



Missionary Prayer Intention - October 2006: The Pope's missionary prayer intention "May the celebration of World Mission Sunday intensify the spirit of missionary animation and cooperation everywhere" **Comment by Cardinal Ivan Dias Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In this month of October 2006 we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the institution of World Mission Sunday. In fact on 14 April 1926 Pope Pius XI gave his approval to a request formulated by the Superior General Council of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith which, in a plenary assembly, petitioned the Supreme Pontiff to establish "a day of prayer and propaganda for the missions to be celebrated on the same day in every Catholic diocese, parish and institute in the world". The reasons for the request were clearly stated: "The day would foster understanding of the greatness of the missionary task, encourage zeal among the clergy and the people; offer an opportunity to make the Society for the Propagation of the Faith ever more widely known and encourage offerings for the missions..." (cfr. Rescript Sacred Congregation for Rites 14 April 1926).

In these eighty years humanity has walked briskly, ever faster in recent times. It has experienced terrible tragedies, such as two world wars, the holocaust, conflicts in every part of the planet, but it has also made progress in the fields of science, technology and medicine; it has launched itself to conquer space, equipped itself with sophisticated means of communications, solemnly proclaimed the inviolable rights of every human person, witnessed profound social and political changes such as the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Nevertheless how often, even in recent decades, has man attempted to remove God from history, distance Him from personal life, sever every vital link with Him, proclaiming himself master of the universe, of humanity, of creation. Then man fought man, humanity fell into the abyss of violence and brutality. The ambition to deny the existence of God did not bring happiness and wellbeing, on the contrary it caused suffering, unhappiness, insecurity... "Yet, the great breakthroughs of technology and science that have considerably improved humanity's condition leave unresolved the deepest searchings of the human soul. Only openness to the mystery of God, who is Love, can quench the thirst for truth and happiness in our hearts;" (Pope Benedict XVI, general audience, 16 August 2006).

Eighty years later is the request made by the Superior General Council of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith still valid? Is it still necessary to intensify missionary animation and cooperation? "The Christian community in our time too feels sent to the men and women of the third millennium in order to acquaint them with the truth of the Gospel message and thereby give them access to the path of salvation. And this, as I said, is not an option but the vocation proper to the People of God, a duty incumbent upon it by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ himself" the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI reminded participants at the Conference promoted by the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples to mark the 40th anniversary of the "Ad Gentes" Decree issued by Vatican II (speech 11 March 2006).

Hence humanity of the third millennium has more than ever need of Christ, to know the love of the Father and the power of his Spirit. Today it is still necessary to become missionaries for humanity so travailed and troubled, to enable those who have never heard of Jesus Christ to know Him and those who have denied Him with their behaviour to return to the right path. The mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church is more than ever urgent, indeed "it is only just beginning", as the Holy Father Pope John Paul II wrote in the encyclical "Redemptoris Missio" (n.1). However for this mission to continue someone must assume responsibility, indeed every baptised person must shoulder this task.

The Missionary Prayer Intention indicated by the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI for this month calls us to pray "that the celebration of World Mission Sunday may intensify the spirit of missionary animation and cooperation

everywhere”. Heeding the Pope’s call then, let us pray that Mission Sunday will be an opportunity not only to “speak about the Missions” but above all to pray for the missions, let us “use gentle violence to persuade the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus to hasten universal recognition of his divine sovereignty”. May every baptised person become more aware that he or she is called, because of baptism, to announce the message of Jesus Christ, Saviour and Redeemer. As Vatican II so aptly says, this Day is an opportunity to realise that the whole People of God is “on mission”: - not only part of it, the Pope, bishops, priests, religious, - all of us, every day of our life, in every circumstance to which the vicissitudes and decisions of our personal history lead us, to those we come into contact and whom the Lord places on our path. Only this will intensify “the spirit of missionary animation and cooperation” and ensure that Mission is not an appointment for a few hours once a year, but rather the beat of the clock of our spiritual life day after day, month after month, year after year. May the clock of missionary life be charged by prayer because “the Christian who prays does not claim to be able to change God's plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather, he seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work.” (Deus Caritas est, n.37).

Let us entrust ourselves to Most Holy Mary, whom we invoke especially in the month of October with the recitation of the Holy Rosary, that through her intercession we may obtain the same ardour as that of the Apostles gathered with her in the Upper Room who were not discouraged after the Lord’s Ascension but persevered in confident prayer. And when the Spirit filled them with His gifts they did not hesitate to leave the place where they were to go out to announce to everyone the wondrous reality of Jesus Christ who died and is risen. Let us transform our communities, our families, our groups of missionary work and apostolate, in many more “upper rooms” in which to invoke with perseverance and untiringly the gift of the Spirit, in order to be ready to go out to the world, since “the proclamation of and witness to the Gospel are the first service that Christians can render to every person and to the entire human race, called as they are to communicate to all God's love, which was fully manifested in Jesus Christ, the one Redeemer of the world” (Pope Benedict XVI speech 11 March 2006). Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Queen of the Missions, pray for us! Card. Ivan Dias (Agenzia Fides 25/9/2006; righe 73, parole 1.065)