

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE
PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS (PIME)**

*Consistory Hall
Monday, 20 May 2019*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I receive you with joy on the occasion of your Assembly. I thank the Superior General and I warmly greet all of you, men and women missionaries.

With you, I give thanks to the Lord for the long journey that he has enabled your Institute to undertake in the nearly 170 years since its founding, which took place in Milan, as the Seminary for Foreign Missions. Let us recall the protagonist of its origins: Bishop Angelo Ramazzotti, then the Bishop of Pavia. He took up a desire of Pope Pius IX and had the felicitous idea of involving the Bishops of Lombardy in the foundation, on the basis of the principle of the *co-responsibility of all dioceses* to spread the Gospel to peoples who did not yet know Jesus Christ. At that time it was a novelty, preceded only by the foundation of the Institute for Foreign Missions of Paris. Up until then, the missionary apostolate was wholly in the hands of Religious Orders and Congregations. With the Institutes of Paris and of Milan, it began to be adopted by the particular Churches, which were working hard to open themselves outwards to the whole world, to send their priests beyond their own borders.

As the years passed, PIME followed its own course and developed in part like other Religious Congregations, although not identifying itself with them. In fact, you do not profess vows as Religious, but you consecrate yourselves to lifelong missionary work with a definitive promise.

Your first mission fields were Oceania, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Hong Kong, and China. The seed hidden in the soil bore many fruits of new communities, of dioceses created from scratch, of priestly and religious vocations germinated for the service of the local Church. After World War II you expanded your presence to Brazil and Amazonia, to the United States, Japan, Guinea-Bissau, the Philippines, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, Thailand, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Mexico, Algeria, and Chad.

Your history is marked by a luminous wake of piety in many of its members, in some recognized officially by the Church: let us recall the martyrs Saint Alberico Crescitelli, Blessed Giovanni Battista Mazzucconi, Blessed Mario Vergara; and the Confessors Blessed Paolo Manna and Blessed Clemente Vismara. Among your missionaries, there are 19 martyrs, who gave their lives for Jesus in favour of their people, without reservations and personal calculations. You are a “family of apostles”, an international community of priests and lay persons who live in communion of life and of activity.

The words that Saint Paul VI pronounced in Manila in 1970, have a special resonance for you and aptly summarize the meaning of your life and your vocation. He stated: “yes, I feel the need to proclaim [Jesus Christ], I cannot keep silent.... I must bear witness to his name: Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God.... I could never finish speaking about him: he is the light and the truth.... He is the bread and the spring of living water to satisfy our hunger and our thirst. He is our shepherd, our guide, our model, our comfort, our brother”. So said Paul VI. In fact, it is only from Christ that our life and our mission have meaning, because “there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22).

To evangelize is, in fact, the grace and vocation of your Institute, its most profound identity (cf. *ibid.*, 14). This mission, however — it is always good to point out — does not belong to you, because it flows from God’s grace. There is no school to become evangelizers. There is help, but that is another thing. It is a vocation you receive from God. Either you are an evangelizer or you are not, and if you have not received this grace, this vocation, stay home. It is a great resource, which carries you forward. “The first word, the true initiative, the true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves into this divine initiative, only begging for this divine initiative, shall we too be able to become — with him and in him — evangelizers” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 112).

This year marks 100 years of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV. As you know, to celebrate this anniversary I proclaimed the Extraordinary Missionary Month, this coming October, with this theme: “Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World”. The objective of this initiative is that of “fostering an increased awareness of the *missio ad gentes* and taking up again with renewed fervour the missionary transformation of the Church’s life and pastoral activity” (Letter of Indiction, 22 October 2017). And you missionaries are the protagonists of this event, so that it may be an occasion to renew the missionary impetus *ad gentes*, so that all your life, your programmes, your work, your structures themselves draw from the Mission and the proclamation of the Gospel the vital lymph and criteria for renewal.

There is a danger that crops up again — it seemed to have been overcome but it reappears —: confusing evangelization with proselytism. No. Evangelization is bearing witness to Jesus Christ, dead and Risen. He is the One who attracts. This is why the Church grows by attraction and not by proselytism, as Benedict XVI said. But this confusion arose perhaps from a politico-economic conception of 'evangelization', which is no longer evangelization; then presence, concrete presence, which leads them to ask you why you are like this. And so you proclaim Jesus Christ. This is not seeking new members for this 'Catholic society', no. It is making Jesus visible: so he may become visible in my person, in my conduct; and to open, through my life, room for Jesus. This is evangelizing. This is what your Founders had at heart.

Precisely in the context of preparing for the Extraordinary Missionary Month, you have gathered here in Rome for your 15th General Assembly, with the theme "*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel: persons, places and ways of the mission for PIME today and tomorrow*". You are seeking, in so far as possible, to put *mission at the centre*, because it is precisely the missionary urgency that founded your Institute and continues to form it. You are convinced of this, and you have chosen Saint Paul's expression: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16) as guide and inspiration. Passion and urgency for mission, which Saint Paul feels as his vocation, is what you all desire for yourselves. Therefore, in the light of this key-Word, you have worked to understand anew, in your Institute and in today's world, the *missio ad gentes*; to reaffirm the primacy of the unique missionary vocation, both for the laity and for presbyters; to choose the setting of the mission; to plan vocational animation as a mission activity; to verify your being a community and to rethink the organization of the PIME of today and of tomorrow.

Therefore, I say to you: "Let us not fear to undertake, with trust in God and great courage, 'a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world'" (Letter of Indiction of the Extraordinary Mission Month 2019).

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for this meeting and especially for your work at the service of the Gospel. May the Lord, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, grant that you may always carry it out joyfully, even in toil. On this point, allow me to recommend that you read the last articles of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. You realize that *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is the greatest post-Consiliar pastoral document: it is still timely, still in force, and it has not lost its strength. In the closing articles, describing the demeanour of an evangelizer, it speaks of the joy of evangelizing. When Saint Paul VI speaks of the sins of the evangelizer: the last four or five articles. Read it carefully; think about the joy that he recommends to us.

I bless you and pray for you. And you too, please pray for me. Thank you!

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