



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II's MESSAGE FOR WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 1999

October 24th 1999

1. Each year World Mission Sunday offers the Church a precious opportunity to reflect on her missionary nature. Ever mindful of Christ's command: "*Go therefore and teach all nations baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the holy Spirit*" (Mt 28,19), the Church knows she is called to proclaim to men and women of every age and in every place the love of the one Father, who in Jesus Christ desires to gather together his children who are scattered abroad. (cfr *Jn* 11,52).

In this last year of the century which prepares us for the Great Jubilee of 2000, we feel strongly the urge to lift up our eyes and hearts to the Father, in order to know him "as he is and as the Son has revealed him to us" (CCC 2779). Reading in this light the Our Father prayer, which the Divine Master himself taught us, it is easier to understand the source of the Church's apostolic activity and the fundamental reasons for which she is a missionary "to the ends of the earth".

Our Father who art in heaven

2. The Church is missionary in order to proclaim untiringly that God is Father, filled with love for all mankind. Every individual and all nations search, at times even unconsciously, for the mysterious face of God which however is revealed to us solely by His only Son, who is one with the Father (cfr *Jn* 1,18). God is "the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ" and "he desires that all mankind are saved and come know the truth" (1 *Tim* 2,4). Those who accept his grace discover with amazement that they are children of the one Father and therefore feel they owe it to all people to proclaim salvation.

In the contemporary world many people, however, fail to recognise the God of Jesus Christ as Creator and Father. Some, at times through the fault of believers, choose to be indifferent or

atheist; others still, cultivating a vague sort of religious feeling, have built a God in their own image and likeness; others again consider Him to be totally out of reach.

It is the duty of believers to proclaim and testify that while he “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 *Tim* 6,16), the heavenly Father in his Son, who was born of the Virgin Mary, died and is risen, has made himself near to all human beings, and made them capable of “responding to him, knowing him and loving him” (cfr *CCC* 52).

Hallowed be thy name

3. The knowledge that the encounter with God promotes and exalts the dignity of the human person leads the Christian to pray: “Hallowed be thy name”, that is “May we be enlightened with the knowledge of you, so we may know the breadth of your benefits, the vastness of your promises, the sublime nature of your majesty and the profundity of your wisdom” (Saint Francis, *Fonti Francescane*, 268).

The Christian prays that God may be hallowed through his adopted sons and daughters, and also through those who have yet to be reached by his revelation, knowing that it is through sanctification that He saves the whole of creation.

So that God’s name may be made holy among all nations, the Church works to draw humanity and creation into the plan of the Creator who in his love, destined us to be holy and blameless before him. (cfr *Eph* 1,9.4).

Thy kingdom come

4. With these words believers pray for the coming of the divine Kingdom and Christ’s return in glory. Nevertheless this desire does not distract them from their daily mission in the world; indeed, it heightens their commitment. The coming of the Kingdom is now the work of the Spirit, sent by the Lord “to complete his work on earth and bring us the fullness of grace” (Roman Missal; *IV Eucharistic Prayer*).

In modern culture there is widespread expectation for a new era of peace, wellbeing, solidarity, respect for human rights, universal love. Enlightened by the Spirit, the Church proclaims that this kingdom of justice, peace and love, already announced in the Gospel, is mysteriously brought about with the passing of time, thanks to individuals, families and communities who choose to live Christ’s teaching in a radical way, in the spirit of the Beatitudes. Through their efforts temporal society is encouraged to evolve towards horizons of greater justice and solidarity.

The Church also proclaims that the Father “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 *Tim* 2,4) by responding to Christ and to his commandment, “that you

love one another; even as I have loved you, that you may also love one another. This commandment summarises all the others and expresses his entire will.” (CCC 2822).

Jesus tells us to pray for this and teaches that we may enter the Kingdom of heaven not by crying “Lord, Lord” but by doing the “will of the Father” his Father “who is in heaven” (Mt 7,21).

Give us this day our daily bread

5. In our day there is growing awareness that everyone has the right to their “daily bread”, that is, to what is necessary for life. Much felt is also the need for rightful equity and shared solidarity to unite all human beings. Nevertheless, many live in conditions which are not in keeping with their dignity as a human person. It is enough to think of the areas of poverty and illiteracy which exist in some continents, of the scarcity of housing and lack of health-care and work, of the political oppression and the wars which destroy the peoples of entire regions of the earth.

What are Christians called to do faced with these dramatic scenes? What has faith in the living and true God to do with overcoming the problems which torment humanity? As I wrote in *Redemptoris Missio*, “... a people’s development does not derive primarily from money, material assistance or technological means, but from the formation of consciences and the gradual maturing of ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour. Man is the principal agent of development, not money or technology. The Church forms consciences by revealing to peoples the God whom they seek and do not yet know, the grandeur of man created in God’s image and loved by him, the equality of all men and women as God’s sons and daughters...” (58). By proclaiming that men and women are children of the same Father, and therefore brothers and sisters, the Church helps to contribute towards the building of a world of authentic fellowship.

The Christian community is called to co-operate with development and peace by means of work of human promotion, Institutes of education and formation at the service of the young, by constantly denouncing all forms of oppression and injustice. But the specific contribution of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel and the Christian formation of individuals, families, communities, since she is well aware that her mission “consists essentially in offering people an opportunity not to ‘have more’ but to ‘be more’ by awakening their consciences through the Gospel. Authentic human development must be rooted in an ever deeper evangelization” (ibid 58).

Forgive us our trespasses

6. In the history of humanity, from the beginning, sin has been present. Sin fractures the original bond between the creature and God, with serious consequences for the life of the individual and that of others. Today, what is more, how can we fail to underline that the numerous expressions of evil and sin often find an ally in the means of social communications? How can we fail to see that “for many, the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their

behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large” (*Redemptoris Missio* 37/c) are the media?

Missionary activity cannot fail to carry to individuals and to entire peoples the good news of the Lord’s loving mercy. The Father who is in heaven, as is clearly seen in the parable of the Prodigal Son, is loving and he forgives the repentant sinner, forgetting his sins, restoring serenity and peace. This is the authentic face of God, the loving Father, who gives us the strength to conquer evil with good and enables those who respond to his love to share in the Redemption of the world.

As we forgive those who trespass against us

7. The Church is called, through her missionary activity, to make the reassuring reality of divine Fatherhood present, not only through words but above all through the holiness of missionaries and of the People of God. “The renewed impulse to the mission *ad gentes* – I wrote in *Redemptoris Missio* – demands holy missionaries. It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organise and co-ordinate ecclesial resources, or delve more deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith. What is needed is the encouragement of a new ‘ardour for holiness’ among missionaries and throughout the Christian community” (90).

Faced with the terrible and numerous consequences of sin, it is the duty of believers to offer signs of forgiveness and love. Only if they have experienced in their own lives the love of God will they be able to turn to others with love which is generous and unconditioned. Forgiveness is one of the highest forms of divine charity, bestowed as a gift on those who ask for it with insistence.

Lead us not into temptation

8. With this last request, in the “Our Father” we ask God not to allow us to take the path of sin and to free us from evil, which is often inspired by a personal being, Satan, who desires to obstruct the plan of God and the salvation He works through Christ.

In the knowledge that we are called to carry the news of salvation to a world dominated by sin and by the Evil One, Christians are encouraged to entrust themselves to God, and to ask him that the victory over the Prince of this world (cfr *Jn* 14,30), won, once and for all, by Christ, may become a daily experience of their life.

In social situations dominated by the logic of power and violence, the mission of the Church is to bear witness to the love of God and the power of the Gospel which dissolve hatred and revenge, egoism and indifference. The Spirit of Pentecost renews the Christian people, ransomed by the blood of Christ. This little flock is sent all over the world, poor in human means but free of any influence, to be leaven of a new humanity.

Final conclusions

9. Dearest Brothers and Sisters, Mission Sunday offers each of us an opportunity to put more emphasis on our common missionary vocation, which leads Christ's disciples to become apostles of his Gospel of reconciliation and peace. The mission of salvation is universal; for every person and for the whole person. It is a task which involves the entire People of God, all the faithful. Mission must therefore be the passion of every Christian; a passion for the salvation of the world and ardent commitment to work for the coming of the Father's kingdom.

For this to come about, there must be unceasing prayer to nourish the desire to carry Christ to all men and women. There must be the offering of one's suffering in unity with those of the Redeemer. There must also be personal commitment to support organisations of missionary co-operation. Among these I encourage you to take into special consideration the Pontifical Mission Societies which have the task of encouraging prayers for the mission, promoting the missionary cause and collecting funds for the work of evangelization. They operate in close collaboration with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which, in turn, co-ordinates missionary efforts in unity of intentions with the Particular Churches and the different Missionary Institutes present throughout the entire ecclesial community.

We will celebrate on October 24th the last Mission Sunday of a millennium in which the evangelizing work of the Church has produced truly wondrous fruits. Let us thank the Lord for the immense good work achieved by missionaries as, turning our eyes to the future, we confidently await the dawn of a new Day.

Those who work at the outposts of the Church are like watchmen on the walls of God's City. We ask them: "Watchman, what of the night?" (*Is* 21,11), and we hear the answer: "Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy: for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion" (*Is* 52,8) Their generous witness in every corner of the earth proclaims "As the third millennium of the Redemption draws near, God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity and we can already see its first signs." (*Redemptoris Missio* 86).

May Mary, the Morning Star, help us to say with ever new ardour our "yes" to the Father's plan for salvation, that all nations and tongues may see his glory (cfr *Is* 66,18).

With this wish, I gladly send to missionaries and to all those who work for the missionary cause, my special Apostolic Blessing

From the Vatican May 23rd, Solemnity of Pentecost
