

## THE POPE SPEAKS

MESSAGE  
OF  
POPE PAUL VI  
FOR  
MISSION SUNDAY  
1969

*Sons and daughters of  
Gods holy Church!*

*Dearly beloved brethren!*

WE CONSIDER OURSELF at this moment as spiritually in your midst.

Listen to Us, for the love of Our Lord.

We would like, again this year, to address a word to you all, as it comes to Us from Our heart, for World Mission Sunday on October 19, 1969. We cannot silence this message, although it may say nothing new, for it springs from the constant awareness of Our apostolic ministry, entrusted to Us by the Lord and making Us responsible to all: to all, as St. Paul says, We are under obligation (cf. Rom. 1:14), and "woe to me if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16)! Before giving utterance to this message, We have heard it in Our heart from the command of Christ himself, the first Missionary, 'sent' from the Father — Christ, who rose from the dead and gave to the Apostles, and to us successors of the Apostles, his imperative mission: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

Our message today is this: let us try to bring out the missionary idea clearly and strongly in ourselves and around us. We should pay heed to the new importance that this idea takes on for the People of God after the Council. It is an idea that permeates the whole Church and each one of the faithful. It enters into the very definition of a Christian: "The obligation of spreading the faith," says the Council, "is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his ability" (*Lumen Gentium*, 17). And again: "All sons of the Church should have a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world. They should foster in themselves a truly Catholic spirit. They should spend their energies in the work of evangelization" (*Ad Gentes*, 36). It is a vocation for all; it is a duty for the whole Church — if it is Catholic, by its very nature it must be missionary (cf. *Ad Gentes*, nos. 2, 6, 35). We have always known this. Already St. Augustine taught: "If you wish to love Christ, your charity must embrace the whole world" (*In Ep. I Jo. tract. 10, 5*; P.L. 35,2060). But the Council has brought out more clearly this pressure, this urgency of the love of Christ (cf. *II Cor. 5:14*), whether as a community of faithful or as single believers. No category of Christians can exempt itself from the missionary vocation: it binds even those who adopt the contemplative life (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, nos. 5 and 11); and it binds the laity, "for the Lord wishes to spread his kingdom by means of the laity also" (*Lumen Gentium*, 36). This is what is new in the Church's consciousness: the urgent and universal duty of the apostolate.

What does this duty entail? It means that we must all unite in the general effort of the Church to spread Christ's message. We repeat: there is no room today for indifference, apathy and spiritual selfishness, as if the cause of the Gospel was the business of the hierarchy only, and of organizations that are specifically dedicated to evangelization. Every Christian who wishes to live up to his call to faith, and to the profession of his faith, must open his soul to the wind of Pentecost; the prophetic breath of the Holy Spirit should invade every son and daughter of God, born to the life of grace (cf. *Acts 2:17*). The whole Catholic community must become convinced of the necessity to spread the faith; each and every member of the Church must be aflame with apostolic fervour and missionary zeal.

The etymological and essential link between the two words 'apostolate' and 'mission' leads many today to apply the word 'mission' to every form of apostolic activity. We intend to use the word 'mission' here in its specific and technical meaning of activity envisaged and organized for the express purpose of evangelizing peoples who are not yet Christian, by means of persons who have dedicated themselves, and are chosen, prepared and officially sent, that is, by means of missionaries', who, in the footsteps of the Apostles, preach the word of truth and bring to birth new Churches (cf. *Ad Gentes*, and St. Augustine quoted there, *Enarr. in Ps. 44, 23, P.L. 36, 508*). That is, we are speaking now of missions in the strict sense. The attention of the faithful should be drawn to the missionary ideal, as they are defined in the Council decree '*Ad Gentes*' on the Church's missionary activity. We must mention in a special way the Holy See's Pontifical Missionary Works, which engage Our primary pastoral responsibility. These have before them the full panorama of the world to be evangelized; they are the centre of a network spread throughout the Church for the benefit of all Catholic missions; they have an awareness of missionary requirement throughout the world; and they are administered on a collegial basis and with impartial criteria of distributive justice and a charity that is awake to all needs and all opportunities to help.

The very existence of this central and official organization in the Church is a reply to a difficulty that is currently brought up in certain sectors, and which would threaten missionary activity with stagnation: that is, an emphasis on the Conciliar proclamation of religious liberty, as if this would favour an agnostic irenicism and authorize indifference concerning religious truth and the apostolic command, to which the plan of salvation is linked. Missionary endeavour, some say, is no longer necessary. The existence of Pontifical Works that are expressly designed to promote and maintain such missionary endeavour contradicts this theory today as before, for religious liberty, as proclaimed by the Council, is meant to ensure that religion will be free from undue interference on the part of any purely secular power, and also from wrong social and political exclusiveness in the religious field; it is not meant to weaken our apostolic duty but rather to provide civic conditions in which missionary activity may be exercised, with due respect for freedom of con-

science, while preaching the one true message of salvation that comes from religion.

This is a basically traditional position in the Church, but one which the Council has renewed and clarified. It makes us remember our need, beloved Brothers and Children, to refresh our missionary consciousness, on many other points as well, with the new ideas that the present time offers to our consideration. There are many such ideas: for instance, that of the progress of human solidarity, which multiplies links between peoples as civilization develops, and obliges the citizens and governments of better endowed countries to willingly and unselfishly help developing countries. We have spoken of this in Our Encyclical 'Populorum Progressio', and We may add that missionary activity claims a place of priority in this scheme of human and Christian solidarity.

Thus the concept of missionary endeavour has undergone development. There used to be something exotic and romantic in it, as if it were an evangelizing adventure in far-off and unknown lands. Today the concept is more positive and realistic, for missionary activity can now profit from experience, which saves it from projects that are too naive and experimental, dispenses it from arduous geographical exploration that is now superfluous, simplifies the missionary's practical initiation and makes his training more scientific and specific. All of this opens up new possibilities, but requires a greater supply of vocations and financial support.

The attitude of the missionary towards the countries to be evangelized has also evolved: the diversity of cultures no longer seems to him an obstacle to his preaching, but rather reveals native values worthy of respect and admiration, which should be understood, strengthened and ennobled" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13). The missionary is not, therefore, a stranger who, along with his faith, imposes his form of culture, but rather a friend and brother who fits in with the worthy customs of the region and provides the vivifying leaven of the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). This missionary attitude, which is 'pluralistic' with regard to the expression of human culture and 'unitary' with regard to the oneness of faith and of the Church, has always been the norm of evangelization, as Pope Pius XII already pointed out in the Encyclical

'Evangelii Praecones' (cf. A.A.S. 43, 1951, pp. 521-522), but nowadays it is more marked than ever.

Today, as yesterday, the motive and the moral value of missionary activity remain valid. The numerous men and women missionaries in the field, dedicated to the service of spreading the Gospel, can bear witness to this. And the same qualities of the missionary remain necessary: total donation of self; willingness to face danger; patience; generous, persevering effort, even when it seems fruitless and when progress is slow; a spirit of sacrifice; the preaching of the Cross not only by word but also by example, with a willingness to suffer one's own passion. The missionary is like Simon of Cyrene, lovingly and publicly bearing Christ's cross with Him to the end.

Beloved Brothers and Children, We are reluctant to exploit these noble ideas with the usual appeal that closes this address on the missions — the appeal concerning the needs of the mission themselves, and the obligation and honour of giving them generous help. But it is our duty to do so — not in a calculating spirit, but because the divine plan of evangelization and the logic of charity make it necessary. The missionary cause needs your help; it needs your love, your prayers and your offerings. Who would deny this when the missionary cause is that of Christ himself, as He makes his mysterious way to the ends of the earth, plants his footsteps on present and future history, raises the destiny of peoples, identifies himself with each man (who without Him would be abandoned and alone), assembles his Church and leads it, as its Shepherd and Saviour, to the joy of eternal life?

"He that has ears to hear, let him hear." We make these words of Jesus Our own and, filled with gratitude and trust, We impart to you all Our Apostolic Blessing.

Given at the Vatican  
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*PAULUS PP. VI*