



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

*Clementine Hall  
Saturday, 14 May 2011*

*Your Eminence,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I would like to address my cordial greeting first of all to the new Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Archbishop Fernando Filoni, whom I warmly thank for his words on behalf of all. To this I add my fervent good wishes for a successful ministry. At the same time, I express deep gratitude to Cardinal Ivan Dias for his generous and exemplary service in these years to the missionary Dicastery and to the universal Church. May the Lord continue to light the way of these two faithful workers in his vineyard.

I greet Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai, Secretary, Archbishop Piergiuseppe Vacchelli, Adjunct Secretary and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, the collaborators of the Congregation and the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, who have gathered in Rome from their various particular Churches for the Annual General Ordinary Assembly of the Superior Council. An affectionate welcome to you all.

Dear friends, with your precious work of animation and missionary cooperation you remind the People of God of “the need in our day too for decisive commitment to the *missio ad gentes*” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, n. 95), to proclaim the “the great hope”, “the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety” (Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, n. 31). Indeed, new problems and new forms of slavery are emerging in our time, both in the so-called first world, well-off and rich but uncertain about its

future, and in the developing countries, which, partly because of a globalization often characterized by profit ends by increasing the masses of the poor, emigrants and the oppressed, in which the light of hope fades.

The Church must constantly renew her commitment to bring Christ, to prolong his messianic mission to bring about the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of justice, peace, freedom and love. It is the duty of the entire People of God to transform the world according to God's plan with the renewing force of the Gospel, so "that God may be everything to every one" (1 Cor 15:28). Thus it is necessary to continue with renewed enthusiasm the work of evangelization, the joyful proclamation of the Kingdom of God, who came in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, to lead all men and women to the true freedom of children of God against every form of slavery. It is necessary to cast the nets of the Gospel into the sea of history to bring human beings towards the land of God.

"The mission of proclaiming the word of God is the task of all of the disciples of Jesus Christ based on their Baptism" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, n. 94). However in order that they may be a decisive commitment to evangelization, it is necessary that individual Christians and communities truly believe that "the word of God is the saving truth which men and women in every age need" (ibid., n. 95). If this conviction of faith is not profoundly rooted in our own lives, we shall not be able to feel the urgency and beauty of proclaiming it. In fact, every Christian must make his or her own the pressing need to work for the edification of the Kingdom of God. Everything in the Church is at the service of evangelization: every sector of her activity and also each and every one, in the various duties that they are called to carry out. All must be involved in the *missio ad gentes*: bishops, priests, men and women religious and lay people. "No believer in Christ can feel dispensed from this responsibility which comes from the fact of our sacramentally belonging to the Body of Christ" (ibid., n. 94). It is therefore necessary to ensure that all the sectors of pastoral work, catechesis and charity are characterized by the missionary dimension: the Church is mission.

A fundamental condition for proclamation is to let oneself be completely grasped by Christ, the Word of God incarnate, because only those who listen attentively to the incarnate Word, who are intimately united to him, can become his heralds (cf. ibid., nn. 51, 91). The Gospel messenger must remain under the dominion of the Word and must draw nourishment from the Sacraments: it is on this vital sap that their existence and missionary ministry depends. Only if we are rooted profoundly in Christ and in his word are we capable of withstanding the temptation to reduce evangelization to a purely human, social project, hiding or glossing over the transcendent dimension of the salvation offered by God in Christ.

It is a word that must be witnessed to and proclaimed explicitly, because without a consistent witness it proves to be less comprehensible and credible. Even if we often feel inadequate, poor, incapable, let us always preserve our certainty of the power of God who places his treasure "in

earthen vessels” precisely so that it may appear that it is he who acts through us.

The ministry of evangelization is fascinating and demanding. It requires love for proclamation and bearing witness, a love so total that it can even be marked by martyrdom. The Church cannot fail in her mission of bringing Christ’s light, of proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel, even if this entails persecution (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, n. 95). It is part of her very life, as it was for Jesus. Christians must not be afraid, even if “Christians are the religious group which suffers most from persecution on account of its faith” (*Message for the World Day of Peace 2011*, n. 1).

St Paul said that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

Dear friends, I thank you for your work of animation and missionary formation which, as National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, you carry out in your local Churches. The Pontifical Mission Societies which my Predecessors and the *Second Vatican Council* have promoted and encouraged (cf. *Ad Gentes*, n. 38) remain a privileged instrument for missionary cooperation and for a useful sharing of personnel and financial resources among the Churches. Nor should the support that the Pontifical Mission Societies offer to the Pontifical Colleges here in Rome be forgotten. At these Colleges, priests, religious and lay people — chosen and sent by their Bishops — are formed for the local Churches in mission territories. Your work is essential for building the Church, destined to become the “common home” of all humanity.

May the Holy Spirit, the protagonist of the Mission, guide and support us always, through the intercession of Mary, Star of Evangelization and Queen of Apostles. To all of you and to your collaborators I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing.