



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI FOR THE WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2010



Building Ecclesial Communion is the Key to Mission

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The month of October, with the celebration of World Mission Sunday, offers to diocesan and parish communities, institutes of consecrated life, ecclesial movements and the entire People of God an opportunity to renew the commitment to proclaim the Gospel and to give pastoral activities greater missionary perspective. This annual event invites us to live intensely the liturgical and catechetical, charitable and cultural processes through which Jesus Christ summons us to the banquet of his word and of the Eucharist, to taste the gift of his presence, to be formed at his school and to live ever more closely united to him, our teacher and Lord. He himself tells us, "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14: 21). Only on the basis of this encounter with the Love of God that changes life can we live in communion with him and with one another and offer our brothers and sisters a credible witness, accounting for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt 3: 15). An adult faith, capable of entrusting itself totally to God with a filial attitude fostered by prayer, meditation on the word of God and study of the truth of the faith, is a prerequisite for furthering a new humanism founded on the Gospel of Jesus.

Furthermore, in many countries the various ecclesial activities are resumed in October, after the

summer break, and the Church invites us to learn from Mary, by praying the Holy Rosary, to contemplate the Father's plan of love for humanity, to love her as he loves her. Is not this also the meaning of mission?

Indeed, the Father calls us to be sons and daughters loved in the beloved Son, and to recognize that we are all brothers and sisters in him who is the gift of salvation for humanity divided by discord and sin, and the revealer of the true face of God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3: 16).

"We wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12: 21), is the request in John's Gospel that some Greeks, who had arrived in Jerusalem for the paschal pilgrimage, address to the Apostle Philip. It also resonates in our hearts during this month of October which reminds us that the commitment to, and task of, Gospel proclamation is a duty of the whole Church, "by her very nature missionary" (*Ad gentes*, n. 2), and invites us to become champions of the newness of life made up of authentic relationships in communities founded on the Gospel. In a multiethnic society that is experiencing increasingly disturbing forms of loneliness and indifference, Christians must learn to offer signs of hope and to become universal brethren, cultivating the great ideals that transform history and, without false illusions or useless fears, must strive to make the planet a home for all peoples.

Like the Greek pilgrims of two thousand years ago, the people of our time too, even perhaps unbeknown to them, ask believers not only to "speak" of Jesus, but to "make Jesus seen", to make the face of the Redeemer shine out in every corner of the earth before the generations of the new millennium and especially before the young people of every continent, the privileged ones to whom the Gospel proclamation is intended. They must perceive that Christians bring Christ's word because he is the truth, because they have found in him the meaning and the truth for their own lives.

These considerations refer to the missionary mandate that all the baptized and the entire Church have received but that cannot be fulfilled without a profound personal, community and pastoral conversion. In fact, awareness of the call to proclaim the Gospel not only encourages every individual member of the faithful but also all diocesan and parish communities to integral renewal and ever greater openness to missionary cooperation among the Churches, to promote the proclamation of the Gospel in the heart of every person, of every people, culture, race and nationality in every place. This awareness is nourished through the work of *Fidei Donum* priests, consecrated people, catechists and lay missionaries in the constant endeavour to encourage ecclesial communion so that even the phenomenon of "interculturality" may be integrated in a model of unity in which the Gospel is a leaven of freedom and progress, a source of brotherhood, humility and peace (cf. *Ad gentes*, n. 8). The Church in fact "is in the nature of sacrament a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 1).

Ecclesial communion is born from the encounter with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who, through the Church's proclamation reaches out to human beings and creates fellowship with himself and hence with the Father and the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 1: 3). Christ establishes the new relationship between man and God. "He reveals to us that 'God is love' (1 Jn 4: 8) and at the same time teaches us that the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love. He assures those who trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all men and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood will not be in vain" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 38).

The Church becomes "communion" on the basis of the Eucharist in which Christ, present in bread and in wine with his sacrifice of love builds the Church as his Body, uniting us with the Triune God and with one another (cf. 1 Cor 10: 16ff.). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* I wrote, "The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with everyone. What the world needs is God's love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him" (n. 84). For this reason the Eucharist is not only the source and summit of the Church's life, but also of her mission: "an authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church" (ibid.), which can bring all to communion with God, proclaiming with conviction "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us" (1 Jn 1: 3).

Dear friends, on this World Mission Sunday in which the heart's gaze extends to the immense spaces of mission, let us all be protagonists of the Church's commitment to proclaim the Gospel. The missionary impulse has always been a sign of vitality for our Churches (cf. Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2), with their cooperation and their unique witness of unity, brotherhood and solidarity that gives credibility to heralds of the Love that saves!

I therefore renew to everyone the invitation to pray and, despite financial difficulties, to offer fraternal and concrete help to support the young Churches. This act of love and sharing, which the precious service of the Pontifical Missionary Societies to which I express my gratitude will see to allocating, will support the formation of priests, seminarians and catechists in the most distant mission lands and will encourage the young ecclesial communities.

At the end of this annual Message for World Mission Sunday, I would like with special affection to express my gratitude to missionaries who bear witness to the coming of the Kingdom of God in the most remote and challenging places, often with their lives. To them, who are in the vanguard of the Gospel's proclamation, every believer offers friendship, closeness and support. May God who loves a cheerful giver (cf. 2 Cor 9: 7) fill them with spiritual fervour and deep joy.

As with the "Yes" of Mary, every generous response of the ecclesial community to the Divine invitation to love our brothers and sisters, will raise up a new Apostolic and ecclesial motherhood (cf. Gal 4: 4, 19, 26), leaving us struck by the mystery of the God of love who "when the time had

fully come... sent forth his Son, born of a woman" (Gal 4: 4) to give faith and boldness to the new Apostles. Such a response will make everyone capable "rejoicing in hope" (Rom 12: 12) by realizing the project of God, who wills "that the whole human race form one people of God, be united in the one body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit" (*Ad gentes*, n. 7).

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