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VATICAN -Pope Benedict XVI's Message for World Mission Sunday 2006: "Charity, the soul of mission"

Vatican City (Fides Service) - We give below the full text in English of Pope Benedict XVI's message for the 80th World Mission Sunday 2006 which the Church all over the world will celebrate on Sunday 22 October with the theme: "Charity, soul of mission".

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
1. World Mission Day which we will celebrate Sunday 22nd October, offers an opportunity this year to reflect on the theme: " Charity, Soul of Mission". Unless mission is animated by charity, that is, unless it flows from a profound act of divine love, it risks being reduced to a mere philanthropic and social action. The love which God has for each single person constitutes, in fact, the very core of living and preaching the Gospel, and all who hear it in turn, become witnesses. The love of God which gives life to the world is the love which has been given us in Jesus, the Word of Salvation, perfect icon of the mercy of our heavenly Father. The message of salvation can be then summed up in the words of Saint John the Evangelist: "In this is manifest the love of God for us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we may have life in him" (1Jn 4, 9). The mandate to spread the message of love was entrusted to the Apostles by Jesus after his resurrection, and the Apostles, inwardly transformed on the day of Pentecost by the power of the Holy Spirit, began to bear witness to the Lord's death and resurrection. From that time on the Church continues this same mission which constitutes for all believers an indispensable and permanent duty.

2. Every Christian community is called, then, to make known God, who is Love. On this fundamental mystery of our Faith I desired to pause and reflect in the Encyclical: Deus Caritas Est; (God is Love). With his love God permeates all creation and the history of humanity. In the beginning man came forth from the hands of the Creator as the fruit of his own loving initiative. Sin darkened the divine imprint. Deceived by the devil our first parents, Adam and Eve, lost their relationship of trust with their Lord, giving way to the temptation of the evil one who persuaded them that God was a rival and wanted to limit their freedom. Thus, they preferred themselves to the divine gratuitous love, convinced in that way to affirm their own free will. As a consequence they forfeited their original happiness and tasted the bitterness and sadness of sin and death. However, God did not abandon them and promised salvation to them and to their descendants: He foretold the coming of his only Son, Jesus, who in the fullness of time would reveal to them his Father's love, a love capable of redeeming every single human creature from the slavery of evil and death. In Christ therefore, we have received immortal life, the very life of the Trinity. Thanks to Christ, the Good Shepherd who never abandons the lost sheep, to all men of all times has been given the possibility of entering into communion with God, our merciful Father who is ready to welcome home his prodigal son. The astounding sign of such a love is the Cross. In my Encyclical Letter Deus caritas est I wrote that "His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of Love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move".(n.12).

3. On the eve of his Passion, Jesus left as His last will to his disciples, gathered in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover, the "new commandment of love - mandatum novum": "This I command you: love one another" (Jn 15,17). The fraternal love which the Lord asks of his "friends" has its source in the paternal love of God. John the apostle remarks: "He who loves comes from God and knows God" (1Jn 4,7). Therefore, to love according to God, we must live in Him and of Him: the first 'home' of man is God and only he who lives in God, burns with the fire

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of divine charity which can ‘enkindle’ the world. Is this not the mission of the Church in all times? Then it is not difficult to understand that authentic missionary concern, the first duty of the ecclesial community, is linked to faithfulness to the divine love. This is true for every Christian, for every local community, for the particular Churches and for the entire People of God. Precisely, because of this awareness of their common mission, the disciples of Christ find strength in responding generously to carry out works of human and spiritual promotion which, as our beloved John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical Redemptoris Missio, bear witness to “the soul of all missionary activity: love which has been and remains the driving force of mission and is also the sole criterion for judging what is to be done or not done, changed or not changed. It is the principle which must direct every action and end to which that action must be directed. When we act with a view to charity, or are inspired by charity, nothing is unseemly and everything is good” (n. 60). To be missionaries then means to love God with all one’s heart, even to the point of giving one’s life for Him. How many priests, men and women religious and laity, even in our time, have rendered supreme witness of their love for Him by their martyrdom! To be missionaries, is to tend, like the Good Samaritan, to the needs of all, particularly those of the poor and the needy, because he who loves with the heart of Christ, searches not for his own interest but only for the glory of God and the good of his neighbour. In this lies the secret of the apostolic fruitfulness in missionary work which crosses frontiers and cultures, reaches all peoples and spreads to the utmost ends of the world.

4. My dear brothers and sisters, World Mission Day is an appropriate occasion for better understanding that witness of love, soul of the mission, concerns everyone. Indeed to serve the Gospel can never be considered a solitary adventure, but a binding duty for every community. Along with all those who operate on the front line of evangelization - and here I remember with gratitude all missionaries - I also think of many others, children, young and old who by their prayers and cooperation in many ways contribute to the spreading of the Kingdom of God on earth. My wish is that this participation may always increase through the contribution of all. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and to the Pontifical Missionary Societies. They coordinate with dedication the world-wide efforts of all who contribute to the work of those in the front line of missionary activities.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who with her presence beside the Cross and her prayer in the Upper Room collaborated actively at the beginning of the ecclesial mission, strengthen their work and help believers in Christ to be evermore capable of true love, so that, in a world which is ever more spiritually thirsty, they may become fountains of living water.

For this I wish and pray with all my heart, while I impart upon all of you my Blessing.

Given at the Vatican, 29th April 2006

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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