



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 25 May 2024*

[[Multimedia](#)]

*Your Eminence, Your Excellencies,
Dear National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies.
Dear co-workers of the Dicastery for Evangelization,
Brothers and sisters, good morning!*

I warmly welcome all of you who have travelled from more than one hundred and twenty countries across five Continents for the Annual General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS). I extend my greetings to Cardinal Tagle, to the Secretary, Archbishop Nwachukwu, and to Archbishop Nappa, Adjunct Secretary and President of the PMS, together with the four General Secretaries: your leadership is in good hands with a Filipino, an African and a Neapolitan!

On the eve of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, we are invited to contemplate the mystery of God: a mystery of love that offers itself, gives itself, and spends itself completely for the salvation of all. Reflecting upon this work of salvation, we discover three fundamental characteristics of the divine mission that have been present from the beginning: *communion*, *creativity* and *tenacity*. Let us consider these essential words, which are relevant for the Church in its permanent state of mission, and especially for our Missionary Societies called to renewal in order to be ever more effective in service.

First, *communion*. When we contemplate the Trinity, we see that God is a communion of persons, a mystery of love. The love with which God comes to seek and save us, rooted in his being One

and Triune, is also the basis of the missionary nature of the pilgrim Church on earth (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 1; *Ad Gentes*, 2). In this perspective, we are called to live a spirituality of communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. Christian mission is not about transmitting some abstract truth or religious conviction, even less proselytizing, but, first and foremost, is for enabling those we meet to have a fundamental experience of God's love. Indeed, if we are shining witnesses reflecting a ray of the Trinitarian mystery, they will be able to discover God's love in our lives and in the life of the Church. On the issue of proselytizing, I would like to speak of a personal experience. At one of the World Youth Days, I was leaving one of the halls where there had been a meeting, and a lady approached me. She belonged to a Catholic group, evidently right-wing. The lady was with a boy and a girl, and she said, "Your Holiness, I want to tell you that I converted these two! I converted them!" I looked her in the eyes and said, "And who will convert you?" On this mission of conversion, there are religious groups that carry a list of those whom they have converted, this is very ugly. This is just one anecdote.

Therefore, I urge everyone to grow in the spirituality of missionary communion, which is the foundation of the Church's current synodal journey. I emphasized this in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* and I reiterate it now, especially as you work on renewing your Statutes. It is important for the Statutes to be updated. Since a journey of missionary conversion is necessary for everyone, it is essential that opportunities for personal and communal formation be provided in order to grow in the dimension of "communal" missionary spirituality. The purpose of the Church's mission is "making everyone know and live the 'new' communion that the Son of God made man has introduced into the history of the world" (*Praedicate Evangelium*, I, 4). [1] Let us not forget that the call to communion implies a synodal style: this means walking together, listening to each other, engaging in dialogue, even arguing, but always as a community. This expands our hearts, and fosters that increasingly universal outlook which was emphasized at the founding of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith: "We must not think only of this or that mission in particular, but of all the missions and missionary initiatives throughout the world" (cf. MONS. CHRISTIANI AND J. SERVEL, *Marie-Pauline Jaricot*, 39).

The second word I would propose is *creativity*. The first was communion, and now the second is creativity. Rooted in the communion of the Trinity, we are involved in the creative work of God, who makes all things new (cf. *Rev* 21:5). We also participate in that creativity. I would like to say two things about this. The first is that creativity is linked to God's own freedom, which he gives to us in Christ and in the Spirit. Indeed, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (*2 Cor* 3:17). What gives us freedom is the Spirit. We read about it in the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, there is a creativity there and there is the Spirit. For this reason, please, we must not allow ourselves to stifle missionary creative freedom! Second, as Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe, the Franciscan missionary in Japan and martyr of charity, said: "only love creates". Let us remember that evangelical creativity stems from divine love, and that all missionary activity is creative to the extent that Christ's charity is its origin, form and end. Thus, with inexhaustible imagination, such charity creates new ways of evangelizing and serving others, especially the

poorest, and include the customary collections taken for the universal funds of solidarity with the missions. To this end, we must promote these collections and make it clear that this donation that I give, that every Christian gives, helps to grow the Church and to save people. Therefore, this participation, not only of individuals, but also of groups and institutions shows their desire to support the many missionary realities of the Church in a spirit of gratitude for the graces received from the Lord.

The third and final word is *tenacity*, that is, steadfastness and perseverance in purpose and action. Let us also contemplate this characteristic of the love of the Triune God who, in order to fulfil his plan of salvation, with constant faithfulness has sent his servants throughout history and, in the fullness of time, gave himself in Christ Jesus. The divine mission “is a tireless going out to all men and women, in order to invite them to encounter God and enter into communion with him. Tireless! Tenacious! The Church, for her part, in fidelity to the mission she has received from the Lord, will continue to go to the ends of the earth, to set out over and over again, without ever growing weary or losing heart in the face of difficulties and obstacles” (*Message for World Mission Day 2024*). The Church does this even to the point of martyrdom. On this point, I would like to pause to thank God for the witness of martyrdom that a group of Catholics from North Kivu in Congo, have recently given. They had their throats slit, simply because they were Christians and did not want to convert to Islam. Today, we see the greatness of the Church in the witness of her martyrs. We can think too, about five years ago, to the beach in Libya where some Copts had their throats slit while on their knees saying, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus”. The Church in martyrdom is the Church of the Lord’s tenacity, which he then carries forward.

We are called, then, to persevere and be tenacious in purpose and action, and to live out this martyr dimension by our example. Those of you in the Pontifical Mission Societies encounter a great variety of situations and events that are part of the great ebb and flow of the Church’s life across the globe. Thus, although you may come across many challenges, complex situations, burdens and weariness that accompany ecclesial life, do not be discouraged! Here I would like to make a digression to mention the weaknesses of so many of our brothers and sisters who at times fall. Please be patient, take them by the hand and accompany them. Please do not be scandalized by their slips. “It can happen to me”, everyone must say, “it can happen to me”. Be very charitable, very gentle and be patient. One of the things that touches my heart about the Lord is his patience: he knows how to wait. By focusing on the positive aspects and the joy that comes from contemplating God’s work, we will know how to face even problematic situations with patience, avoiding inactivity and the spirit of defeatism. With tenacity and perseverance, go forth in the Lord! With the brothers and sisters who slip and fall, remember, it is permitted to look down on a person only on one occasion: to lift him or her up. Always do this with those brothers and sisters who have fallen.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you once again, together with your co-workers, for your generosity and dedication in promoting the missionary responsibility of the faithful, especially in

caring for the children of the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood. May Our Lady intercede for you. I impart to you my heartfelt blessing. I thank you for all you do. Please do not forget to pray for me.

[1] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 32.

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