



## **VATICAN-Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the World Mission Day 2012**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Fides publishes Pope Benedict XVI's Message for World Mission Day, which this year will be celebrated on Sunday, October 21 on the theme "Called to radiate the Word of truth":

HOLY FATHER'S MESSAGE (translation by Fides News Agency)

WORLD MISSION DAY 2012

"Called to radiate the Word of truth" (Apost. Lett. Porta Fidei No. 6)

Dear brothers and sisters,

This year the celebration of World Mission Day has a very special meaning. The 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council and of the opening of the Year of Faith and the Synod of Bishops on the theme of the New Evangelization contribute to reaffirming the Church's desire to engage with more courage and zeal in the *missio ad Gentes* so that the Gospel reaches the ends of the earth.

The II Vatican Council, with the participation of Catholic Bishops from all corners of the earth, was a truly luminous universal sign of the Church, welcoming for the first time such a large number of Council Fathers from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania. Missionary bishops and native Bishops, Pastors from communities scattered among non-Christian populations, who brought during the Council the image of a Church present in all Continents and were the interpreters of the complex realities of the then so-called 'Third World'.

Due to the rich experience of being Pastors of young Churches, animated by the passion for spreading the Kingdom of God, they have contributed significantly to reaffirming the necessity and urgency of the evangelization *ad Gentes*, and in placing the Church's missionary nature at the centre of ecclesiology.

### Missionary Ecclesiology

Today this vision is still valid, indeed, it has experienced a fruitful theological and pastoral reflection and, at the same time, presents itself with renewed urgency because the number of those who do not know Christ has expanded: "The number of those awaiting Christ is still immense", said the Blessed John Paul II in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* about the permanent validity of the missionary mandate and therefore, added: "We cannot be content when we consider the millions of our brothers and sisters, who like us have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but who live in ignorance of the love of God" (Num. 86). I, too, in announcing the Year of Faith, wrote that Christ "today as in the past, sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth" (Apost. Let 7); proclamation, which, even the Servant of God Paul VI in his apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* clearly expressed, "it is not an optional contribution for the Church: it is the duty incumbent on her by the command of the Lord Jesus, so that people can believe and be saved. This message is indeed necessary. It is unique. It cannot be replaced" (Num. 5). We then need to return to the same apostolic zeal

of the early Christian communities, which, though small and defenseless, were able, through their witness and proclamation, to spread the Gospel throughout the then known world.

No wonder, therefore, that the II Vatican Council and the subsequent Magisterium of the Church insist in a very special way on the missionary mandate that Christ had entrusted to his disciples and that has to be the commitment of all the People of God, Bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, lay people. The care of proclaiming the Gospel in every corner of the world belongs to the Bishops first of all, directly responsible for the evangelization in the world, both as members of the College of Bishops and as pastors of particular Churches. In fact, they "have been consecrated not only for a particular diocese, but for the salvation of the entire world" (John Paul II, Enc Lett. Redemptoris missio, 63), "heralds of the faith, who lead new disciples to Christ" (Ad Gentes, 20) and make "the mission spirit and zeal of the People of God present and as it were visible, so that the whole diocese becomes missionary" (ibid., 38).

The priority to evangelize

The mandate of preaching the Gospel, therefore, does not finish for a Pastor, in his attention towards the portion of the People of God entrusted to his pastoral care, or by sending a Fidei donum priest, man or woman religious or lay man or woman; it must involve all the activities of the particular Church, all her sectors, in short, her whole being and working.: all the components of the large mosaic of the church must strongly questioned the mandate of the Lord to preach the Gospel, so that Christ can be preached everywhere . We Pastors, men and women religious and all the faithful in Christ, we must put ourselves in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, who the Council clearly indicated it and the subsequent Magisterium reaffirmed it with force. This requires regular adjustments of lifestyles, pastoral planning and diocesan organization to this fundamental dimension of being Church, especially in our continuous changing world. And that goes for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, as well as for ecclesial Movements: all the components of the large mosaic of the Church must strongly feel questioned by the mandate of the Lord to preach the Gospel, so that Christ can be preached everywhere. We Pastors, men and women religious and all the faithful in Christ, should follow in the footsteps of the apostle Paul, who "a prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles" (Eph 3, 1), worked, suffered and struggled to bring the Gospel among the Gentiles, he did not save energy, time and means to make known the Message of Christ.

Even today, the mission ad Gentes must be the constant horizon and the paradigm of every ecclesial activity, because the identity of the Church herself is constituted by faith in the Mystery of God, who revealed himself in Christ to bring us salvation, and by the mission of witnessing and proclaiming Him to the world until He comes. Like St. Paul, we should be attentive towards those who are far, to those who do not yet know Christ and have not yet experienced the paternity of God, in the awareness that "the missionary cooperation includes new forms-not only economic assistance, but also direct participation to evangelization" (John Paul II Redemptoris missio, 82).

The celebration of the Year of Faith and the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization also aim to relaunch missionary cooperation.

Faith and proclamation

The passion to preach Christ urges us to also read history so as to scrutinize the problems, aspirations and the hopes of mankind, that Christ has to heal, purify, filling it with his presence. His Message is not timeless, but is drawn into the heart of the history of the people and is able to meet the aspirations of each man/woman. For this reason the Church must be aware of "the immense horizons of the Church's mission and the complexity of today's situation call for new ways of effectively communicating the Word of God" (Benedict XVII, Apost Exort postsin Verbum Domini 97). This obliges us, first of all, to a more conscious and vigorous adherence of faith to the Gospel "especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing" (Apost Lett. Porta Fidei 8).

One of the obstacles for evangelization, in fact, is the crisis of faith, not only in the western world, but for most of humanity, who, however is hungry and thirsty for God, and must be invited and brought to the bread and the living water, like the Samaritan at Jacob's well in the encounter with Christ. As St. John the Evangelist says, the story of this woman is of particular significance (cfr John 4,1-30): the Samaritan woman met Christ, who asks her for some water, but then talks about a new water, able to extinguish the thirst for ever. At the beginning the

woman does not understand, she remains at a material level, but she is slowly led by the Lord to undergo a path of faith which leads her to recognize him as a Messiah. Here St Augustine says: “after having received in the the Lord Christ, what else could [this woman] have done if not abandon amphora and run to the village and announce the presence of the Messiah (homily15, 30). It is necessary to renew the enthusiasm of communicating the faith to promote a new evangelization of the communities and Countries of ancient Christian tradition, which have lost the reference to God so that they may rediscover the joy of believing. The concern to evangelize must not remain on the margins of ecclesial activity and of the personal life of a Christian, but strongly characterized in the awareness of being receivers and and, at the same time, missionaries of the Gospel. The core of the mission is always the same: the Kerigma of Christ dead and risen for the salvation of the world, the kerigma of God's absolute and total love for every man and woman, manifested in sending the eternal and only Son, the Lord Jesus, who did not despise on accepting the poverty of our humanity, whom he loved and redeemed by offering himself on the cross from sin and death.

Faith in God in this project of love fulfilled in Christ is a gift and mystery which must be welcomed in the heart and life and for this we must thank the Lord. If it is a gift from God to be shared; it is a talent which must bear fruit; it is a light that should not be hidden, but must alighten the whole house. It is the most important gift we have and we cannot keep for ourselves.

Proclamation becomes charity

Woe to me if I do not preach, said the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 9:16). This word resounds with force for every Christian and for every Christian community in all Continents. Even for the young Churches in the mission territories even recently created, the missionary conscience has become a connatural dimension, even if they themselves still need missionaries. Many priests, men and women religious, from every corner of the world, many lay people and even entire families leave their countries and their local communities and go to other churches to witness and proclaim the Name of Christ, in which only Humanity finds salvation. It is a profound expression of communion, sharing and charity among the Churches, so that every man and women may listen or re-listen to the saving proclamation and to get closer to the sacraments, source of true life..

And together with this immense sign of faith in the form of given charity, I therefore feel and have the duty to remember and thank the Pontifical Mission Societies, through their activities, the proclamation becomes helping others, justice for the poorest, schools in remote villages, hospitals in isolated places, emancipation from poverty, rehabilitation of those who are marginalized, support for the development of peoples, overcoming ethnic divisions, respect for life.

Dear brothers and sisters, I invoke on the mission of evangelization ad Gentes, and in particular on its workers, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the grace of God makes it procede more decisively in the history of the world. I pray with Blessed Newman: "O Lord accompany Thy missionaries in the Lands to be evangelized, put the right words on their lips, make their efforts fruitful". The Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and star of Evangelization, accompany the missionaries of the Gospel.

From the Vatican, January 6, 2012, Solemnity of the Epiphany

Benedictus PP. XVI