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BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 160516a

Monday 16.05.2016

Message for the 90th World Mission Sunday: missionary Church, witness of mercy

Vatican City, 15 May 2016 – "Missionary Church, witness of mercy" is the theme chosen by the Holy Father for the 90th World Mission Sunday, to be celebrated on 23 October 2016. In the document, signed in the Vatican today, the Solemnity of Pentecost, the Pope recalls that the Jubilee invites us to look to the *missio ad gentes* as an immense work of mercy, both spiritual and corporal, and observes, at the same time, that an eloquent sign of God's maternal love is the considerable and growing presence of women in the missionary world. "Together with the evangelising and sacramental work of missionaries, women and families often more adequately understand people's problems and know how to deal with them in an appropriate and, at times, fresh way", he writes. Likewise, with reference to the many injustices, wars and humanitarian crises for still awaiting resolution, he emphasises that "missionaries know from experience that the Gospel of forgiveness and mercy can bring joy and reconciliation, justice and peace".

The following is the full text of the Pope's message:

"The Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, which the Church is celebrating, casts a distinct light on World Mission Sunday 2016: it invites us to consider the *missio ad gentes* as a great, immense work of mercy, both spiritual and material. On this World Mission Sunday, all of us are invited to 'go out' as missionary disciples, each generously offering their talents, creativity, wisdom and experience in order to bring the message of God's tenderness and compassion to the entire human family. By virtue of the missionary mandate, the Church cares for those who do not know the Gospel, because she wants everyone to be saved and to experience the Lord's love. She 'is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel' and to proclaim mercy in every corner of the world, reaching every person, young or old.

When mercy encounters a person, it brings deep joy to the Father's heart; for from the beginning the Father has lovingly turned towards the most vulnerable, because His greatness and power are revealed precisely in his capacity to identify with the young, the marginalised and the oppressed. He is a kind, caring and faithful God who is close to those in need, especially the poor; He involves himself tenderly in human reality just as a father and mother do in the lives of their children. When speaking of the womb, the Bible uses the word that signifies mercy: therefore it refers to the love of a mother for her children, whom she will always love, in every circumstance and regardless of what happens, because they are the fruit of her womb. This is also an essential aspect of the love that God has for all His children, whom He created and whom He wants to raise and educate;

in the face of their weaknesses and infidelity, His heart is overcome with compassion. He is merciful towards all; His love is for all people and His compassion extends to all creatures.

Mercy finds its most noble and complete expression in the Incarnate Word. Jesus reveals the face of the Father Who is rich in mercy; He 'speaks of [mercy] and explains it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all He Himself makes it incarnate and personifies it'. When we welcome and follow Jesus by means of the Gospel and sacraments, we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, become merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful; we can learn to love as He loves us and make of our lives a free gift, a sign of His goodness. The Church, in the midst of humanity, is first of all the community that lives by the mercy of Christ: she senses His gaze and feels He has chosen her with His merciful love. It is through this love that the Church discovers its mandate, lives it and makes it known to all peoples through a respectful dialogue with every culture and religious belief.

This merciful love, as in the early days of the Church, is witnessed to by many men and women of every age and condition. The considerable and growing presence of women in the missionary world, working alongside their male counterparts, is a significant sign of God's maternal love. Women, lay and religious, and today even many families, carry out their missionary vocation in various forms: from announcing the Gospel to charitable service. Together with the evangelising and sacramental work of missionaries, women and families often more adequately understand people's problems and know how to deal with them in an appropriate and, at times, fresh way: in caring for life, with a strong focus on people rather than structures, and by allocating human and spiritual resources towards the building of good relations, harmony, peace, solidarity, dialogue, cooperation and fraternity, both among individuals and in social and cultural life, in particular through care for the poor.

In many places evangelisation begins with education, to which missionary work dedicates much time and effort, like the merciful vine-dresser of the Gospel, patiently waiting for fruit after years of slow cultivation; in this way they bring forth a new people able to evangelise, who will take the Gospel to those places where it otherwise would not have been thought possible. The Church can also be defined as 'mother' for those who will one day have faith in Christ. I hope, therefore, that the holy people of God will continue to exercise this maternal service of mercy, which helps those who do not yet know the Lord to encounter and love Him. Faith is God's gift and not the result of proselytising; rather it grows thanks to the faith and charity of evangelisers who witness to Christ. As they travel through the streets of the world, the disciples of Jesus need to have a love without limits, the same measure of love that our Lord has for all people. We proclaim the most beautiful and greatest gifts that He has given us: His life and His love.

All peoples and cultures have the right to receive the message of salvation which is God's gift to every person. This is all the more necessary when we consider how many injustices, wars, and humanitarian crises still need resolution. Missionaries know from experience that the Gospel of forgiveness and mercy can bring joy and reconciliation, justice and peace. The mandate of the Gospel to 'go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' has not ceased; rather this command commits all of us, in the current landscape with all its challenges, to hear the call to a renewed missionary 'impulse', as I noted in my Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: 'Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel'.

This Jubilee year marks the 90th anniversary of World Missionary Day, first approved by Pope Pius XI in 1926 and organized by the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith. It is appropriate then to recall the wise instructions of my predecessors who ordered that to this Society be destined all the offerings collected in every diocese, parish, religious community, association and ecclesial movement throughout the world for the care of Christian communities in need and for supporting the proclamation of the Gospel even to the ends of the earth. Today too we believe in this sign of missionary ecclesial communion. Let us not close our hearts within our own particular concerns, but let us open them to all of humanity.

May Holy Mary, sublime icon of redeemed humanity, model of missionaries for the Church, teach all men,

women and families, to foster and safeguard the living and mysterious presence of the Risen Lord in every place, He Who renews personal relationships, cultures and peoples, and Who fills all with joyful mercy."
