the earth.

With these sentiments, I cordially bless all of you.

From the Vatican, 12 January 2003, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

IOANNES PAULUS II

Pope John Paul II's 2004 Message for World Mission Sunday (24 October, 2004)

Theme: "Eucharist and Mission"

My Dearest Brothers and Sisters!

The Church's missionary activity is an urgency at the beginning of the third millennium

1. The Church's missionary activity is an urgency also at the beginning of the third millennium, as I have often said. Mission, as I stated in the encyclical "Redemptoris Missio" is still only beginning and we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service (cfr. No. 1). The entire people of God at every moment of its pilgrimage through history is called to share the Redeemer's "thirst" (cfr. John 19:28). This thirst to save souls has always been strongly experienced by the saints: it suffices to think for example of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Patroness of Mission and of Bishop Comboni, great apostle of Africa whom recently I had the joy of raising to the honor of the altars.

The social and religious challenges facing humanity in our day call believers to renew their missionary fervor. Yes! It is necessary to relaunch [the] mission "ad gentes" with courage, starting with the proclamation of Christ, Redeemer of every human person. The International Eucharistic Congress which will be celebrated at Guadalajara in Mexico in the coming month of October, the missionary month, will be an extraordinary opportunity to grow in choral missionary awareness around the Table of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Gathered around the altar, the Church understands better her origin and her missionary mandate. As the theme of World Mission Sunday this year clearly emphasizes "Eucharist and Mission" are inseparable. In addition to reflection on the bond that exists between the Eucharistic mystery and the mystery of the Church, this year there will be an eloquent reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary, because of the occurrence of the 150th anniversary of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854-2004). Let us contemplate the Eucharist with the eyes of Mary. Confiding in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the Church offers Christ, the Bread of Salvation, to all peoples that they may recognize Him and accept Him as the only Savior of mankind.

Mission of Church draws spiritual energy from communion with his Body and Blood

2. Returning ideally to the Upper Room, last year, precisely on Holy Thursday, I signed the encyclical "Ecclesia de Eucharistia," from which I would like to take some passages which will help us, dearest Brothers and Sisters, to live World Mission Sunday this year with a Eucharistic spirit. "The Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist" (No. 26), I wrote, observing how the mission of the Church is a continuity of the mission of Christ (cfr. John 20:21), and draws spiritual energy from communion with his Body and Blood. The goal of the Eucharist is precisely "communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit" ("Ecclesia de Eucharistia," No. 22). When we take part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice we understand more profoundly the universality of redemption

and, consequently, the urgency of the Church's mission with its program which "has its center in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem" (ibid., 60).

Around Christ in the Eucharist the Church grows as the people, temple and family of God: one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. At the same time she understands better her character of universal sacrament of salvation and visible reality with a hierarchical structure. Certainly "no Christian community can be built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist" (ibid., 33; cfr. "Presbyterorum Ordinis," No. 6). At the end of every Mass, when the celebrant takes leave of the assembly with the words "Ite, Missa est," ["Go, the Mass is ended"] all should feel they are sent as "missionaries of the Eucharist" to carry to every environment the great gift received. In fact anyone who encounters Christ in the Eucharist cannot fail to proclaim through his or her life the merciful love of the Redeemer.

Need of apostles who are "experts" in the celebration, adoration and contemplation of the Eucharist

3. To live the Eucharist it is necessary, as well, to spend much time in adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament, something which I myself experience every day drawing from it strength, consolation and assistance (cfr. "Ecclesia de Eucharistia," No. 25). The Eucharist, the Second Vatican Council affirms, "is the source and summit of all Christian life" ("Lumen Gentium," No. 11), "the source and summit of all evangelization" ("Presbyterorum Ordinis," No. 5).

The bread and wine, fruit of human hands, transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Christ, become a pledge of the "new heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21:1), announced by the Church in her daily mission. In Christ, whom we adore present in the mystery of the Eucharist, the Father uttered his final word with regard to humanity and human history.

How could the Church fulfill her vocation without cultivating a constant relationship with the Eucharist, without nourishing herself with this food which sanctifies, without founding her missionary activity on this indispensable support? To evangelize the world there is need of apostles who are "experts" in the celebration, adoration and contemplation of the Eucharist.

Believers come to understand that the missionary task means being "acceptable as an offering, made holy by the Holy Spirit"

4. In the Eucharist we relive the mystery of the Redemption culminating in the Lord's sacrifice, as it is said in the words of consecration: "my body which will be given for you ...; ... my blood which will be poured out for you" (Luke 22:19-20). Christ died for all; and for all is the gift of salvation which the Eucharist renders sacramentally present in the course of history: "Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). This mandate is entrusted to ordained ministers through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. To this banquet and sacrifice all men and women are invited so they may share in the very life of Christ: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself

draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me" (John 6:56-57). Nourished by Him, believers come to understand that the missionary task means being "acceptable as an offering, made holy by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16), in order to be more and more "one, in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32) and to be witnesses of his love to the ends of the earth.

Journeying through the centuries, reliving every day the Sacrifice of the altar, the Church, the People of God, awaits Christ's coming in glory. This is proclaimed after the consecration by the Eucharistic assembly gathered around the altar. Time after time with renewed faith the Church repeats her desire for the final encounter with the One who comes to bring his plan of universal salvation to completion.

The Holy Spirit with invisible but powerful working, guides the Christian people on this daily spiritual itinerary on which they inevitably encounter difficulties and experience the mystery of the Cross. The Eucharist is the comfort and the pledge of final triumph for those who fight evil and sin; it is the "bread of life" which sustains those who, in turn, become "bread broken" for others, paying at times even with martyrdom their fidelity to the Gospel.

Opportunity to strengthen their missionary zeal

5. This year, as I already mentioned, will be the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Mary was "redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits of her Son" ("Lumen Gentium," No. 53). I said in the encyclical Letter "Ecclesia de Eucharistia": "Gazing upon Mary, we come to know that transforming power present in the Eucharist. In her we see the world renewed in love" (No. 62).

Mary, the first "tabernacle" in history" (ibid., No. 55), shows us and offer us Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cfr. John 14:6). If "the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist" ("Ecclesia de Eucharistia," No. 57).

I hope that the happy coinciding of the International Eucharistic Congress with the 150th anniversary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, may offer the faithful, parishes and missionary institutes an opportunity to strengthen their missionary zeal so that in every community there may always be "a genuine hunger for the Eucharist" (ibid., No. 33).

This is also a good opportunity to mention the contribution offered to the Church's apostolic activity by the worthy Pontifical Mission Societies. They are very dear to my heart and I thank them, on behalf of all, for the valid service rendered to new evangelization and the mission "ad gentes." I ask you to support them spiritually and materially so that also through their contribution, the proclamation of the Gospel may reach all the peoples of the earth.

With these sentiments, invoking the maternal intercession of Mary, "woman of the Eucharist," I gladly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 19 April 2004

IOANNES PAULUS II

Pope John Paul II's 2005 Message for World Mission Sunday (23 October, 2005)

Theme: "Mission: Bread Broken for the Life of the World"

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. *World Mission Sunday*, in this year dedicated to the Eucharist, helps us to better understand the "eucharistic" sense of our life as we relive the emotion of the Upper Room when, on the eve of his passion, Jesus offered himself to the world: "*On the night he was betrayed, he took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said: This is my body that is for you. Do this in memory of me*" (1 Cor 11, 23-24).

In my recent Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine* I invited you to contemplate Jesus in the "breaking of the bread" offered for the whole of humanity. Following his example we too are called to offer our life for our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. The Eucharist bears the "mark of universality" and prefigures in a sacramental way the time when "all who share one human nature, regenerated in Christ through the Holy Spirit and beholding the glory of God, will be able to say with one accord: "Our Father" (*Ad Gentes* 7). In this way, while the Eucharist helps us to understand more fully the significance of mission, it leads every individual believer, the missionary in particular, to be "bread, broken for the life of the world".

Humanity has need of Christ "broken bread"

2. In our day human society appears to be shrouded in dark shadows while it is shaken by tragic events and shattered by catastrophic natural disasters. Nevertheless, as "*on the night he was betrayed*" (1 Cor 11, 23), also today Jesus "breaks the bread" (cf. *Mt* 26, 26) for us in our Eucharistic celebrations and offers himself under the sacramental sign of his love for all mankind. This is why I underlined that "the Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church's life; it is also a project of solidarity for all of humanity" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 27); it is "bread from heaven" which gives eternal life (cf. *Jn* 6, 33) and opens the human heart to a great hope.

Present in the Eucharist, the same Redeemer who saw the needy crowds and was filled with compassion "*because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd*" (*Mt* 9, 36), continues through the centuries to show compassion for humanity poor and suffering.

And it is in his name that pastoral workers and missionaries travel unexplored paths to carry the "bread" of salvation to all. They are spurred on by the knowledge that, united with Christ "centre not just of the history of the Church, but also the history of humanity (cf. *Ef*. 1, 10; *Col* 1, 15-20)" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 6), it is possible to meet the deepest longings of the human heart. Jesus alone can satisfy humanity's hunger for love and thirst for justice; He alone makes it possible for every human person to share in eternal life: "*I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever*" (*Jn* 6, 51).

The Church, one with Christ, becomes “broken bread”

3. When the ecclesial Community celebrates the Eucharist, especially on Sunday the Day of the Lord, it experiences in the light of the faith the value of the encounter with the Risen Christ and is ever more aware that the Sacrifice of the Eucharist is “for all” (*Mt* 26, 28). We who nourish ourselves with the Body and Blood of the crucified and risen Lord, cannot keep this “gift” to ourselves; on the contrary we must share it. Passionate love for Christ leads to courageous proclamation of Christ; proclamation which, with martyrdom, becomes a supreme offering of love for God and for mankind. The Eucharist leads us to be generous evangelisers, actively committed to building a more just and fraternal world.

I sincerely hope the Year of the Eucharist will inspire every Christian community to respond with “fraternal solicitude to some of the many forms of poverty present in our world” (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28), because “by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognised as true followers of Christ (cf. *Jn* 13, 35; *Mt* 25, 31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.” (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28).

Missionaries, “bread broken” for the life of the world

4. Still today Christ urges his disciples: “*Give them something to eat yourselves*” (*Mt* 14, 16). In his name missionaries all over the world proclaim and witness to the Gospel. Through their efforts there resound once again the words of the Redeemer: “*I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst*” (*Jn* 6, 35); they too become “*bread broken*” for their brothers, some even to the point of sacrificing their life.

How many missionary martyrs in our day! May their example draw numerous young men and women to tread the path of heroic fidelity to Christ! The Church has need of men and women willing to consecrate themselves wholly to the great cause of the Gospel.

World Mission Sunday is an opportune occasion to increase our awareness of the urgent necessity to participate in the evangelising mission undertaken by the local Communities and many Church organizations, in particular the *Pontifical Mission Societies* and the *Missionary Institutes*. This mission requires the support not only of prayer and sacrifice, but also of concrete material offerings. I take this opportunity to recall once again the valuable service rendered by the *Pontifical Mission Societies* and I ask you all to support them generously with spiritual and material cooperation.

May the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, help us relive the experience of the Upper Room so that our ecclesial Communities may become authentically “Catholic.” Communities where “missionary spirituality” which is “intimate communion with Christ” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 88), is closely related to “eucharistic spirituality” of which the model is Mary, the “woman of the Eucharist” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 53). Communities always open to the voice of the Spirit and to the needs of humanity. Communities where believers, missionaries in particular, do not hesitate to offer themselves as “*bread, broken for the life of the world*”.

To all I impart my Apostolic Blessing!

From the Vatican, 22 February 2005, Feast of the Chair of Peter
IOANNES PAULUS II