



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

Thursday, 16 May 2002

1. The annual meeting with the national directors and collaborators of the Pontifical Mission Societies, gives me great joy.

The Church's missionary reality is a strong incentive to respond with responsibility and far-sightedness to the problems of the contemporary world. To the difficulties and expectations of the present time that challenge our faith, the Church puts forward with humble courage the answer, Jesus Christ, her living hope. The Church is aware that *"missionary evangelization ... is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world"* (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 2), revealing the love of God that is manifested in the Redeemer. The community of believers moves forward through the centuries, obedient to the Lord's mandate: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28,19-20).

Did not Jesus assure us that he will be with us "always even to the end of the world" (Mt 28,20)? Certain of his Word, Christians live every time as the "acceptable time" and the "day of salvation" (cf. II Cor 6,2), because "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever!" (Heb 13,8). And brothers and sisters, it is your mission to help ecclesial communities to respond to the gifts of the Spirit and to collaborate actively in the universal work of salvation.

2. In the days preceding the General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies, you spent time reflecting on the necessity of an adequate formation of missionary personnel and on the necessary dialogue with the other religions. It is clear to you that this formation is not "peripheral, but central to the Christian life" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 83).

Indeed at the various levels of responsibility, in the Church everyone must be educated to cooperate together with Christ's mission. There should be no lack of vocations *ad gentes* (*to the nations*), nor of workers for various assignments in the vast field of evangelization. Moreover, missionary activity can never be reduced to mere human advancement, help for the poor and liberation of the oppressed. Even if she must intervene courageously in these areas, in collaboration with every person of good will, the Church has another primary and specific mission, to bring every man and woman to meet Christ, the only Redeemer.

Missionary activity, for this reason, must be concerned first and foremost with transmitting the salvation that Jesus accomplished. Who better than you can bear witness that the poor hunger for God first of all, and not only for bread and freedom? When those who believe in Christ are faithful to their mission, they become powerful instruments of global liberation.

3. Missionary formation, first of all, requires the witness of an evangelical life. The saint is the true missionary and the world is waiting for missionaries who are saints. It is not enough then to be dedicated only to renewing pastoral methods and structures, coordinating ecclesial forces better; it is not enough to be limited to exploring the biblical and theological foundations of the faith with greater penetration. What is indispensable is to stir up a new "ardour of holiness" in missionaries and in the Christian community, especially among the missionaries' closest collaborators.

Once again, I would like to repeat the urgent need for missionaries *ad gentes* (*to the nations*) and *ad vitam* (*lifelong missionaries*). This vocation "retains all its validity: it is the model of the Church's missionary commitment, which always stands in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold endeavours (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 66).

I thank the Lord for all those who, hearing his voice, respond to him generously. Even though they are conscious of their own inadequacy, they place their confidence in his promises and help. Supported by divine grace, missionaries - priests, men and women religious and lay persons - dedicate their energy to Christ in far off lands, even in the midst of difficulty, misunderstanding, danger and even persecution.

4. How can we not recall with gratitude those who in the past few months have fallen in the breach in order to stay faithful to their mission? They are bishops and priests, religious and many lay persons. They are "the martyrs and witnesses to the faith" of our time, who encourage all believers to serve the Gospel with total dedication.

I raise my prayer to God for each one of them as I entrust you, brothers and sisters, to the hands of Our Lady, Star of Evangelization, and cordially impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all your collaborators in the tireless work of missionary promotion, formation and cooperation.
