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Missionary Prayer Intention - MISSIONARY INTENTION - "That by proclamation of the Gospel and the witness of their lives, missionaries may bring Christ to those who do not yet know him" - Comment on the Missionary Intention for April 2011

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) – During the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI's Homily on 9 March, Ash Wednesday, he highlighted the need for Christians to be a living message, through their witness to the Gospel. Many people today do not have contact with the Gospel other than through the life and words of those who follow Christ. Thus St Paul wrote to the Christians that they too are a letter of Christ, written with the Spirit of the living God (cf. 2 Cor 3:3).

Years ago one could talk about a healthy number of countries marked by faith in Christ, and mission was intended mainly for those countries which had not yet received the Gospel message. Today it is common in western society to find every day, people who have never heard of Christ. So we need a renewed awareness of the missionary dimension of the whole Church, of all the baptised. This missionary activity is to be carried out not only with words but also by the witness. In this sense, John Paul II said: "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers,69 in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ, whose mission we continue, is the "witness" par excellence (Rv 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Church along her way and associates her with the witness he gives to Christ (cf. Jn 15:26-27).

"The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living. The missionary who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities. But everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness; in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary." (Redemptoris Missio, 42).

Ultimately the heralds of Christ must be convinced of his Gospel and must try to live it. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Mt 7:21). Words are not enough. Life and witness is needed.

History shows that when there are true witnesses, faith grows. Testimonies such as that of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta or of John Paul II, have aroused a wave of Gospel freshness where they passed. But we can not bear witness to Christ if we are not truly united to Him. " Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear The upcoming Beatification of John Paul II will also be an opportunity to place a model before the world of a man who was truly dedicated to Christ, who knew how to make the Eucharist the centre of his life, and especially in his final years, lovingly embraced the Cross of his Lord.

In the homily at his funeral, the then Cardinal Ratzinger recalled the words: "Get up, Let us go!", the title of John Paul II's last book. "Get up, Let us go!": with these words a tired faith was reawoken from the sleepiness of yesterday's and today's disciples. "Get up, Let us go!", also speaks to us today. The Holy Father was ultimately a priest, because he offered his life to God to serve his sheep and the entire human family, both in his daily service to the Church and especially in the trying final months of his life. In this way he became one with Christ, the good shepherd who loves his sheep. (Card. J.Ratzinger, homil on 8 April 2005). His testimony revived the faith of many. May we become missionaries like him! (Agenzia Fides 30/03/2011)

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