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Message of the Holy Father to the Pontifical Mission Societies

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) on the occasion of the inauguration of the General Assembly, taking place in the Valpré Centre, Lyon, from 16 to 23 May 2022:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

In this special year, you are gathered in Lyon, a city where the Pontifical Mission Societies originated and where the beatification of Pauline Jaricot, the founder of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, will be held. It will be its bicentenary, as well as the centenary of its elevation, together with the Society of the Holy Childhood and the Society of Saint Peter the Apostle, to the rank of “Pontifical”. These were later joined, again recognized by Pius XII, by the Pontifical Missionary Union, which is celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of its founder, Blessed Paolo Manna.

This anniversary is part of the celebration of four hundred years of the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, to which the Pontifical Mission Societies are closely linked and with which they collaborate in supporting the Churches in territories entrusted to the Dicastery. It was instituted to support and coordinate the spread of the Gospel in lands hitherto unknown. But the evangelizing impetus has never diminished in the Church, and it always remains her fundamental dynamism. That is why I wanted the Dicastery for Evangelization to take on a special role also in the renewed Roman Curia, in order to foster the missionary conversion of the Church (*Praedicate Evangelium*, 2-3), which is not proselytism, but witness: going out of oneself to proclaim *with one’s life* the gratuitous and salvific love of God for us, all called to be brothers and sisters.

So you have come to Lyon because it was there, two hundred years ago, that a young 23-year-old woman, Pauline Marie Jaricot, had the courage to found a society to support the missionary activity of the Church; a few years later she started the “Living Rosary”, an organization dedicated to prayer and the sharing of offerings.

From a wealthy family, she died in poverty: with her beatification, the Church testifies that she knew how to accumulate treasures in Heaven (cf. *Mt* 6:19), treasures that are born from the courage of giving and reveal the secret of life: only by giving it is it possessed, only by losing it is it found (cf. *Mk* 8:35).

Pauline Jaricot liked to say that the Church is missionary by nature (cf. *Ad gentes*, 2), and that every baptized person therefore has a mission; rather, he or she *is* a mission. Helping to live this awareness is the first service of the Pontifical Mission Societies, a service they fulfil with the Pope and in the name of the Pope. This link of the PMS with the Petrine ministry, established one hundred years ago, translates into practical service to the bishops, to the particular Churches, and to all the People of God. At the same time, it is your task, according to the Council (cf. *Ad gentes*, 38) to help the bishops to open every particular Church to the horizon of the universal Church.

The jubilees that celebrate the beatification of Pauline Jaricot offer me the opportunity to offer to you again three elements that, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, have greatly contributed to the spread of the Gospel in the history of the PMS.

First of all, *missionary conversion*: the goodness of the mission depends on the path of going out of oneself, on the desire to centre one's life not on oneself, but on Jesus, on Jesus who came to serve and not to be served (cf. *Mk* 10: 45). In this sense, Pauline Jaricot saw her existence as a response to God's compassionate and tender mercy: since her youth she had sought identification with her Lord, also through the sufferings she went through, with the aim of igniting the flame of her love in every person. Here lies the wellspring of mission: in the ardour of a faith that does not settle for less and that, through conversion, becomes imitation day by day, to channel God's mercies on the roads of the world.

But this is possible – second element – only through *prayer*, which is the first form of mission (cf. *Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies*, 20 May 2020). It is no coincidence that Pauline placed the Work of the Propagation of the Faith alongside the Living Rosary, as if to reiterate that mission begins with prayer and cannot be accomplished without it (cf. *Acts* 13:1-3). Yes, because it is the Spirit of the Lord that precedes and enables all our good works: the primacy is always of His grace. Otherwise, the mission would be a question of running in vain.

Finally, the *concreteness of charity*: along with the prayer network, Pauline gave rise to a collection on a vast scale and in a creative form, accompanying it with information on the life and activities of the missionaries. The offerings of so many people were providential for the history of the missions.

Dear brothers and sisters who make up the General Assembly of the PMS, I hope that you will walk in the footsteps of this great missionary woman, letting yourselves be inspired by her practical faith, her bold courage, and her creative generosity. By the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Star of Evangelization, I invoke the Lord's blessing on each one of you and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 12 May 2022

FRANCIS
