

## MISSION SUNDAY MESSAGE\*

Beloved children,  
Fellow Christians,  
Fellow missionaries,

Thus the Pope addresses you, acknowledging with wondering respect the apostolic dignity which it has pleased our Lord Jesus Christ to confer on each one of his followers, from the greatest to the least.

You will, of course, understand, when this Message reaches you on World Mission Day, that it does not come from the Pope alone — as from some isolated figure who must bear all by himself the missionary responsibility which has from beginning “weighed up the Church” (*Ad Gentes*, 5). For Christ’s command to “go into the whole world; preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16: 15) “was inherited from the apostles by the order of bishops, assisted by priests, and united with the successor of Peter” (*Ad Gentes*, 5).

So then we address you on this Mission Day not only on our own behalf, but also as spokesman for our brother bishops throughout the world, with whom it is our joy to be united in the closest bonds of charity and in a blessed collegial solidarity.

The pastors of the Christian flock, servants of all servants of God, would have you share with them on this day the wonder of this thought: that they and you are members of a missionary Church, a Church which exists to make known to all mankind the Gospel of salvation.

The people of God are a missionary people.

Christ could have asked his Father and he would have given him at once “more than twelve legions of angels” (Mt. 26: 53) to announce his redemption to the world. Instead, Christ gave the task and the privilege to us; to us, “the very

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<sup>1</sup> *L'osservatore Romano*, Aug. 5, 1971.

least of all the saints". (Eph. 3: 8), who are indeed unworthy to be called apostles (cfr. 1 Cor. 15: 9). He deliberately left himself with no voice but ours to tell the glad tidings to mankind. It is we to whom this grace is given: "to preach to the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3: 8).

### A TIME WITHOUT PRECEDENT

And we are to preach the Gospel in this extraordinary period of human history, a time surely without precedent, in which peaks of achievement never before attained are matched by similarly unprecedented depths of bewilderment and despair. If ever there were a time when Christians were challenged to be, more than ever before, a light to illumine the world, a city on a hill, a salt to give savour to men's lives (cfr. Mt. 5: 13-14) surely that time is now! For we possess the antidote to the pessimism, the gloomy foreboding, the dejection and fear, which afflict our time.

We have Good News!

And every one of us, by the very nature of his Christianity, must feel himself impelled to broadcast this Good News to the ends of the earth. "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4: 20).

No one of us Christians — be he Pope, bishop, priest, religious or layman — can disclaim responsibility in regard to this essential Christian duty. You will certainly recall the emphasis with which the recent Ecumenical Council insisted on this: "Every disciple of Christ (without exception) has the obligation to do his part in spreading the faith" (*Ad Gentes*, 23). "All sons of the Church should have a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world . . . They should spend their energies in the work of evangelization" (*ibid.*, 36).

### NO EXCEPTION OF RACE OR TIME

Let us be very clear on one point: Christ gave his apostles a command which is so concrete and so explicit that it excludes any possibility of uncertainty about his wishes. They were to go to the whole world, (without exclusion of any part) and preach the Good News to every creature (with no exception of race or time).

The Good News is this: that God loves us; that he became man to share in our life and to share his life with us; that he walks with us — every step of the way — taking our concerns as his own, for he cares about us (1 Pet. 5: 7); and that therefore men are not alone, for God is present in their entire history, that of peoples and that of individuals; that he will bring us, if we allow him, to an eternal happiness beyond the bounds of human expectation.

You will undoubtedly hear the well-meaning objection: but what of the hungry, the underprivileged, the victims of oppression and injustice? Does it make sense — is it even in keeping with charity? is it not rather an affront? — to talk to them of good things ahead? Would it not be better for Christianity to assist them to something approaching a human life before presuming to speak to them of a heavenly life to come?

But Christ, who was himself “anointed to preach the Good News to the poor . . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Lk. 4: 18), would not have us exclude the poor and underprivileged — or, for that matter, the men of any particular race, colour, tribe or human condition whatever — from the joy of hearing the Good News of his Gospel.

True to his spirit, our missionaries have never, at any time, thought to separate the love of God from the love of mankind, much less to oppose the one to the other. While they build the Kingdom of God, they invariably labour at the same time to improve man's earthly condition. And it should be stated very firmly that the gentle message of the Gospel has never, in the Church's experience, been regarded by the poor or oppressed as an affront.

Without claiming to intervene “to propose a ready-made model” of civilization (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 42), the spreaders of the Good News bring to every people (with due loyalty to the patrimony of the teaching of Christ and due respect for their various cultures) what they believe to be “the only, the true, the highest interpretation of human life in time, and beyond time: the Christian interpretation” (Address to the Parliament of Uganda, 1 August 1969, AAS LXI [1969] p. 852). They indeed believe that “Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through his Spirit offer man the light

and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 10). Evangelization, which responds to man's noblest aspirations, thus becomes a leaven of development.

Thus we see the perennial need to preach the Gospel, in order to offer man the ultimate reasons for his efforts towards development: "the acknowledgement by man of supreme values, and of God their source and finality . . . faith, a gift of God accepted by the good will of man, and unity in the charity of Christ, who calls us all to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men" (*Populorum Progressio*, 21).

### NEED OF SPIRITUAL VALUES

Perhaps never before has the world had such need of spiritual values, and, we are convinced, never has it been so disposed to welcome their proclamation. For the most affluent regions of the world are fast discovering for themselves that happiness does not consist in possessions; they are learning from a bitter "experience of emptiness" how true are our Lord's words: "Not on bread alone does man live, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4: 4).

We must tell men, and keep on telling them, that "the key, the focal point, and the goal of human history" is to be found in our Lord and Master (*Gaudium et Spes* 10). We must tell them that this is true not only for believers, but also applies to everyone, for whom Christ died and whose ultimate vocation is to correspond to God's design: "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1: 10).

We must invite all men to join the People of God, his Church, that ever-growing society of hope, which is able to look eagerly to the future without closing its eyes to the present; which indeed finds the present meaningful and valid and worth-while because of its very relationship to that future, and is therefore able to involve itself in the present with all the more energy and conviction.

No, we are "not ashamed of the Gospel" (Rom. 1: 16). Nor are your Pope and bishops ashamed to beg for the means by which the Gospel may be made known. If, then, you find

them on this World Mission Day with begging-bowls in their hands, beseeching alms of you for the love of God and neighbour, this will not surprise or scandalize you.

Did not Christ himself frequently beg from those near him the means by which he chose to accomplish good? Did he not feed the multitude with a few loaves given by a boy in the crowd? Did he not beg the use of a fisherman's boat from which he might speak the word of life to the people? Did he not readily accept the assistance offered to him and his disciples by the women who provided for them out of their own resources? Did he not ride on a borrowed ass down to the place of his Passion? And was he not dependent on a rich man for the very tomb from which he accomplished his Resurrection?

### SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

We wish to confide to you, the whole body of the Catholic faithful — all of you our collaborators in the divinely assigned task of making the Good News known — a matter which causes us shame and embarrassment. We are unable to provide adequate support for the Church's missionaries, or to give sufficient assistance to the many good works of religion and love which they constantly undertake.

These missionaries have made the commitment "for life" to the Gospel. They go to the nations in our stead. They carry out on our behalf the command of the Master "to preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk, 16: 15). Nothing in our power to offer could ever repay our obligation to these men and women; but we must at least supply their daily bread and provide the other necessities which their various works demand.

For the many of us who cannot personally bear the Good News to the peoples of the earth, this is often the only way which presents itself in which we may fulfill the inescapable missionary obligation laid on all Christians. Our constant prayer brings the grace of God on our missionaries' undertakings; our sacrifices freely offered and our sufferings gladly accepted open many doors to them.

To these spiritual subsidies we must add generous alms, for in the reality of our earthly situation material assistance is also necessary.

For almost a century and a half, the organization of this support from the Catholic faithful has been entrusted to an enterprise of charity known as the Pontifical Mission Works (now sometimes called Papal Mission Aid). Through these Pontifical Works in each country, under the direction of zealous National Directors proposed by the bishops, the alms of the People of God are gathered each year, principally in the parish collections on Mission Sunday.

After these donations have been gathered into one fund, they are distributed to the missions. And so your contributions, generously and willingly given in response to the Pope's annual appeal, are soon put to work, providing for the daily necessities of our missionaries, building churches, schools, hospitals, seminaries and novitiates: feeding the hungry, relieving suffering and bringing emergency assistance in times of disaster.

If it is indeed sadly true that the Pontifical Works now find themselves unable to meet more than a fraction of the total requirement, it is not because your gifts have become less generous, but rather because of the speed with which the work of the Gospel has been proceeding and the enormous expansion in the works of social development undertaken by the missionaries.

Nevertheless, we feel constrained to urge each and every one of the Catholic faithful to make yet greater sacrifices for the Faith; and not only those in the more prosperous societies, but those also who, like the widow so highly commended by Christ, must give "out of their poverty" (Mk. 12: 44). Doing this, we shall more closely resemble the first community of Christians, of whose number "no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own" (Acts 4: 32).

### OUR PRESENT-DAY APOSTLES

Just as "the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" in that springtime of Christianity, so must the company of believers be today; not only a society of hope,

but also of faith and of charity. And certainly we must be at one with our missionaries, those present-day apostles, as they hurry on our behalf to the ends of the earth to "make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God" (Eph. 3: 9) and to "show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2: 7).

• We must be at one with them in a solidarity of apostolic Christian urgency, so that they may be enabled "with great power" to "give their testimony to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4: 33). And we shall thus accomplish un-faillingly what Christian hearts must always sincerely desire to do for their fellow-men: to cause them "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" so that they "may be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3: 19).

As we express our thoughts to all of you, dear sons and daughters, we invoke upon you the grace and strength of the Lord, that you may be faithful to your vocation in his missionary Church. And to you, our beloved missionaries throughout the world, we extend a very special and deeply affectionate greeting in Jesus Christ, whom you serve in love and sacrifice and joy. To all of you, collaborators with him in the building up of his kingdom — "a kingdom of truth and life; of holiness and grace; of justice, love and peace" (Preface for the Feast of Christ the King) — we most cordially impart on this World Mission Day our Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 25 June 1971.

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