



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE CONGREGATION
FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES**

Saturday, 24 May 2003

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I welcome and greet with affection each one of you who are taking part in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. I greet first of all Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, Prefect of your Congregation; I am grateful to him for the words he has addressed to me on your behalf. With him, I greet the Secretaries, the Undersecretary and the collaborators of the Dicastery; I greet the Cardinals, Bishops, men and women Religious and all who are present.

During the work of the Plenary Meeting, you have addressed an important aspect of the Church's mission: "*Formation in the mission lands*", with reference to the priests, seminarians, Religious, catechists, and lay people involved in pastoral activities. This topic deserves your full attention.

2. The urgent need to train apostles for the new evangelization was reasserted by the Second Vatican Council as well as by the Synods of Bishops held in recent years. The work of the Synodal Assemblies has resulted in important Apostolic Exhortations, of which I will only mention *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *Vita Consecrata*, *Catechesi Tradendae* and *Christifideles Laici*.

The recently founded Ecclesial Communities are rapidly expanding. Precisely because weaknesses and difficulties in their development process have sometimes been identified, it appears urgently necessary to insist on the formation of well-qualified pastoral workers by means of systematic programmes, adapted to the needs of the present time and attentive to "inculturating" the Gospel in the different settings.

There is an urgent need for integral formation, a training that will produce competent and holy evangelizers equal to their mission. This requires a long and patient process in which every form of biblical, theological, philosophical and pastoral study finds its strong point in the personal relationship with Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14: 6).

3. Jesus is the first "formation teacher", and the fundamental task of each educator will be to help people in formation to develop a personal relationship with him. Only those who have learned to "stay with Jesus" are ready to be "sent out by him to evangelize" (cf. Mk 3: 14). Passionate love for Christ is the secret of a convinced announcement of Christ. I was alluding to this when I wrote in my recent Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*: "It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 13: 25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart" (n. 25).

The Church, especially in the mission countries, needs people who are prepared to serve the Gospel freely and generously, who are prepared to promote the values of justice and peace, pulling down every cultural, racial, tribal or ethnic barrier; people who can penetrate the "signs of the times" and discover in them the "seeds of the Word", without indulging in reductionism or relativism.

In the first place, however, such persons are required to be "experts" and "in love" with God. "The world", my venerable Predecessor Paul VI observed, "is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 76).

4. Next to personal intimacy with Christ, it is necessary to foster a constant growth in love for the Church and service to the Church. As far as priests are concerned, it will be useful, therefore, to be particularly attentive to the instructions contained in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, in the Conciliar Decrees *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius*, and in other texts published by various dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

I noted in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*: "Inasmuch as he represents Christ, the Head, Shepherd and Spouse of the Church, the priest is placed not only in the Church but also in the forefront of the Church. In his spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ's spousal love towards the Church, his Bride" (n. 22). Then it is the Bishop's task, in communion with the priest, to outline a project and establish a programme "which can ensure that ongoing formation is not something haphazard but a systematic offering of subjects which unfold by stages and take on precise forms" (*ibid.*, n. 79).

5. I would like to make the most of this opportunity to thank all those who generously dedicate themselves to the work of education in mission territories. And how can we forget that many seminarians, priests, Religious and lay people who belong to mission lands complete their formation here in Rome at colleges and centres, many of which depend on your Dicastery? I am

thinking of the Pontifical Urban College, the College of St Peter and St Paul for Priests, the Paul VI Foyer for women Religious, the *Mater Ecclesiae* Centre for catechists, and the International Centre for Missionary Animation for the spiritual renewal of missionaries. I warmly hope that the Roman experience may be a true cultural, pastoral and, above all, spiritual enrichment for each and every one.

I also hope that every Christian community may advance with docility at the school of Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. In the [Message for the next World Mission Sunday](#) I wrote that a "more contemplative Church" becomes a "holier Church" and a "more missionary Church".

As I ask the Lord that this may be so for every ecclesial community, especially in mission territories, I assure you of my prayers, and I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.