



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE NORTH 1 AND NORTH EAST
REGIONS OF BRAZIL ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 4 October 2010

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you with great pleasure, the Bishops of the North 1 and North East Regions of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil on the occasion of your *ad limina Apostolorum* visit. I express gratitude to Bishop Moacyr Grechi for his kind words and for the sentiments he has expressed on your behalf, while I assure you of my daily remembrance in prayer, asking Heaven to support your efforts very often without the adequate means to take the Good News of Jesus to all the corners of the Amazon forest and to make them fruitful, in the awareness that "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2: 4).

God can bring about this salvation in extraordinary ways that he alone knows. However, if his Son came, it was precisely to reveal the ordinary paths of salvation to us through his words and through his life. He then sent us, with his authority, to pass on this revelation to others. Therefore we cannot help thinking: even if we do not proclaim the Gospel to them, people can be saved in other ways, thanks to God's mercy; but will I be saved if through negligence, fear or shame or by following false ideas I fail to proclaim it? At times people make this objection to us: to impose a truth, even a Gospel truth, to impose a way, even salvation, can only offend religious freedom. I would like here to repeat [Pope Paul VI's](#) relevant and illuminating answer: "It would certainly be an error to impose something on the consciences of our brethren. But to propose to their consciences the truth of the Gospel and salvation in Jesus Christ, with complete clarity and with a total respect for the free options which it presents "without coercion, or dishonourable or unworthy pressure far from being an attack on religious liberty is fully to respect that liberty, which is offered the choice of a way that even non-believers consider noble and uplifting... The respectful presentation of Christ and his Kingdom is more than the evangelizer's right; it is his duty. It is likewise the right of his fellow men to receive from him the proclamation of the Good News of salvation" (Apostolic

Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 80).

"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9: 16), the Apostle exclaimed to the Gentiles. The desire to proclaim the Gospel is born from a heart in love with Jesus who ardently desires that many may receive an invitation to take part in the marriage feast of the Son of God (cf. Mt 22: 8-10). In fact, mission means spreading the flame of love that burns in the hearts of human beings. By opening themselves to the truth of the Gospel and letting themselves be transformed by it, they can move on to living their lives, as St Paul said: "by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2: 20). The call to the mission is consequently not something intended exclusively for a small group of the Church's members; on the contrary it is an imperative addressed to every baptized person, an essential element of his or her vocation. As the Second Vatican Council stated: the "The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate" (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 2). In this regard one of the main commitments of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, which I had the joy of inaugurating in Aparecida in 2007, was to revive in Christians the awareness of being disciples and missionaries; it thus redeemed the missionary dimension of the Church by convoking a "Continental Mission".

In thinking of the challenges that this proposal of renewal involves for you Brazilian Prelates, the figure of Bl. José de Anchieta springs to mind. Indeed, his tireless and very generous apostolic activity, not exempt from grave dangers and which guaranteed the dissemination of the Word of God among both the Indios and the Portuguese which is why, from the moment of his death, he was called the "Apostle of Brazil" can serve as a model to help your Particular Churches find ways to form missionary disciples in the spirit of the Conference of Aparecida (cf. *Document of Aparecida*, n. 275).

Yet the challenges of the present time could lead to a reductive vision of the concept of mission. Mission cannot be limited to the mere search for new techniques and forms that make the Church more attractive and capable of overcoming the rivalry of other religious groups or relativist ideologies. The Church does not work for herself: she is at the service of Jesus Christ; she exists to ensure that the Good News is accessible to all. The Church is Catholic precisely because she invites every human being to experience a new existence in Christ. The mission, therefore, is no more than the natural consequence of the Church's very essence, a service of the ministry of union that Christ wished to bring about in his crucified Body.

This must lead us to reflect on the fact that the weakening of the missionary spirit is perhaps due to having forgotten that the mission must draw nourishment from a deeper nucleus than to limitations and deficiencies in the external forms of traditional missionary action. This deeper nucleus is the Eucharist. The latter, like the presence of the human and divine love of Jesus Christ, continuously presupposes Jesus' coming to the men and women who were to be his members, who would themselves be Eucharist. To sum up, if it is to be truly effective the

Continental Mission must start from the Eucharist and lead to the Eucharist.

Beloved Brothers, when you have returned to your dioceses and prelatures, I ask you to pass on to your priests, men and women religious, seminarians, catechists and faithful the affectionate greeting of the Pope, who thinks of all and prays for all with deep affection and steadfast hope. I entrust you, your intentions and your pastoral resolutions to Bl. José of Anchieta, who found in the tabernacle the secret of his apostolic effectiveness, so that in the heart and on the lips of every Brazilian Christ's name may be ever present. With these sentiments, may my prayers and my Apostolic Blessing accompany you.

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