



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

Dear brothers and sisters,

In this special year, you gathered in Lyon, the city where the Pontifical Mission Societies originated and where the beatification of Pauline Jaricot, the founder of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, will be held. It is its bicentenary, as well as the centenary of its elevation, together with the Society of the Holy Childhood and the Society of Saint Peter the Apostle, to the rank of “Pontifical”. These were later joined, again recognized by Pius XII, by the Pontifical Missionary Union, which is celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of its founder, Blessed Paolo Manna.

These anniversaries are part of the celebration of 400 years of the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, to which the Pontifical Mission Societies are closely linked and with which they collaborate in supporting the Churches in territories entrusted to the Dicastery, which was instituted to support and coordinate the spread of the Gospel in lands hitherto unknown. But the evangelizing impetus has never diminished in the Church, and it always remains her fundamental dynamism. That is why I wanted the Dicastery for Evangelization to take on a special role also in the renewed Roman Curia, in order to promote the missionary conversion of the Church (*Praedicate Evangelium*, 2-3), which is not proselytism, but witness: going out of oneself to proclaim *with one’s life* the gratuitous and salvific love of God for us, all called to be brothers and sisters.

So you chose to gather in Lyon because it was there, 200 years ago, that a young 23-year-old woman, Pauline Marie Jaricot, had the courage to found a society to support the missionary activity of the Church; a few years later she started the “Living Rosary”, an organization dedicated to prayer and the sharing of offerings. From a wealthy family, she died in poverty: with her beatification, the Church testifies that she knew how to accumulate treasures in Heaven (cf. Mt 6:19), treasures that are born from the courage of giving and reveal the secret of life: only by giving it is it possessed, only by losing it is it found (cf. Mk 8:35).

Pauline Jaricot loved to say that the Church is missionary by nature (cf. *Ad gentes*, 2), and that every baptized person therefore has a mission; rather, *is* a mission. Helping to live this awareness is the first service of the Pontifical Mission Societies, a service they fulfil with the Pope and in the name of the Pope. This link between the PMS and the Petrine ministry, established 100 years ago, translates into practical service to the bishops, to the particular Churches, and to all the People of God. At the same time, it is your task, according to the Council (cf. *Ad gentes*, 38) to help the bishops open every particular Church to the horizons of the universal Church.

The jubilees you celebrate and the beatification of Pauline Jaricot offer me the opportunity to present to you again three elements that, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, have greatly contributed to the spread of the Gospel in the history of the PMS.

First of all, *missionary conversion*: the goodness of the mission depends on the path of going out of oneself, on the desire to centre one's life not on oneself, but on Jesus, on Jesus who came to serve and not to be served (cf. Mk 10: 45). In this sense, Pauline Jaricot saw her existence as a response to God's compassionate and tender mercy: since her youth she had sought identification with her Lord, including through the sufferings she went through, with the aim of igniting the flame of her love in every person. Here lies the wellspring of mission: in the ardour of a faith that does not settle and that, through conversion, day by day becomes imitation, to channel God's mercy on the roads of the world.

But this is possible — second element — only through *prayer*, which is the first form of mission (cf. *Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies*, 20 May 2020). It is no coincidence that Pauline placed the Society for the Propagation of the Faith alongside the Living Rosary, as if to reiterate that mission begins with prayer and cannot be accomplished without it (cf. Acts 13:1-3). Yes, because it is the Spirit of the Lord that precedes and enables all our good works: the primacy is always of His grace. Otherwise, the mission would be a question of running in vain.

Finally, the *concreteness of charity*: along with the prayer network, Pauline gave rise to a collection of offerings on a vast scale and in a creative form, accompanying it with information on the life and activities of the missionaries. The offerings of so many humble people were providential for the history of the missions.

Dear brothers and sisters who make up the General Assembly of the PMS, I hope that you will walk in the footsteps of this great missionary woman, letting yourselves be inspired by her practical faith, her bold courage, and her creative generosity. By the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Star of Evangelization, I invoke the Lord's blessing on each one of you and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 12 May 2022

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