



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SUPERIORS OF MISSIONARY CONGREGATIONS
PARTICIPATING IN THE FIRST MEETING
ORGANIZED BY THE CONGREGATION
FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES**

Friday, 31 May 2002

*Your Eminence,
Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am pleased to meet with you on the occasion of the convocation organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples with the superiors of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life committed to the service of the mission *ad gentes*.

2. I greet Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe and thank him for his cordial words on your behalf. I greet each of you, brothers and sisters, who represent the institutes and societies involved in missionary work. I thank you for your ecclesial service, which you carry out according to your own charism, and for the cooperation you offer to taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

In the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, I wrote that after 2,000 years: "the mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion" (n. 1). The Second Vatican Council confirmed that the whole Church is missionary, and so every one of the baptized must feel called to offer his contribution to proclaiming the Gospel.

2. Besides, it is clear that mission and consecrated life are strictly interdependent. If the missionary dimension belongs to the nature of the Church, it cannot be optional for men and women religious, who "because of the dedication to the service of the Church deriving from their very consecration, have an obligation to play a special part in missionary activity, in a manner

appropriate to their Institute" (*ibid.*, n. 69; *CIC*, can. 783). So one can say that "the sense of mission" is at the heart of every form of consecrated life (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 25). Through the ages, consecrated persons have always been at the forefront of missionary action *ad gentes*. Many of them left their homes, families and countries of origin to go forward with courage "to the ends of the earth" (cf. Acts 1,8), to bring to every person the Gospel message. They often had to accept difficulties, obstacles, renunciation and sacrifice. Some, indeed many, sealed with martyrdom their witness to Christ.

Following them, your institutes continue to go on with a single goal, that of making the light of the Gospel shine on those who still "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Lk 1,79).

3. I am happy to have a chance to thank you for your generous dedication to the mission. At the same time, I want to invite you to dedicate yourselves with even greater determination to this cause, reviving in your hearts the burning zeal of Paul who exclaimed: "*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!*" (I Cor 9,16).

Missionary work is quite demanding and, in the face of problems, hardships and misunderstandings, along with the decline of lifelong missionary vocations, the temptation to discouragement and weariness might sometimes appear. The daily routine may sap your generosity or leave you with a sense of dryness. Resist these risks by drawing from deep union with God the vigour to overcome every obstacle.

May the certainty that Christ is present sustain you. He assures us: "*I am with you always, even to the end of time*" (Mt 28,20). The Lord is always with us, in moments of spiritual intensity and of "harvesting the grain" and in the demanding, fatiguing periods "of sowing". As the Psalmist recalls, the missionary too "*goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing*", but "*comes home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him*" (Ps 125 [126], 6).

4. In the promising season of the new evangelization that we are living, it is necessary to continue to cultivate fruitful communion among the missionary institutes, the bishops and the particular Churches engaging in a constant, loving dialogue at the national and diocesan levels, with the Unions of Superiors of male and female orders and recognizing different charisms, tasks and ministries.

In this regard, the agreements stipulated between the bishops and the moderators of institutes dedicated to missionary work (cf. *CIC* can. 790 1,2°) are very useful, so that the relations established, the efforts made and the structures created may contribute in the best possible way to the missionary action of the Church.

The spirit of communion, that is born from thinking with the Church (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 46), is lived preeminently in collaboration with the Apostolic See and with the organisms that coordinate

missionary activity. The first of these is the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples whose task is "to direct and coordinate throughout the world the actual work of spreading the Gospel ..." (*Pastor Bonus*, art. 85). I rejoice with the meeting organized these days that has been dedicated to reflection, exchange and the investigation of a more intense and fruitful collaboration. I invite you to repeat this experience and to keep alive the climate of communion that is created at these meetings.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, I follow you and I am close to you in prayer, as I invoke upon your work the heavenly protection of the many martyrs and holy missionaries and of the founders and foundresses of your institutes. Today, on the feast of the *Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, I entrust you to the Star of Evangelization, that she may support you in your daily missionary service and be your model of total dedication to the Gospel.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to the members of your respective communities, and to those whom you meet in your apostolate.