



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO ARCHBISHOP SIMON D. LOURDUSAMY, PRESIDENT
OF THE PONTIFICAL SOCIETY OF MISSIONARY CHILDHOOD
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD***

The founder of this Pontifical Society did not fail to meditate on what might be called "the apostolate of Jesus", which comprised a certain apostolate of childhood. Christ wants people to let the little children come to him. He admires their simplicity and their trust, their transparency and their generosity. The evangelist Matthew narrates to us that Jesus calls one of them and puts him in the midst of his apostles, who were discussing questions of merits and precedence, to present him to them as a model for those who wish to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Even more! The Lord identifies himself with the world of young children: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mt 18:5). And he dares to curse those who scandalize them! Jesus does not condition children, he does not use children. He calls them, and brings them into his plan for the salvation of the world. How wonderful!

It was certainly what the Apostle John noticed when he reports the words of Andrew, Peter's brother, before the multiplication of the loaves: "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" (Jn 6:9). Jesus accepted this humble gift and, through his divine power, he gave it dimensions that the little donor could not foresee.

Today still, very young Christians, formed to knowledge and evangelical love of children of their age deprived of the goods necessary for their complete development, are capable of cooperating in this work of justice, solidarity, peace and advance of the Kingdom of God. And doing so, not only does their baptismal and human life develop and become personalized, but such children question and evangelize the world of adults, who are sometimes hardened and sceptical about the necessity and the efficacy of solidarity and the gift of oneself.

To this glance at the topicality of the Pontifical Society of Missionary Childhood and at its evangelical sources, I would like to add finally my encouragement to take all means to cause it to progress. I count a great deal on the well-known zeal, prudent and persevering, of national, regional and diocesan leaders. In harmony with other movements of the apostolate of childhood, let them take care to improve constantly their methods of action, which are doubtless different from one country to another but certainly convergent!

Without being exhaustive, stress can be laid first of all on the privileged place of the child's prayer in a missionary perspective. To that must be added permanent concern with informing and forming young children by means of solid and well-adapted catechetical methods, sessions of study for the educators of the young to the missionary spirit, carefully studied renewal of missionary educative activities, ranging from sketching and dramatic expression to the twinning of groups of children, and the organization of collections intelligently presented and carried out, in particular for the needs of the young Churches on the plane of their catechetical means, often so limited.

Nor should it be forgotten to teach the children to look at and appreciate the cultural and religious riches of those whom they wish to help, in a climate of mutual and really brotherly exchange. But, above all, I would like the World Day of Missionary Childhood, very happily placed in the period of Christmas and Epiphany, to be both for the children and for their educators, among whom I hope to see many older adolescents, and even for their families, the annual revival of a human and Christian solidarity, which is more and more thoughtful, effective and reciprocal.

In this firm hope, I invoke on the Missionary Childhood the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and I address my affectionate Apostolic Blessing to its President, the national leaders and their collaborators, and all the children in the world who bring of their best to this ecclesial society.

From the Vatican, 10 April 1979.

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