



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE
FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS**

Friday, 1 June 2001

Dear Brothers in Christ,

1. It is a reason of great joy for me to welcome you today and extend a cordial welcome to you. At the end of the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of your foundation and on the occasion of your 12th general assembly, you wished to visit me to renew the expression of your fidelity to the Successor of Peter in communion with the whole Church. I greet you with affection.

My thoughts go first of all to the new Superior General, Fr Gianbattista Zanchi, to whom I extend my wishes for the delicate task which has been entrusted to him in the service of the Institute and of the Church. At the same time, I wish to thank Fr Franco Cagnasso, for the work that he did as Superior General for your fraternity. My greeting is extended also to the members of the new Council of the General Management. I see in you, brothers, the faces of the numerous missionaries of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) of Italy who are generously active in so many parts of the world. I embrace them all with spiritual intensity, thinking of the generous commitment with which they sow the Word of God, often amid so many difficulties and obstacles.

The assembly that saw you gathered in prayer and reflection took place just a few months after the end of the Great Jubilee, an event of extraordinary grace for the Church, and at the beginning of a new millennium, which sees the Christian community heading forward with renewed confidence and hope towards the announcement of Christ, the only Saviour of mankind. Today's meeting takes place on the eve of the feast of Pentecost: our spirit resounds with the command of the Lord to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Mt 28,19*). It is the same strength of the Spirit, who directed the first Christian community, who guides our footsteps in the way of Christ.

2. Years and centuries go by, yet Christ remains the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the centre of the individual and community life of those who belong to him. It is necessary, therefore, constantly to set out anew from him in order to understand the meaning of the mission that he has entrusted to the Church.

If you plan to re-appraise the proper charism of your Institute in order to revitalize the congregation, it is essential, from this point of view, to set out anew from the central place of Christ in community life and in personal witness. Should a "Christological weakness" ever slip into your activity, then your work of evangelization might risk being reduced to a prevalently social, charitable activity or one of pastoral organization. On the contrary, your Society was born for gathering holy and generous souls "who made an offering of themselves to God, anxious to devote themselves to the spreading of his holy Kingdom" (cf. *Maxims and Norms*, Preface).

Today as yesterday, you are sent into the world to be of Christ, without fear "that it will be considered an offence to the identity of others what is rather the joyful proclamation of a gift meant for all, and to be offered to all with the greatest respect for the freedom of each one: the gift of the revelation of the God who is Love, the God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3,16)" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 56). Faith is strengthened by being given!

Certainly, the difficulties and problems that mankind, as a whole, finds itself facing today must be held in the right consideration. I am thinking, for example, of the emergence of new planetary visions such as globalization, ethnocentrism, or the temptation to construct a "do-it-yourself religion". I am thinking of the closing of quite a few countries to the presence of missionaries and direct evangelization. Nor should we underestimate specific problems such as the numerical fall in the members of the Institute and the consequent aging or the, at times difficult, creation of fraternity among persons of different nationalities and languages. However, with the grace of God, we must look towards the future with eyes of hope. Strong in the mysterious presence of Christ, we must set out into the vast ocean that opens before the Church of the third millennium and "put out into the deep" with confidence.

3. Allow me to take up again the four chief dimensions that characterize the identity of your Institute as you outlined them in your general assembly. In the first place, the PIME missionary is one who is *sent out beyond the Christian world*. This means to say that he leaves his land, he abandons his culture and even his own particular Church to bring the announcement of the Cross to the place where the Lord sends him. The moving rite of the handing over of the Crucifix and the departure signify that you are sent as a gift of God to mankind and the communities among whom you are to carry out your pastoral ministry.

In the second place, yours is a *mission ad gentes* (to the non-Christian nations). Therefore you must renew your commitment to reach the so-called "distant people", especially those who still do not know the Gospel. It requires a creative effort to be able to inculturate the evangelical message,

an intense capacity for dialogue, a constant attention to the demands of human development, of the struggle against injustice, of the defence of the most needy and those without rights. If you will know how to form new vocations to intercultural dialogue, you can hope to have missionaries who are able to cooperate in unity, even while safeguarding legitimate diversity.

In the third place, your *consecration* is *for life*. It is the response to a call and to a plan that involves one's whole life and lasts for an entire lifetime. It is a total gift to Christ for the mission. The pivotal items of your spirituality are, therefore, rooted in being rather than in doing, mindful of the word of Christ who promised that "By your perseverance you will save your souls" (Lk 21,19).

Finally, the characteristic of your apostolic work is that of *working together*. You are missionaries of various nationalities, priests and laity who live in communion, in a style that is orientated to the mission. The spirituality of communion is the truest witness to Christ that you can give to the world, bringing into harmony every kind of difference so that it may become a common treasure. It demands a continuous process of personal kenosis that opens each one to the other, be he priest or layman. In this regard how can we fail to see the usefulness of supporting the lay dimension of the missionary task, in response to the signs of the times that require the presence of the laity for evangelization? It will be important that priests and laity know how to work together, so that the diversity of ministry may become a source of grace for all and an eloquent witness to Christ.

4. Missionaries, through the grace of God, new opportunities for enlightened evangelization are opening up in the Church every day. Know how to listen to the Spirit who challenges you and answer him with generosity, accepting today's challenges. Do not fear to go where the missionary is not welcomed, due to political, social, ideological or even religious reasons.

Do not forget that even in the countries which were evangelized long ago, today there is a need for a sound missionary commitment, especially in the cities, which need a new evangelization, or even, a first announcement of Christ. Moreover, the history of your Institute is a long account of meeting and dialogue with other religions. Continue on this path, knowing how to rejoice in the riches present in them and to offer to those in dialogue with you the specific gift of your Christian faith.

I entrust your entire family to Mary, Star of Evangelization. May she sustain and console you. May she protect you together with the Blesseds and Saints who offered their lives entirely for the mission. May you also be accompanied by my Blessing, which I sincerely impart to you, to your confrères and to all those whom you will meet in your ministry.
